

EDUCATING LEADERS FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

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I.S.R.E. –Istituto Salesiano di Ricerca Educativa

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Co-operating Elites

Helmut Reifeld

The Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB) and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) are united by decades of trust and collaboration. The two organizations' mutual interests that underlie their long-standing cooperation are the fight against poverty, their political education and their strong support for academic exchange programs. The range of the political themes that are dealt with has always been, and continues to be, exceptionally broad. It encompasses all aspects of education and development cooperation.

The collaboratively led series of seminars over the past three years titled "Eradication of Poverty – The Responsibility of the Elites" had as its goal the strengthening of the political sense of responsibility of the participants of the Don Bosco higher education courses and training programs, by grouping the resources, networks and experiences in order to adequately prepare them for their future assignments as important actors in the areas of politics, economy and civil society. A major question for discussion was: To what extent is cooperation with responsible elites of target countries necessary, sensible and constructive? Another was: To what degree should the young individuals who are educated by the Salesians be prepared to take on public responsibility in the areas of politics, finance and civil society?

The term "elites" – a key term of numerous discussions over the past three years – was a point of contention for many of the conference participants. Their skepticism was based on the experience that, all over

the world and at all times we encounter “elites” whose deeds must be called corrupt and criminal, inhuman and condemnable. Any form of cooperation with them is beyond all questions. But independently of the assessment whether certain elites in some countries are perceived as corrupt or cooperative, incompetent or helpful, or even “good” or “bad”, one must recognize that elites exist in all countries of the world. This omnipresence of elites also has implications for possibilities of action within the framework of cooperation for development. Their existence makes it necessary to come to a decision whether or not to seek their cooperation; i.e., whether to integrate them in developmental work or to ignore them.

KAS attempts to approach this subject with an open mind, within the framework of international cooperation. We are convinced that fighting poverty cannot be done effectively without improving the overall political conditions. Bettering these political conditions is generally possible only with the help of the respective government, economic and civil society elites. This is why we look principally for partners who operate within the circle of the elites, while we look also for other external partners.

The pool of potential partners is quite large. It includes politicians, exceptional individuals of civil society, businessmen, union officials, military personnel, journalists, exceptional religious figures, secular intellectuals, civil servants, artists, established traditional elites and tribal representatives. It is crucial that they hold an influential position of political significance, that they can have an influence on the future development of their respective countries and that they strive for goals which are in line with ours. We do not want to develop a relationship only with those who are the final decision-makers, but also with those individuals who set the tone of public discourse, who are involved in the formulation of their country’s “national interests” and who can impact the public assessment and strategic development of key political issues.

How, this close cooperation with elites who demonstrate political and social awareness and responsibility has to be, is made clear in view of the importance of the shaping of public opinion. It is not sufficient only to make appeals to the elites’ sense of moral responsibility. We have to be certain that the elites are willing to take on a high degree of responsibility, that they publicly accept this responsibility and that they can be held accountable for their conduct. We believe that these are the most important prerequisites for cooperation. Cooperation with

elites is not necessarily “immoral” simply because the activities of some of these elites have in the past been “immoral”. Cooperation does not simply result from dealing with elites, but has to be based on common goals as well as on the tasks at hand thus making cooperation a viable solution.

1. Binding Values

The exchange of values and ideas that leads to the public well-being has to be a central component of any manner of cooperation with elites. These values do not necessarily have to be religious values; they may be political core-values. Apart from the religious sphere, such values can also come from the areas of economics, politics or society. We are looking for partners who share our objectives that are based on common values. Any discussion about pre-political and normative characteristics of a free state genuinely revolves around fundamental values, even if such a discussion is conducted in a completely secular context.

Because of globalization, an active dialog concerning these values is absolutely essential because no universal hierarchy of values exist. The fundamental values that we wish to clarify and thematically organize, include: liberty and justice, human dignity and human rights, solidarity and subsidiarity, peace and the preservation of creation, tolerance, secularism and pluralism, as well as the renunciation of violence as a means to achieve political goals.

KAS believes that these fundamental values are inextricably linked to a free and democratic State and they should be integrated into its constitution. Although these fundamental values necessitate and lead to a legitimate State, these values do not necessarily assume the existence of the same. On the one hand, these values require the protection of the State. On the other hand, they exist apart from the State, and it is the State that depends on them to balance recurrent conflicts of interest. Because we want to play a role in the development of these tense, and oftentimes strained, relationships, an effective dialogue about these core-values has to be conducted with States that have fundamentally different world views, as well as with authoritarian but basically reform-oriented States.

Without a doubt, constructive and lasting cooperation with elites can only take place in relatively stable States in which the rule of law is anchored in the institutional framework. Without the existence of State structures that guarantee a degree of - at least internal - stability, which makes possible the development of good governance, democratization and human rights, elites, cannot meet their political responsibilities. This is so particularly in developing countries, in which dictatorships or para-

State structures block any democratization efforts and responsible-minded elites are typically forced to put up with undesirable political trends. Without good governance, attempts to find lasting solutions in the fight against poverty and to establish good levels of cooperation with elites will be doomed to failure from the outset.

2. Functional and Moral Elites

The common distinction made between functional and moral elites is not of particular importance, because we believe that these two types of elites should, on the whole, be treated the same. Functional and power elites are groups who occupy important leadership positions and, by virtue of their high standing, have significant impact on political, economic, administrative, scientific and cultural decisions. The selection, existence and make-up of these groups depend on their individual functions. In contrast, moral elites do not necessarily need to have any specific functions. Moral elites are representative of value standards, cultural heritage and different achievements that benefit the community. Because these elites intervene more often on behalf of common interests than on behalf of the political or social sectors, they represent a counterweight to the functional elite.

Both moral and functional elites can be represented by a single person. However, as a rule, this is not the case. Under some circumstances, one can be played against the other; but at times the two can complement each other in a constructive manner. However, in terms of KAS interests, the two have similar roles to play. Both can help strengthen, foster and stabilize efforts designed to fight poverty, assuming they are both aware of developmental needs and that their awareness of the situation leads to constructive action. One can speak of successful cooperation, if these elites constructively contribute to the establishment of the necessary development-oriented political, economic and social conditions.

If elites who think and act within a democratic frame of mind as well as in terms of development efforts are present in a country, the cooperation with them within the context of developmental work - in particular regarding the fight to eradicate poverty - is not only sensible, but absolutely necessary. If these elites are also capable of creating the necessary general, political and macro-economic conditions necessary to achieve progress, this type of cooperation becomes absolutely indispensable. This is particularly true if these elites are to be instrumental in the education of future elites. While the support of the present elites for the achievement of nearly all development processes may be indisputably valuable, the participation in these processes by future elites is even more important for guaranteeing the lasting stability of such programs. Having an impact on the educational and moral

development of these future elites – as limited as this impact may seem from a current point of view – is an essential component of any collaboration for developmental work. It is also a joint interest of SDB and KAS.

Even under favorable conditions, one should not forget that any form of cooperation with elites requires patience, and must be grounded solidly in mutual trust. Differences in individual goals and interests must be identified and respected. It is important to discuss openly what kind of cooperation is possible, how this cooperation can be developed and what can be achieved and avoided through this cooperation.

3. Globalization and Development Cooperation

In the context of globalization, not only the implementation of good governance becomes a global effort, but also the fight against poverty and the network for cooperation. Globalization and political responsibility form an ever tighter network of the traditional Western donor countries together with the newly industrialized countries (in particular China, India, South Africa, Brazil and Mexico) as well as an increasing number of developing countries.

Government action must increasingly take areas of development cooperation into account. This makes those elites indispensable partners, who, because of their global perspective, wish to participate in the areas of human and civil rights, democracy promotion and good governance. Purely national solutions and models are no longer sufficient to deal with the worldwide development problems we are faced with today. This is why new and unusual possibilities for cooperation must be tried and tested. From a political perspective, we look at poverty not as an argument against globalization, but as a challenge to improve cooperation and find new ways to deal with the problems at hand. To make good use of cooperation, and maintain new possibilities for cooperation, we will probably not always be able to handpick our partners. However, we can continually examine whether their desired goals correspond with ours.

Since the information exchange on the international level is no longer limited to institutional levels, but reaches deep into civil society, cooperation with and among different elites has become indispensable to assure the stability of cooperation. This is evidenced by the fact that the fight against poverty is now inextricably linked to global conditions and is more than ever dependent on the cooperation of elites. One of the consequences of globalization is that differences are rendered transparent. The chances for balancing inequalities are better, in

particular when increased cooperation leads to a better understanding of individual responsibility. The path to balancing inequalities can not be a top-down or a north-south approach. On the contrary, this path must rely on mutual cooperation between partners from south and south as well as north. It must take place on different levels simultaneously and incorporate indigenous elites. This path may not be enforced on the periphery by dominant centres. Instead, it must be a decentralized and reciprocal process.

Globalization not only offers new possibilities. It also requires new methods of international cooperation. This is not only true for the fight against poverty, but also for the cooperation with political, as well as numerous social, economic, cultural and religious institutions. These processes are usually conducted on a bilateral basis, but increasingly they are also carried out on a multilateral basis. In all cases, these processes are increasingly networked and so require increased transparency and accountability and do not allow for crucial actors to be excluded.

Legitimate goals of cooperation with certain elites are: to include them in the areas of education and development work, strengthen their awareness of the importance of political responsibility and transparency, as well as to guarantee their continued support. To achieve these goals, it is necessary to strengthen the normative framework of these elites, and to convey to them the importance of the above-mentioned fundamental values.

If efforts to fight poverty were to be kept from becoming part of the greater international cooperation network, such efforts would be reduced to emergency assistance and charity. Global efforts to fight poverty can only truly be successful through interaction and cooperation, not merely through charity and selflessness. Global poverty can only be successfully addressed through the cooperation of international partners. Some of these partners are particularly advantaged to address this issue because of their specific functions. Consequently, we should take elites on all sides of the discussion seriously and take advantage of their presence.