

**INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY WEEK
19-25 NOVEMBER 2014 JOHANNESBURG
REPORT BY ANTHONY WALDHAUSEN (GAY & LESBIAN NETWORK)**



I had the opportunity to participate at the International Civil Society Week 19-25 November 2014 Johannesburg. I would like to take this opportunity to thank and acknowledge the French Embassy for making it possible who sponsored me to attend the event.

This was my first time to participate at an international event that included a wide representation of civil society organisations from across the world.

The theme of the event was Citizen Action, People Power. The theme was touched on through the many activities of the programme and presented practical work of various speakers, panel discussions and workshops throughout the week.

Programme of events

The event started on the 21 November with an opening ceremony which included a musical performance by Project Elo a 12 piece contemporary spiritual jazz band and an experimental sound and video performance produced by Keleketla.

Then the main activities of the week which included various workshops/open events on topical issues got underway from the Saturday 22 November to the Sunday 23 November and ended the Civicus World Assembly on the Monday 24 November.

There were so many workshops/open events to choose from for the two days and would have liked to attend all the events but was not possible as the events happened at the same times. The following are the events I managed to attend during the two days.

People Powered Accountability: Building Effective Feedback Loops – This session showcased innovative ideas for enhancing citizen voice and activism – from harnessing new technologies to monitor development to crowd sourcing information to map trends in civic space. This session was presented by Keystone Accountability from the USA who presented practical and cost effective ways on getting feedback from clients/beneficiaries on how they felt about services offered to them by CSOs.

This made me think on how we can introduce some feedback mechanisms to engage with our beneficiaries and stakeholders on Gay & Lesbian Network services and programmes. This would provide us with feedback on how services and programmes and to measure if they were effective, efficient but most important has it made an impact on them. This would also assist us with our monitoring and evaluation processes as well.

Pathways to participation: Widening Spaces for Volunteering and Citizen Action for Development – The Contributions of Governments and People Post 2015 – This session was facilitated by the Volunteer Consortium and it included presentation from various parliamentarians from six countries together with citizens and organisations engaged in volunteering and civic action for development.

The Gay & Lesbian Network is volunteer based organisation and it would be important to engage with our government to support and partner with CSOs who use volunteers to implement various services to the citizens. This session was interrupted by load shedding.

What is Relevant Grant-making Practices for Supporting Civil Society? – This session was facilitated by STAR-Ghana which focused on multi donor pooled funds. This provided an opportunity to engage with representatives from Multi Donor Pooled funds.

Emerging Democracies: How Civil Society can influence Policy Decisions to Improve Human Rights – This session was facilitated by South African Forum for International Solidarity and focused on how civil society groups can use their countries’ political and economic alliances to bring together the voices of emerging democracies on global issues.

The Gay & Lesbian Network’s strength lies in our ability to form network and partnerships with various stakeholders like government and CSO organisations to realising our vision and trying to create a safe space and service provision for LGBTI people in their communities.

The last event of the week was the Civicus World Assembly which focused on celebrating inspiring ideas for citizen action which included various stories by inspirational people and leaders.

The format for this celebration included panel discussions on topical issues and personal stories. Topics included “How civil society organisations build people power?” This looked at how CSOs can challenge the status quo to achieve the status quo to achieve systemic political and economic transformation. This session included panellists and a discussion with Jay Naidoo former SA government minister and trade unionists.

The main highlight of this session was My Story by Maryam Al-Khawaja, Gulf Center for Human Rights Director, is a Bahraini human rights activist. She was imprisoned in her country and was released with strict restrictions and was denied a visa to attend the event but was allowed at the last moment. Her story was so inspiring and made me stronger as a person to know that we can overcome our problems in our country and to ensure LGBTI rights are realised.

It was a privilege for me to witness the conversation with Navi Pillay the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights which was facilitated by Adam Habib, University of Witwatersrand Vice Chancellor and Principal. She reflected on her past and her fight for human rights globally.

The event end off with the Nelson Mandela – Graca Machel Innovation Awards which celebrated civil society activism by rewarding an organisation, individual activist and young person for their work and brave risk-taking.

The ending was a CAB concert which is a unique project and singular musical trip where Caribbean meets Africa and Brazil.

Conclusion

This was an eventful and memorable event to attend as it provided me an opportunity to meet a wide range of inspirational people from all over the world.

I found the session on building effective feedback loops very interesting and will be investigating on how GLN can set up such a system to track people's perception and feedback on GLN services and programmes. This is one area that we can implement and will take it forward as we presently working on our capacity building and organisational development.

We will be conducting an external evaluation soon and the outcomes from this process would assist us with baseline information as we will be interviewing beneficiaries and stakeholder and wide range of players with GLN to do the evaluation.

The programme was well executed and professional and included a variety of events and activities. What I found disappointing was the lack of engaging with the real issues in the world and especially in South Africa and to have a critical reflection on CSO organisations in South Africa as I find that we are not robust enough and complacent.

Also disappointing was the lack of broad representation or more local crafts, arts and display of all organisations at the event to display their work and to have more engagement on what all CSOs globally do.

Overall I was impressed the organising of the event and unity of all who attended the event.

I would like to thank the French Embassy again for providing me the opportunity to participate in this all important event.