



Thinking and Nurturing Transnational Activism: Global Citizen Advocacy in Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT. In recent years, international nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and transnational networks involved in knowledge creation have become key civil-society actors in Southeast Asia. How and why has such form of transnational activism expanded significantly in the region? The author suggests that this type of activism is a response to socioeconomic and political processes associated with globalization, as well as a consequence of the relative and limited political liberalization that has characterized some Southeast Asian countries. The specific combination of these two factors is peculiar to the region since contemporary transnational activism in Western Europe and North America takes place within open democracies with well-established civil-society organizations. Moreover, trade liberalization and other global economic processes have not marked domestic dynamics as rapidly and suddenly as the economic boom of the 1980s and, eventually, the 1997 financial crisis did in certain Southeast Asian countries. To explore this argument, the paper traces the genealogy and analyzes the objectives and activities of four transnational activist organizations. Common to the four organizations is the central place of discourse and knowledge production and its linkages to mobilization, network building and constituency building, and a growing awareness that they are confronted with common challenges and share common targets.

KEYWORDS. Transnational activism · transnational networks · ARENA · TWN · Focus · APRN

INTRODUCTION

In December 2005, Hong Kong hosted the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO), following previous ones in Singapore (1996), Geneva (1998), Seattle (1999), Doha (2001), and Cancun (2003). Beginning with Geneva, and especially the year after, with the “Battle of Seattle,” civil-society parallel meetings and protests were occasions for transnational movements and networks to gather and act collectively to resist and protest decision-making processes

deemed undemocratic and exclusionary (Bandy and Smith 2005; Smith and Johnston 2002). For many participants, trade liberalization as embodied in the WTO agenda constitutes a global challenge that calls for cross-border collective action to shift the current neoliberal economics in favor of social justice and equity (Clark 2003; Prokosh and Raymond 2002).

In its bare form, *transnational activism* has been defined as “social movements and other civil-society organizations and individuals operating across state borders” (Piper and Uhlin 2004, 4-5).¹ This definition was further refined by della Porta and Tarrow (2005, 7) who referred to *transnational collective action* as “the coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states, or international institutions.”

Recent works on transnational collective action—notably the works of della Porta and Tarrow (2005), Tarrow (2005), and Risse-Kappen (1995 and 2002)—suggest that three variables explain the rise and outcomes of contemporary transnational activism: the current complex internationalization (growing density of international institutions, regimes, and contacts among states officials and nonstate actors), and multiplication of linkages between local, national, and international issues [Tarrow 2005, 8]; the multilevel political opportunities created by the interaction between complex internationalization and domestic structures (i.e., “institutional features of the state, society, and state-society relations” [Risse-Kappen 1995, 20]); and the emergence of a stratum of activists best described as *rooted cosmopolitans* (“a fluid, cosmopolitan, but rooted layer of activists and advocates” [Tarrow 2005, 34]).

Very seldom do transnational activists work exclusively at the global level.² Instead, they tend to be “rooted” at local and national levels, simultaneously engaging different levels of government institutions. Today, these networks are led by activists engaged in transnational activism after having been involved in local and national advocacy. In fact, many have remained involved in national struggles, arguing that advocacy and policy engagement at one level do not deter activism at another level. Transnational activists are able to create linkages and coalitions among various types of actors operating on different levels (local, national, regional, international) in order to respond to various political contexts, each offering a different range of political opportunities.

It is nearly impossible to identify a single episode or a historic birthmark for the emergence and accelerated growth of contemporary transnational activism, although certain events acted as important catalysts. While transnational social movements have been around for a long time,³ global mobilization of the 1990s, including the Zapatista uprising in January 1994 and its call for transcontinental (and even, intergalactic!) resistance to global neoliberalism and the “Battle of Seattle,” have been particularly significant, highlighting the importance of cross-border solidarity and collective action (Schulz 1998; Price 2003). Unsurprisingly, the study of transnational activism and its links to globalization has become a thriving research area, both in international relations and political sociology (Bandy and Smith 2004; della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink 2002). Despite its growing richness, the geographic coverage of this research domain has remained largely confined to North America, Europe, and, to some extent, Latin America (Risse 2002; Price 2003). Today, there are few analyses tracing the genealogy and the influence on public policy of such form of collective action in Southeast Asia (Piper and Uhlin 2004; Hewison 2001).

Yet, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, and, increasingly, Indonesia host various forms of transnational activist organizations. In fact, one can observe that this tendency accelerated after the 1997 financial crisis (Lizée 2000; Loh 2004). Bangkok, Manila, and Jakarta have become “nodes of transnational activism,” places that “provide not only the practical infrastructure required by transnational NGO networks, but also a political climate that is not too hostile toward civil-society activism” (Piper and Uhlin 2004, 14).⁴

A better and informed understanding of this modality of activism in relation to the broad range of initiatives for social transformation in Southeast Asia is now timely. This is especially true for international development agencies that find themselves increasingly involved in supporting this type of work, sometimes at the expense of local community organizations and national NGOs and peoples’ organizations. Another reason is to be able to understand how such form of transnational collective action “fits” within the repertoire of collective action in Southeast Asia, and how distinctive this form of regional activist knowledge creation is compared to other regions of the South, therefore building on the works of Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999) and Keck and Sikkink (1998).

In this article, I examine how and why transnational activism expanded significantly in Southeast Asia. I suggest that this type of activism is a response to socioeconomic and political processes associated with globalization, as well as a consequence of the relative and limited political liberalization that has characterized some Southeast countries (Taylor 1996). As Loh and Öjendal (2005, 3) correctly note: “For although the Southeast Asian countries enjoyed unprecedented high rates of economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s, and experienced pluralization of their societies, nonetheless, the state authorities continued to dominate over their societies.” Kingsbury (2005, 416) concurs, stating, “almost regardless of the political model adopted—or invented—in the region, some more traditional forms of authority continue. Most notably, variations on patron-client relations continue to dominate, running afoul of conventional statist notions of propriety and political party, not to mention law and human rights.” Unsurprisingly, transnational activist organizations established themselves in countries where relative political space existed, or at least allowed, for global organizing. In some instances, transnational organizing became a way to reach out to the state for further democratization, somehow reminiscent of the boomerang model developed by Keck and Sikkink (1998).⁵

Such specific combination of these two factors is peculiar to the region since contemporary transnational activism in Western Europe and North America takes place in relative open democracies with well-established civil-society organizations (see Tarrow 2005). Moreover, trade liberalization and other global economic processes have not marked domestic processes as rapidly and suddenly as the economic boom of the 1980s and, eventually, the 1997 financial crisis did in certain Southeast Asia countries. To explore this argument, I trace the genealogy and analyze the objectives and activities of four transnational activist organizations—the Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA) now based in Seoul and Hong Kong but with a history closely linked to Southeast Asia, Third World Network (TWN) based in Penang, Focus on the Global South (Focus) based in Bangkok, and the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) based in Manila. These organizations represent a specific type of transnational activist organization, one that intervenes in the realm of ideas, knowledge production, and alternative discourse and acts primarily at the regional and global levels. One could argue that they can be considered as “think tanks” of civil society.⁶ What makes them transnational is that the

knowledge they produce seeks to explain regional and global processes and sustain collective action nationally and regionally to challenge not only national states but the very processes represented by, for example, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), or the WTO. For instance, in December 2005, at the WTO Ministerial Conference, various civil-society organizations attended seminars that involved APRN and marched under the APRN banner (Tujan 2006). Prior to the conference, Focus produced easily accessible digital versatile discs that were used as educational and consciousness-raising tools. It also was active in a number of forums organized by the Hong Kong People's Alliance on WTO. TWN, on the other hand, explained and described at length its understanding of what was happening during the meeting (TWN 2006).

The four networks are connected to various international formations around international development issues, global financial architecture, food security, and global social justice. While they may be part of the same international networks, they are recognized as distinct actors with their own specificities. The four emerged at different times, and their "repertoire of collective action," their linkages with social movements, and their interaction with government authorities vary. All four networks had expanded since their formation, especially in the 1990s at a time when Southeast Asia was becoming increasingly linked to the global economy, and when various social sectors (labor, farmers, migrant workers, women, and students) were increasingly organizing and seeking alternative knowledge to the dominant neoliberal paradigm.

Before turning to the analysis of these four transnational organizations, one should note that this comparative exercise is still very much a work in progress. At this point, my focus is on understanding the emergence and development of one type of transnational organization—those that may be considered as think tanks—rather than assessing its policy impact. As mentioned earlier, Southeast Asia, in particular the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, host various forms of transnational activist organizations (Loh 2004; Verma 2002). An overall picture of the region that would examine the range of transnational social movements, international NGOs, and advocacy networks remains to be developed.⁷ For now, I examine these four transnational organizations to understand their genealogy; the context for their emergence and their expansion, highlighting how the international and national contexts interplayed with specific thematic

chosen; and the various organizing modalities adopted by each organization in their efforts to nurture and sustain regional and global activism in Southeast Asia. In each case, the specific national context in which these networks are established will be examined, revealing how their specific location had to do with the relative political space allowing for different forms of transnational activities.

TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVIST ORGANIZATIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: FOUR EXAMPLES

Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives

ARENA is the oldest transnational organization among the four examined here. It was established in 1980 with its offices located outside Southeast Asia (Hong Kong and Seoul). ARENA was set up after an initial consultation that brought together “progressive scientists and church people” who recognized at the time that it was not possible to do critical research in mainstream universities (Nacpil-Manipon and Escuetas 1998). ARENA’s initial location in Hong Kong was not fortuitous. In the early 1980s, many Asian countries were under dictatorship or under semi-authoritarian rule that constrained the possibility of setting up an organization such as ARENA.

Since its formation, ARENA has always had an Asia-wide approach, striving to bring together “intellectual activists” to collaborate across borders in producing research outputs and conceptual work that would be relevant to social movements in Asia. In the process, ARENA would build a community of concerned Asian scholars.⁸ In fact, this precise constituency is a key feature of the organization: “ARENA is a unique NGO because it has chosen to focus on the concerned Asian scholars as its immediate constituency, believing that this sector can play a vital role in the process of social transformation (ARENA n.d. [a]).”⁹ It seeks to strengthen and sustain civil-society organizations by providing knowledge and research that can be acted upon, recognizing that these organizations “play an important role in the process of social transformation and the search for peace and social justice” (ARENA n.d. [a]). At the same time, its perception of its role has gradually evolved as fellows’ perceptions evolved: “Before, Asia was a rallying point for anti-imperialist struggles. Now, it has shifted, as people want to problematize what it means to be a new center for global economic activities” (Nacpil-Manipon and Escuetas 1998).

Until 1992, the network grew slowly, gathering about twenty individuals into its Council of Fellows, who were left-wing academics; many of them concerned with human rights and linked with various social movements, including antidictatorship movements, like in the Philippines. During its first decade, the Christian Conference of Asia¹⁰ played a central role in supporting the network; fellows helped identify other fellows and their works focused mostly on research and advocacy while providing a certain degree of protection for those scholars living in repressive contexts (Nacpil-Manipon and Escuetas 1998). At the time, the Christian Conference of Asia was very active in the region helping to set up various regional organizations, including the Asia Monitor Resource Center, the Committee for Asian Women, the Asian Human Rights Commission, and later on the Asian Migrant Center (Cheong n.d., 12-15; Tadem 2005).

Following a five-year evaluation, ARENA became more formalized in 1992-1993, with the Hong Kong secretariat, assuming greater responsibilities as program coordinator. At the same time, ARENA began expanding rapidly, with its number of fellows eventually reaching sixty, an executive board established, and a greater inclusion and participation of women fellows. In its early days, ARENA was quite “an old boys network” loosely connected (Nacpil-Manipon 2005). After 1992, the number of women fellows increased, putting women’s and gender concerns on the agenda, thus enlarging the range of interests from political economy to comparative studies of culture and interdisciplinary approaches (Nacpil-Manipon 2005). As explained by Eduardo Tadem, ARENA’s coordinator between 1993 and 1997, once ARENA had secured a more solid base of funding and was able to launch various research initiatives, it built and enlarged a community of fellows: “We had our own research projects and we had to tap different scholar-activists in different countries. That way, we were getting them into ARENA by being involved in its projects. This is how we were recruiting fellows” (Tadem 2005). Beyond funding availability, there was also a shared understanding that ARENA needed to develop a genuine community of scholars since many of the ARENA members had been handpicked by ARENA’s first coordinator. The appointment of women coordinators since 1989 was also a positive factor in terms of establishing a greater gender balance and bringing on board a clearer feminist perspective among some members.¹¹

At the moment, the ARENA Council of Fellows has seventy-nine fellows based mostly in East, Southeast, and South Asia¹² but with a

small number based in Australia, the United States (US), and the United Kingdom (UK). Its present goals reflect a broader set of concerns such as:

1. Promotion of equity among social class, caste, ethnic groups, and gender;
2. Strengthening of popular participation in public life as against authoritarian centralization;
3. Prevention of marginalization of communities in the face of incursion by modern influences;
4. Improvement of the quality of life for Asia's underprivileged;
5. Nurturing of ecological consciousness;
6. Drawing upon aspects of indigenous knowledge systems which enhance social emancipation; and
7. Articulation of new visions encompassing a holistic worldview (ARENA n.d. [b]).

During the 1990s, ARENA also took on a more significant collective life, holding regular congresses and developing three-year plans of action. Its first coordinated plan was developed in its October 1996 congress held in Seoul. Attended by forty-two fellows, a three-year plan, entitled "People's Alliance in the Age of Globalisation: Sustaining Equity, Ecology and Plurality," was approved and served as the basis of programming. Beyond understanding and deconstructing "globalization" and analyzing the impact of global trade and investment, ARENA emphasized the need to contribute to the creation and nurturing of people's alliance, "being built across borders by social movements, grassroots organizations, NGOs and like-minded groups" (ARENA n.d. [b]). Its next three-year program (2000-2003), entitled "Reimagining 'Asia': Redefining 'Human Security' and 'Alternative Development': Movements and Alliances in the Twenty-First Century," came in the wake of the financial crisis that hit many countries of the region. The crisis fostered a greater sense of regional identity, and this was reflected in the program's emphasis on the importance of acting jointly:

The process of orienting the future and of "reimagining Asia" will also entail the pooling together of Asian people's political energies and cultural imagination—bringing linkages between the local, national, and

the regional–toward articulating and interpreting the experiences of resistance and reconstruction. (ARENA 2000, 7)

For its three-year program for 2003-2006, the context was post-September 11 and the US-led invasion of Iraq. Its Council of Fellows met from March 28 to 31, just few days after the invasion on the theme “Hope Amidst Despair: Resistances and Alternatives to Hegemonies.” Its orientation echoed the specific context at the time:

The search for alternatives—for “other” possibilities that transform the prevailing relations of power and usher in a more just and equitable order—necessarily confronts and addresses the violence that is engulfing the world today. The violence of relentless hegemonic pursuits and Empire building. The violence of militarism and wars of aggression. The violence of deeply rooted structure of patriarchy. The violence of racism and the culture of prejudice and intolerance. The violence of capitalist exploitation of humanity and all the earth’s resources. (ARENA 2003)

Beyond its regular congresses and its publications (its primary means of disseminating ideas), ARENA established what it called the “exchange-schools for alternative praxis.” This was an opportunity to “blur the division between intellectuals and activists by providing an educational environment for them to transgress their roles,” and as a “platform and an information network for sharing of ideas and resources among alternative education organizations and NGOs” (Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives ca. 1999, 4).

As a transnational activist network, ARENA has sought to provide a critical space for intellectuals to meet and explore areas of thinking that could inform collective action, nationally and regionally. This sense of community and solidarity among ARENA fellows has been a distinct feature of the network. As explained by Tadem in an interview in 2005, this is probably a dimension that distinguishes ARENA from other networks:

With ARENA, the research is not done in-house; the research is not done by the members or [the] staff. The work is done by fellows because what is more important for ARENA is to nurture, develop, and expand the community, not put out publications . . . It is just a means of achieving the ultimate, the bigger goal of the community: developing, expanding, nurturing, and making active such a community. (Tadem 2005)

When ARENA was first established, this type of critical intellectual engagement was not tolerated, if not directly repressed, within traditional academic circles and universities operating under authoritarian or

semi-authoritarian governments. In many ways, its emergence in the 1980s was a response to the limited space that existed for critical discourse in Asian universities and the need to create a “community” of scholars that could engage each other at the regional level and then feedback such discourse within existing domestic grassroots organizations. In an interview in 2005, Tadem recalls an activity organized for ARENA fellows in Kerala:

In Kerala people who went there from different countries were really excited about commonalities that they found, especially those who were doing organic farming in Japan and Malaysia, alternative forestry initiatives in Nepal, things like that. So my feeling is that the transnational aspect was there, although it was never really articulated in that way, but somehow being together in one conference and the similarities in your experiences brought a very strong feeling of solidarity. That is the word that I would use actually—solidarity. It would always come out from these regional gatherings of ARENA. (Tadem 2005)

With the growing density and importance of regional multilateral organizations (such as ASEAN, APEC, and the Asian Development Bank) and global economic and political processes (such as the Asian crisis and the war against terrorism), ARENA’s fellows increasingly developed plans of action that embodied their goal to act collectively at the regional level. The fellows are able to provide alternative analyses and a critical standpoint on these developments. For example, in 2002 ARENA took an active stand on spearheading the Asian Peace Alliance (APA). In its Inaugural Assembly, APA gathered over a hundred peace activists from NGOs, social movements, and research institutes within the region. ARENA became responsible for the coordination and dissemination of the outcomes of the assembly and acted as its secretariat.¹³ ARENA’s creation of a series of alternative schools for activists is another instance in which it sought to contribute directly to transnational activism. These alternative schools for activists are a modality through which ARENA fellows’ expertise and knowledge are shared and discussed transnationally with participants originating from various countries in the region. Finally, ARENA’s publications taking a regional standpoint reflect this orientation toward creating bridges and fostering space for exchange among intellectual activists.

Overall, ARENA’s key contributions are to provide knowledge and document existing transnational activist endeavors launched by various social sectors, such as peasants, workers, women,

environmentalists, and migrants. A recent evaluation described ARENA's early years:

In its earliest phase, ARENA flourished—with minimal institutional structures, minimal formal procedures, modest financial resources and overhead costs. It maintained a small Secretariat in Hong Kong that sought to nurture close links with social movements; provide solidarity for the diverse struggles of various Asian peoples; provide a caring, nurturing environment for a small, young core staff; provide a space for self-reflection and creative thinking for both activists and concerned intellectuals; and be a forum for the exchange of (what was somewhat tautologically called) “new alternatives” in development theory and practice. (Dias and Francisco 2004, 4)

At present, ARENA is in the process of reorganizing its institutional structure after having to confront an institutional challenge. This is to ensure continued relevance within the realm of transnational activism in Asia. As noted in the evaluation: “While it continues to widely enjoy the prestige and respect of being one of the progressive regional organizations in the Asia Pacific, it is not exactly a ‘sought-after’ organization in more activist-oriented regional coalitions and formations that are working on alternatives to globalization” (Dias and Francisco 2004, 6-7)

Third World Network (TWN)

The Third World Network (TWN) describes itself as “an independent nonprofit international network of organizations and individuals involved in issues relating to development, the Third World and North-South issues” (Third World Network). Its international secretariat based in Penang was established in 1984. Today, TWN has offices in New Delhi, Montevideo, Geneva, and Accra, and affiliates in many countries such as Philippines, Thailand, Brazil, Bangladesh, Peru, Ethiopia, Mexico, South Africa, Senegal, and China (Third World Network).

TWN has been regularly involved in multilateral processes such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the ASEAN (Khor n.d.). Beyond participation in official and parallel summits, TWN produces a wide range of publications: two magazines (*Third World Resurgence* and the bimonthly *Third World Economics*), books, occasional briefing papers, and regular press releases. Its website has become its primary portal for the dissemination of its materials and analyses.

The history of TWN goes back to the late 1970s, when Martin Khor, working at the time as research director with the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP), proposed with other local and foreign activists to establish such network.¹⁴ Khor recalls in an interview,

CAP got in touch with other NGOs in Asia and other parts of the world, and by 1984 we realized that many local problems had global roots. Together with many of these other NGOs, we formed the Third World Network in 1984, to link the local problems of communities in the South to the global policy-making arenas. (Khor 2004)

The formation of TWN took place well before the newest wave of transnational activism referred to as the “antiglobalization movement.” As two program officers from Inter Pares, a Canadian social-justice organization and one of the original supporters of TWN, noted: “The creation of TWN emerged from the process of taking a broader view at consumerism, linking issues of public health, environment to North-South relations. In fact, TWN emerged very much with the logic of the non-aligned movement” (Seabrooke and Gillespie 2005).

What distinguishes TWN from the three other organizations examined here is its explicit commitment to work whenever possible with government officials to affect public policies. Asked how TWN can reconcile the two roles of being a civil-society activist network as well as an advisor to Southern governments, Khor offers the following response:

In the end, the social activist wants to achieve concrete results in terms of better public policies and improvement in the lives of people Yes, the government has invited us to take part in some consultative processes and institutions in which we are able to put forward our views and inputs for government policy making. Taking part in these processes helps us put forward our perspectives more directly. But it does not compromise our ability to have independent views and to remain critical. (Khor 2004)

Such approach challenges other networks that consider that participation in government processes could reduce their level of autonomy and independence. At one level, this methodology can be seen as rooted in an analysis that emphasizes the need to influence policy-making processes in the most effective possible way—that is, by engaging directly with state and multilateral organization officials (Hewison 2001, 225). Such orientation is also consistent with the underlying analysis of TWN that “divides the world into the North (rich, industrialized) and South (poor, underdeveloped)”; at the same

time, it reflects Khor's faith in "a revitalized United Nations" (Hewison 2001, 224-25). At another level, this approach might be a way to enhance legitimacy within limited democratic space in Malaysia, especially for domestic advocacy.

Malaysia's political system, despite its democratic façade, has had limited tolerance for direct political challenges and has been able to control and, in some cases, effectively prevent the formation of important local and national NGOs (Loh 2005; Trocki 1996; Verma 2002). In this context, the shift from local and transnational issues appears to have been in part a response to limited domestic political space, as well as to the growing and rapid integration of Malaysia into the world economy.

TWN's success is linked to the capacity of its members to provide alternative analysis and policy discourse on issues of the day for many Third World activists and even government officials. With its long tradition of analyses, having been established in the mid-1980s, TWN became particularly prominent during the 1990s, especially with its analyses on the Asian crisis and more recently with its analysis of WTO processes, a time when social movements and activists in the region are seeking critical perspectives.

A quick analysis of the various annual reports produced by TWN between 1993 and 2003 revealed an amazing increase in its participation in international and regional events (Third World Network 1993-2003). TWN's participation in civil-society activities and government and multilateral organizations meetings increased threefold from 50 in 1993 to 158 by 2003. Throughout the period, TWN consistently participated in United Nations (UN)-sponsored processes, often at the request of the agencies themselves (Third World Network Archive). At the same time, TWN maintained its rhythm in terms of organizing civil-society activities, spearheading a dozen of seminars and forums each year, mostly in Asia (Malaysia, Bangladesh, India, and the Philippines) and also in Ghana, Peru, Switzerland, and Norway. Today, its website has become a key tool for disseminating its analyses. As reported in its *2003 Annual Report*,

Overall, for the year 2003, the website recorded nearly 8.2 million hits, with the month of November recording the highest number of hits at 826,056. In 2002, the website registered around 7.8 million hits, while in 2001 it registered around 4.8 million hits. (Third World Network 1993-2003)

In fact, TWN, along with Focus on the Global South and Brazil's Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Rural Workers' Movement), is listed on *The Global Activists Manual* as a key reference in the global south movements "directory," referring to it as "a platform for Southern interests in global meetings and institutions" (Prokosh and Raymond 2002, 295). After more than twenty years of existence, TWN is a recognized network, both of multilateral and national organizations as well as of civil-society groups and movements in the areas of trade negotiations, especially WTO agreement on agriculture, issues on trade-related intellectual property rights (TRIPS), biodiversity, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs).¹⁵

Focus on the Global South (Focus)

Conceived between 1993 and 1994 by its first two codirectors, Kamal Malhotra and Walden Bello, Focus on the Global South (hereafter referred to as Focus) was officially established in Bangkok, Thailand, in January 1995 (Malhotra and Bello 1999).¹⁶ Its cofounders represent in many ways archetypes of transnational activists. Bello, a Filipino political economist, had lived in the US for years where he was very active in the anti-Marcos dictatorship struggle and the international Third World solidarity movement. He had also worked with a Northern NGO—the Food First/Institute for Food and Development Policy. Malhotra, who is from India, had been involved for years with an international NGO—Community Aid Abroad-Oxfam Australia)—and many other local NGOs. In conceiving Focus, the two shared a common set of ideas:

Both were dissatisfied with the existing North-South division paradigm. They were also skeptical about mainstream economic analysis, and the economics-culture-politics methodology . . . They saw the need for linking micro-macro perspectives in analyzing current situations . . . They both saw the gap between activists who mobilize while holding incomplete or simplistic analysis, and researchers and academics who have abilities to make good analysis but lack the opportunities for action . . . They saw the importance of East and Southeast Asia as a locale in light of its dynamic economic, social, and political dimension in global development (Kaewhatep 1999, 45-46).

The choice of its name reflected a specific lens on how globalization was affecting both the South and the North.¹⁷ Early on, this understanding of the international economy was presented: "The current globalization process is making the traditional definition of

South and North less clear-cut” as there “is a rapidly growing North in the South, and at the same time a rapidly growing South in the North” (Focus ca. 1997). Moving away from a traditional North-South perspective, Focus sought to propose a different conception: “North and South are increasingly redefined as concepts to distinguish between those who are economically able to participate in and benefit from globalized markets and those who are excluded and marginalized from them” (Focus ca. 1997). At the same time, Focus chose to “give priority to its work in developing countries, with a particular emphasis on the Asia Pacific region” (Focus ca. 1997).

The reputation, track records, and networks of its two directors helped the organization take off the ground with a set of funding agencies committing to support the initiative. Focus presented itself as a place where thinker-activists within the Asia Pacific region can be connected (Focus ca. 1997). Its main goals are as follows:

1. To strengthen the capacity of organizations of poor and marginalized people in the South and those working on their behalf to better analyze and understand the impact of the globalization process on their daily life and struggles;
2. To improve critical and provocative analysis of regional and global socioeconomic trends and articulate democratic, poverty-reducing, equitable, and sustainable alternative that advance the interest of the poor and marginalized peoples around the world, but especially in the Asia Pacific region; and
3. To articulate, link, and develop greater coherence between local community-based and national, regional and global paradigm of change (Focus ca. 1997).

Early on, Focus sought to combine analyses on the workings and the impact of regional and global economic processes with studies of local resistance and initiatives. Its two main programs—policy-oriented research and analysis on critical regional and global socioeconomic issues (*Global Paradigms Program*), and documentation, analysis, and dissemination of “innovative civil society, grassroots, community-based efforts in democratic, poverty-reducing and sustainable development” (*Micro-Macro Paradigm Program*)—reflected such orientation (Kaewhpet 1999, 46).

Thailand's relative political stability and democratic space, and the possibility of being associated with the Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute (CUSRI) were two key factors why Focus's head office was established in Bangkok (Kaewhtep 1999). Beginning with a small staff of six in 1996, the Focus team expanded rapidly; in 1999, it already had close to twenty staff and about twenty-five by 2005. It has also opened two national offices, one in India and one in the Philippines.

Within a few years, Focus became a key reference for civil-society organizations not only in Southeast Asia but also within the broader antiglobalization movement.¹⁸ Two types of factors can explain such success story. The first is endogenous and has to do with Focus's capacities "to build networks and strengthen linkages between and among civil-society organizations at the global, national and local level" (Sta. Ana 1999, 6).¹⁹ Through the years, Focus staff have been involved not only in the production of research and policy analysis but also in organizing civil-society networks within the region around a range of issues such as food security, APEC, ASEAN, and Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). They were also closely involved in many global processes, such as the World Social Forum, anti-WTO coalitions such as Our World Is Not for Sale and the peace movement.²⁰ Lastly, with Malhotra taking a leave of absence in the late 1990 to join the UNDP, much of Focus's clout revolves around the persona of Bello, its current director. Similar to TWN with Khor, Bello's imprimatur is highly significant despite a growing team of prolific and dedicated staff.²¹

The second type of factors is exogenous. One was the Asian financial crisis that began in Thailand in 1997 before spreading to the region. Another was the growing importance of global economic processes and regional and multilateral organizations. These developments made Focus's analyses and staff highly in demand. As one of the external evaluators noted: "The Asian financial crisis and the role of the international financial institutions have undoubtedly become the burning issues of the day. The controversies revolving around WTO and APEC, in different periods, have likewise occupied center stage" (Sta. Ana 1999, 24). The Asian crisis virtually catapulted Focus at the center of critical discourse on the impact of economic liberalization in Southeast Asia. However, the growing demand by civil-society organizations for analyses on multilateral processes and organizations such as APEC, WTO, and ASEM meant that other research areas did not develop as much, including its proposed research

programs on the cultural responses to globalization and the micro-macro connections.

In recent years, Focus's key areas of research and advocacy are the issue of peace and the opposition to US foreign policy. In the wake of the US-led invasion of Iraq, Focus played a central role in convening a peace conference in Jakarta, which brought together representatives and organizations from the larger peace movement that had emerged prior to the invasion. The conference resulted in the creation of the Jakarta Peace Consensus.²² As it did for the Asian crisis and the anti-WTO movement, Focus's capacities and skills for networking as well as its capability to produce analyses and policy documents placed the organization at the center of several transnational coalitions on the issue of peace and antimilitarism. In August 2006, it helped organize the "International Civil Society and Parliamentary Peace Mission to Lebanon" in the context of the Israeli bombardment. The mission included two parliamentarians, two farmers, two university professors, and four activists, a journalist, and an interpreter from six countries (India, Philippines, Spain, Norway, France, and Brazil). Once again, it was Focus's international linkages, having been involved in organizing a peace conference in 2004 in Beirut, and its capacity to react quickly that allowed it to be an active player in this undertaking. These also enabled Focus to rapidly disseminate the mission's findings within its networks abroad and in the Philippines (International Civil Society and Parliamentary Peace Mission to Lebanon 2006).

Similar to the two previous cases, the role of certain individuals with experience in both national organizing and international coalition building was key to the emergence of this transnational organization. However, two factors best explain the rapid expansion of the organizations: the specific context of Southeast Asia's rapid integration into the world economy during the 1980s and 1990s, which became especially obvious during and after the Asian crisis; and the relative political liberalization and the increased density of civil-society organizations looking for critical views and analyses.²³ This niche for critical studies around which campaigns and mobilizations can be organized, and Focus's growing involvement in global civil-society processes, such as the World Social Forum, point to the importance of taking advantage of openings in what was earlier referred to as multilevel political opportunity structures.

Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN)

The creation of the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) in 1999 was the product of a two-year process of consultation and exchanges of materials among seventeen organizations from the Asia Pacific region involved in research and documentation efforts (Asia Pacific Research Network 1999, 1). Spearheaded by Manila-based research and databank center, Ibon Foundation (especially its director, Antonio Tujan), APRN's initial objectives were the following:

1. Develop the capacity of selected Asian NGOs in the conduct of research;
2. Develop at least one NGO in each target Asian country that can become a research-information provider by introducing data banking and research as a general service;
3. Develop common strategies in research information work through sharing of experiences and raise the general level capacities in research; and
4. Develop capacity and common research platform to support social movements in their respective countries in the emerging issues related to the WTO Millennium round, the IMF and the APEC (Asia Pacific Research Network 1999, 3).²⁴

Its first annual conference, organized around the theme of trade liberalization, brought together eighty-five individuals from fifty organizations located in eleven different countries, including ten of the seventeen founding organizations of the network. A workshop on research methodologies that followed the conference identified specific activities for the network to be organized in the coming years.²⁵

Once established, APRN grew steadily. APRN was involved in the People's Assembly, a parallel summit to the Third Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Seattle. In 2000, through a grant from a Northern funding agency, it set up a small secretariat located in the Ibon Foundation office in Manila. The secretariat is responsible for communications among network members, development and maintenance of a website and a listserv, and coordination of the publication of *APRN Journal* (Asia Pacific Research Network 2000b, 1).²⁶ At the end of that year, APRN held its second annual conference in Jakarta on the theme "Poverty and Financing Development" attended

by about seventy local participants from Indonesia and another sixty foreign participants coming from twenty different countries (Asia Pacific Research Network 2000b, 1).²⁷ By then, APRN had expanded its membership to twenty-three organizations based in twelve countries of the Asia Pacific (Asia Pacific Research Network 2000a, 1).

In the following years, APRN continued to organize its annual conferences, each co-hosted by at least one APRN member. Its third annual conference took place in Sydney in September 2001, with the theme “Corporate Power or People’s Power: TNCs and Globalization” (Asia Pacific Research Network 2001a, 1), and brought together more than 130 participants.²⁸ The conference aimed at “developing common perspectives on TNCs across NGOs in the region, creating complimentary research agendas, agreeing [on] common priorities for future research and developing shared strategies in contesting TNCs” (Asia Pacific Research Network 2001a, 1). The Fourth Annual Conference was held in Guangzhou in November 2002 and focused on the WTO, particularly on the impact of China’s membership (Asia Pacific Research Network 2002a, 1).²⁹ Proposals that emerged of the conference included a commitment to “initiate the formation of a broad coalition toward the Fifth WTO Ministerial meeting in Cancun” (Asia Pacific Research Network 2002a, 7). In November 2003, against the backdrop of “aggressive US policy,” APRN held its Fifth Annual Conference in Beirut on the theme “War on Terrorism in Relation to Globalization” (Asia Pacific Research Network 2003, 3). Organized for the first time in the Middle East, the annual conference was co-organized by APRN and the local host organization, the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND). The conference aimed at understanding the growing militarization and its links with globalization, especially the role of the US and its impact on the people and resistance movements (Asia Pacific Research Network 2003, 3).

Its sixth annual conference was held in Dhaka from November 25 to 27, 2004, which was hosted by Unnayan Bikalper Nitinirdharoni Gobeshona (Policy Research for Development Alternatives), a long-standing member of APRN. The theme of the conference was agriculture and food sovereignty. This time, the conference’s organizers sought to expand its goals from “a purely research and academic conference to a more open and public gathering of research institutions and people’s organizations” (Asia Pacific Research Network 2004b, 1). At the time, there was a growing number of members that felt that APRN could take a more advocacy-like role and link the results of their researches to

proposals for public policies and mobilization. As a result, it was decided to “transform the APRN conference into a People’s Convention on Food Sovereignty” (Asia Pacific Research Network 2004c). Such convention would then be promoted during the World Food Summit +10 scheduled for 2006 (Asia Pacific Research Network 2004c, 1).³⁰ As preparations evolved, the goals of the People’s Convention expanded to include preparations for the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the WTO and other regional/bilateral agreements and the promotion and strengthening “of local, national and popular movements and initiatives” (Asia Pacific Research Network and Peoples Food Sovereignty Network-Asia Pacific 2004). The conference, attended by over five hundred participants from more than thirty countries, resolved to adopt the People’s Convention on Food Sovereignty and drafted a People’s Statement (Asia Pacific Research Network 2004a).

In 2005, APRN continued to be involved in global and regional activities.³¹ APRN members were involved in the preparation of various activities parallel to the Sixth WTO Ministerial Meeting in Hong Kong. In July 2005, with the assistance of the AMRC and the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) in Hong Kong, it organized the “Policy-Research Conference on Trade” to strengthen the advocacy of civil-society organizations (CSOs) and social movements in relation to the WTO meeting.

Since its establishment, APRN has gradually expanded its range of activities. During the Sydney General Council meeting in 2002, APRN members agreed that APRN would “finally embark on coordinated researches as originally envisioned at the start of the network in Manila three years ago” (Asia Pacific Research Network 2002b).³² The two initial coordinated-research projects were “Effective Strategies for Confronting TNCs,” coordinated by GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade]-Watchdog of New Zealand, and “Women and Labour,” coordinated by the Center for Women’s Resources of the Philippines.³³ In the past years, APRN members also participated in the formation of The Reality of Aid Asia project, aimed at monitoring and documenting international development assistance programs and projects. Another area that APRN developed through the years is its training component. In 2001, it organized a capacity-building training in Bangkok on “people’s advocacy policy research”³⁴ and another one at the end of November 2001, in Bangladesh targeting South Asian NGOs, and seeking to strengthen advocacy on the WTO Agreement on Agriculture and TRIPS (Asia Pacific Research Network 2002b, 5; see

also Asia Pacific Research Network ca. 2001c; Asia Pacific Research Network ca. 2002d).³⁵

After seven years of existence, APRN has been able to locate itself as a key research and advocacy network primarily in Southeast Asia, broadening to other members in the Asia Pacific region (Tujan 2005, 2006). It has expanded its membership from seventeen to thirty-six member-organizations based in twenty-one different countries. While contributing to the development of research capacity of NGOs, it has also become involved in advocacy efforts. During the last WTO ministerial in Hong Kong, APRN had its own contingent during the various marches and demonstrations organized, allowing many of its members to link their advocacy and their research efforts to mobilization and direct action.

APRN's skill at identifying emerging global issues reflected in its choice of theme for its annual conferences (WTO, peace, food sovereignty, transnational corporations, and official development assistance), and its specific emphasis on research and documentation is certainly a factor that explains such expansion. As with the three previous networks, APRN's rapid expansion can be attributed to the presence of key individuals skilled at network building, animating processes, and seeking financial assistance. Moreover, the growing density of international and regional processes (economic integration, financial liberalization, including the 1997 crisis) and a relatively open political space in several Asian countries allowing for the organizing of parallel and critical conferences facilitated the network's expansion in terms of membership and areas of work. It is also important to outline that APRN like ARENA expanded by recruiting members and organizations through joint projects, personal networks, and joint activities. Today, APRN has several applicants for membership and has consolidated its internal decision-making processes to ensure an alternating leadership among its various members.

SUMMARY

The analysis of the four networks reveals interesting commonalities and some forms of convergence in terms of the growing importance of producing critical views and alternative proposals to the various processes associated with globalization, whether it be WTO, APEC, GMOs, or TRIPs. At the same time, each organization was established at different "historical junctures." ARENA came about in the era of

anti-imperialist struggles marked by resistance movements to authoritarian governments in the region. TWN, on the other hand, was set up very much within the logic of non-aligned countries seeking to provide a Southern perspective to issues. Focus and APRN emerged in the context of neoliberal globalization and sought to respond to such process by providing analyses that move away from the tradition of North-South dichotomy (Focus), or strengthening capacity of people's organizations to challenge such form of domination (APRN). In all four cases, the production of knowledge and analyses that could transcend national boundaries has been a central feature of their work. As pointed out by Eduardo Tadem, intellectual activists were well placed to engage in such process because they

“are always looking at interconnections between issues, between countries, and between regions. And that is part of [their] work whatever discipline they are in. With the grassroots or purely NGO-type of organizations, there is a strong tendency for national sectarianism, class sectarianism, ideological sectarianism.” (Tadem 2005; original in Filipino, the author's translation)

In the coming years, such distinction may become less and less relevant, as a growing number of social movements involved across the regions in transnational collective action are themselves engaged in knowledge production for advocacy and mobilization (Piper and Uhlin 2004; Loh 2004; Weiss 2004). In that sense, it is not surprising to see ARENA, Focus, and APRN becoming involved in direct collective action and social-movement building.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I examined how and why regional activist networks engaged in policy advocacy based on critical knowledge production were established and expanded, becoming one important component of transnational activism in Southeast Asia. The review of the four cases has shown that as early as the late 1970s, regional advocacy networks were being organized. However, as the region was increasingly integrated into the global economy, there have been a growing number of initiatives. In fact, the process of economic integration of Southeast Asian economies within global markets, combined with relative political liberalization in several countries, provided a specific context for the development of transnational activist networks with the specific

goal of nurturing and sustaining regional activism through the production of critical knowledge.

As the analysis showed, Southeast Asian transnational activism focused around knowledge and discourse production as a response to domestic and international processes, as well as a result of the growing awareness among local and national activists across the region that they are confronted with common challenges and share common targets. In certain instances, undertaking advocacy and organizing transnational coalitions is a way of pushing citizen's rights that are being blocked nationally or that cannot be tackled directly within the domestic arena. In other cases, transnational activism becomes a means to broaden political pressure globally on common issues affecting citizens, such as increasing poverty, marginalization of the rural sector, privatization, trade liberalization, deregulation, militarism, migration policies, and a decaying environment. Common to the four organizations is the central place of discourse and knowledge production and its linkages to mobilization, network building, and constituency building.

Findings from the four cases largely confirm the thesis put forward by della Porta and Tarrow (2005) that transnational activists are very seldom working at the supranational level only.³⁶ Whether it is the activist intellectuals of ARENA, staff from Focus, TWN affiliates, or APRN members, they engaged in transnational activism after being involved in local- and national-level advocacy. Many remain rooted in their own national struggles, arguing that advocacy and policy engagement at one level does not deter activism at another level. Transnational activists are capable of and interested in creating linkages and coalitions among various types of actors operating on different levels (local, national, regional, international) in order to respond to various political contexts, each offering a different range of political opportunities. As the work of Focus and TWN revealed, specific and localized concerns are woven together around the theme of resistance to neoliberal globalization and the need for global social justice (see Bello 2001). Also, as the history of ARENA reveals, the need for critical knowledge—knowledge that can be transformed into action and that can be shared among academics linked to social movements—is seen as an imperative to challenge authoritarian states or policies deemed detrimental to the poor.

As Southeast Asia became increasingly integrated in the global economy and each state linked and affected by global processes, transnational activism relying on alternative sources of knowledge

became a defining feature of civil-society processes, especially during and after the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Concrete impact and policy influence of such form of activism takes different forms and is often difficult to trace in a linear way. At one level, transnational advocacy efforts produce shared identities and a common understanding of issues. It also generates common campaigns and proposals that can be put forward during regional and international gatherings and implemented both at the regional and national levels. In some cases, transnational activism can influence the dominant discourse, and forces its tenants to defend and justify their positions. As the study of TWN demonstrates, reformist policymakers interested in developing alternative proposals to the more orthodox neoliberal agenda are seeking the expertise and knowledge generated by transnational networks. In other cases, transnational activism can expose the tensions and divisions that exist between states and economic blocs. Finally, by connecting community organizations and local NGOs' struggles to a broader set of issues and struggles, transnational activists are able to amplify and enrich both the work being conducted at the very local level and the advocacy and policy work conducted regionally and globally.

This emerging form of activism is not without its own sets of dilemmas and challenges.³⁷ Allocation of resources between local, national, and cross-border activities, democratic decision-making processes within global networks, oppositional versus propositional politics, mobilization-driven versus long-term campaigns are all issues confronting the four transnational networks examined here.³⁸ Nonetheless, their rapid expansion, their multidimensional activities, and their capacities to mobilize and provide concrete analysis and policy proposals for civil-society organizations suggest that knowledge creation constitutes one specific niche of transnational activism. While transnational activism seems to stay, its influence on regional and global economic policies and on regional intergovernmental organizations remains to be assessed.³⁹ ❁

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NOTES

1. The same authors define activism as “political activities that are 1) based on a conflict of interests and thus are of a contentious nature, 2) challenging or supporting certain power structures, 3) involving nonstate actors, and 4) taking place (at least partly) outside formal political arenas” (Piper and Uhlin 2002, 4). Using Thomas Risse-Kappen’s work, they define transnational as “interaction across state borders involving at least one nonstate actors” (5). See also Risse-Kappen (1995).
2. This was also a key observation of Keck and Sikkink (1998) who described insightfully the combination of forms of activism.
3. A useful historical treatment of this question can be found in Hopkins (2002) and Boli and Thomas (1999).
4. See in particular Lindquist (2004). As Piper and Uhlin further explain: “Considering fairly recent and ongoing changes towards democratization in this region, it is not surprising also to find rising civil-society activism in general and increasing number of NGOs in particular” (2004, 19).
5. In her study of six regional NGOs based in Hong Kong, Soo-Bok Cheong proposes a similar argument emphasizing the importance of these two variables, naming them “globalization and industrialization” and “authoritarianism and democracy” (Six Asian Regional NGOs and the Formation of Social Actor n.d., 1-5).
6. Reviewing analyses and discourses produced by Focus on the Global South and Third World Network, Hewison suggests that populism and “progressive nationalism” have influenced their analyses hindering the production of “an alternative discourse” that can locate “the causes of exploitation in capitalist processes” (2001, 233). While this may be debated, the goal of the current article is to understand the genealogy and emergence of these four transnational networks and reveal how their analyses created resonance with popular organizations and social movements within the region.
7. A pioneering work is Piper and Uhlin (2004). Rather than focusing on a specific type of formation, their emphasis is on thematic organizations.
8. In fact, ARENA defines itself as an “interdisciplinary programme for Asian studies and research cooperation,” and a regional network “of concerned Asian scholars—academics, intellectuals, activists, researchers, writers, and artists—which aims to contribute to a process of awakening toward meaningful and people-oriented social change” (ARENA 2005).

9. In ARENA's view, concerned scholars are individuals capable of conceptualizing, theorizing, analyzing, interpreting, and articulating issues and concerns as direct participants of or in support of struggles for social transformation in the interests of disadvantaged peoples (ARENA 2000, 9).
10. The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) is a regional ecumenical organization now comprising sixteen National Councils and over one hundred churches/denominations in the Asia Pacific area. It was first established in 1957 and was quite active in the 1970s, supporting regional gatherings including regional meetings of the Rural Youth Programme that helped foster links among those who eventually formed ARENA (ARENA n.d. [b]).
11. These changes were also supported by the results of the first ARENA evaluation conducted in the early 1990s.
12. In East Asia (Beijing, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan), Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), and South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka).
13. See Asian Peace Alliance (2003), Annex 4.
14. As Khor explains: "CAP and its charismatic leader, S. M. Mohammed Idris, enabled me to make the link between the academic world of theory and the real world of people and their problems. The world of NGOs and involvement in community issues became so interesting to me that eventually I left the academic world and joined the NGO movement full time" (Khor 2004).
15. A glance at the various TWN annual reports between 1993 and 2003—in particular, its publications and participation at various meetings—easily reveals such specialization and expertise.
16. In the concept paper that led to its formation, Focus was initially called "The Center for the South."
17. Many others would also use the concept of a "Global South" afterward. For example, see Inter Pares (2001).
18. In its 2003-2005 Work Plan, the organization recognized such particular position: "Focus has also traveled considerably from its starting point. It is today widely considered a 'key player' in the global movement for a different and better world. Its analyses of global developments are extensively consulted, as are its suggestions for structural changes" (Focus on the Global South ca. 2003, 3).
19. As noted in a 2002 review report by external consultants, four attributes help understand why Focus has become a key transnational activist network because of its capacity to create and nurture regional NGO coalitions and social movements: "political radicalism, a clear political position based on power relations; intellectual leadership, clear and credible analyses; convening power, the ability to bring people and organizations together; financial resources, the ability to raise funds and finance the relationship" (Banpasirichote, Singh, and Van der Borgh 2002, 2).
20. As two evaluators pointed out: "We have the impression that Focus has started its action with a strong focus on the production of ideas and analysis but that today it is more and more involved in global strategy and activism" (Banpasirichote, Singh, and Van der Borgh 2002, 2).
21. As the 2002 evaluation report pointed out: "At present, Focus without the current Executive Director is unthinkable" (Banpasirichote, Singh, and Van der Borgh 2002, 3).

22. As described in its founding document: "The hurriedly organized conference, held in Jakarta, Indonesia, 19-21 May 2003, was open to all. Those who attended come from some of the biggest national and regional peace and justice coalitions and groupings all over the world." These included members of the Asian Peace, the UK Stop the War Coalition, the US United Peace and Justice, the Italian Social Forum, and the Istanbul Not to War Coalition (The Jakarta Peace Consensus 2003).
23. This was discussed in interviews with staff of Focus on the Global South in May 2005 in Bangkok and Manila.
24. See also Consumers International-Regional Office Asia-Pacific (1999).
25. These included "common and/or coordinated research projects," "training in research and related technologies," and "publications" (Asia Pacific Research Network 1999, 4). Common research areas were government transparency; the impact of globalization on workers' rights and labor migration, the impact of globalization on food security, and the impact of the GATT-agreement on agriculture. A third event led by IBON, a training-workshop on documentation and data banking, was considered particularly useful as participating organizations suggested afterward that such training be organized on a regular basis.
26. Its first issue came out in December 1999 and comprised papers presented during the July 1999 Conference.
27. Participants came from a range of organizations: research institutes, NGO, government, academia, popular organizations, and the media.
28. Like the previous year, APRN secretariat in Manila worked with a local organizing committee made up of Australian NGOs and trade unions, including AidWatch; the Public Interest Advocacy Centre; the Mineral Policy Institute; APHEDA Union Aid Abroad; Friends of the Earth-Australia; Australian Manufacturing Workers Union; and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union. Despite difficulties in traveling and securing visa in the wake of September 11, the turnout of the conference was only little lower than expected, with 130 participants, including thirty-five international participants and twenty-three APRN members (Asia Pacific Research Network 2001a, 3). See also Asia Pacific Research Network 2001d.
29. The conference was organized with the assistance of two organizations: the Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) and the Ghangzhou All China Federation of Trade Union (ACFTU). In the end and despite some visa difficulties, a total of ninety participants joined the conference, including forty foreign participants, of which twenty-seven were APRN members.
30. The process envisioned by the People's Convention was to initiate a process of adoption of national conventions culminating in a "global convention on people's food sovereignty" presented during the 2006 World Food Summit +10 in 2006 (Asia Pacific Research Network 2004c).
31. Including a policy workshop on regional cooperation and human rights in Asia held in the Philippines in June 2004, and the co-organizing of the international conference "Bandung in the 21st Century: Continuing the Struggle for Independence, Peace against Imperialist War and Globalization," held in Bandung, Indonesia, on April 14-16, 2005.
32. It meant that instead of financing individual researches carried by APRN members, research would be conducted jointly (Asia Pacific Research Network 2004c, 1).

33. The first one took off the ground in 2002, reviewing the experience of specific campaigns against TNCs, while the second was delayed because members felt that it was necessary to organize first a research planning conference (Asia Pacific Research Network 2002b; 2002c, 3; see also, Asia Pacific Research Network 2003).
34. The purpose of the training was to “familiarize the participants with basic concepts of participatory research; provide skills in research design and methods of policy research; provide framework guidance on policy analysis; and familiarize on process of effective practical application of policy research”(Asia Pacific Research Network 2002b, 4).
35. This training was the third of the same kind, each focusing on the WTO and Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), the first two having been held in Malaysia in 2000 and Indonesia in 2001.
36. This is also a key observation made by Keck and Sikkink (1998) who describe insightfully the combination of forms of activism.
37. In their recent book on transnational coalitions, Joe Bandy and Jackie Smith (2005, 231-52) propose a list of “factors” that can generate tension and cooperation.
38. Academics such as Kevin Hewison (2001, 233) also questioned their analyses, in particular those of TWN and Focus on the Global South, seeing those as populist and somehow simplistic.
39. Recent works of Jonathan Fox (2002) and Fox and Brown (1998) can provide a useful starting point; see as well Clark (2003).

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