



Global Collaboration – Grassroots Action: A History of Friends of the Earth International 1971 – 2006

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Is FoE truly an organization for all seasons?... Given its protean capacity to reinvent itself, and in the process to help the whole environmental movement do the same, I suspect that's more than likely. And I can't help thinking that the world will be a better place because of it.¹

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INTRODUCTION: FRIENDS ACROSS THE EARTH

Friends of the Earth was founded in 1969 by David Brower following his resignation as Executive Director of the Sierra Club of the United States. Disagreements between Brower and the Board of the Sierra Club resulted from disputes over issues (e.g., their position on nuclear power), managerial style and budgeting (e.g., the spending of club funds), organizational structure and decision-making process (e.g., the bureaucratic and hierarchical structure of the Sierra Club), the national focus of the club, and decisions on club activities (e.g., the Club's focus on recreational and educational activities as opposed to lobbying and publishing of environmental books).² For Brower, Friends of the Earth would be everything the Sierra Club wasn't. FOE would be international, decentralized, political and anti-nuclear. It would focus on legislative lobbying, litigation and political campaigning, as well as publishing books for awareness-raising on environmental issues.

The initial Friends of the Earth office opened in San Francisco, California in 1969. In 1971, Brower gathered with "environmental people" from France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Sweden and the United States for a meeting in Paris, France. In the same year, at a meeting in Roslagen (Sweden), environmental activists from France, Sweden, England and the USA, including Brower, founded Friends of the Earth International. FoEI gave primacy to the autonomy and "self-determination" of national members while employing "consensus decision-making" and operating under the mission "to promote...the conservation, restoration and rational use of the natural resources and beauty of the Earth".³ David Brower's wife, Ann, suggested the name "Friends of the Earth" and the idea that the earth needs friends resonated outside of the United States.

FoEI began as a collection of concerned individuals from industrialized countries, and has since expanded globally to include 76 member groups from all continents, with a combined number of members and supporters of over two million, uniting more than 5,000 local activist groups, and employing 1,200 staff members. The goals of FoEI were initially focused on preservation, conservation and restoration of the natural environment. In the 1980s, environmental groups in Asia, Latin America and Africa joined the federation and expanded the organization outside its original northern country members. These new member groups brought a more holistic perspective on environmental issues as being interconnected with issues of ecological and cultural diversity, human and peoples' rights, sovereignty, equity and social, economic and gender justice. The first annual meeting hosted by a member organization from the South was in 1986 in Malaysia. FoEI began by focusing entirely on local and national campaigns. Participatory, democratic decision-making and national group autonomy are core values of FoEI and, although southern offices supported the decentralized structure, they called for joint international campaigning in order to tackle issues that span national borders. Global and international problems were becoming increasingly apparent, and FoEI member groups developed international campaigns and, later, an international agenda in order to strengthen FoEI's voice at the global level in support of local and national struggles.

This continuous, organic expansion and shift in focus stems from the FoEI member group commitment to a democratic, decentralized and informal structure, which repeatedly allows a flow of dialogue amongst FoEI groups to renew and redefine the scope and reach of FoEI. Until 2004, this structural arrangement challenged FoEI member groups in their development of a common international agenda; however, FoEI member groups came together in a 2005 – 2006 strategic planning process to build an international umbrella strategy. FoEI member groups seek to build bridges between local and national campaigns and global processes, while preserving the autonomy of their national groups and nurturing their cultural and political differences.

² McCormick, J. (1989). *The Global Environmental Movement: Reclaiming Paradise*. London, UK, Belhaven Press, p. 144; Wapner, P. (1996). *Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics*. Albany, NY, State, p. 121; Carmin, J. and D. B. Balser (2002). "Selecting Repertoires of Action in Environmental Movement Organizations." *Organization and Environment* 15(4): 373. University of New York.

³ Burke, T. (1982). "Friends of the Earth and the Conservation of Resources." *Pressure Groups in the Global System*. P. Willetts. London, UK, Frances Pinter (Publishers) Ltd., p. 107

Because new member groups were fully formed organizations in their own countries which then joined the FoEI federation, the new campaigners from these groups not only brought new perspectives to the annual general meetings but also new campaign issues and tactics to add to the multitude of local, national and international activities. FoEI has forged long-standing alliances with likeminded civil society organizations, indigenous peoples and local communities, networks and social movements, and FoEI member groups actively incorporate the perspectives, campaigns and tactics of these partnerships to enrich and strengthen their campaigns. FoEI member groups build on past ideas, activities, member groups and alliances. They seek to create a context within which learning can spiral upwards as member groups incorporate new ideas, activities and member groups. FoEI is in continuous flow, or as one FoEI campaigner said, "The [FoEI] network is alive – it moves constantly."⁴

The most important thing is that no matter how good the structure is, it is the people who make the difference. It is about how the membership drives the federation. It is about the values such as valuing the diversity of the federation and at the same time wanting to be effective.... We are all committed to the process and want to make sure that the regions have a say. We are looking to see if there are bottlenecks and different points of view. We are finding the root. We are learning. There is no prescribed model for this process. Even our experienced facilitator commented that this is a federation that invests time in finding ways of sorting itself out and in experimenting a lot of the time.... It became clear that the federation only exists as far as people invest in it and we have the commitment to engage.⁵

This report traces part of the history of this alive and vibrant network and explores the evolution of its increasingly international focus and its embrace of internal diversity as a powerful force for change.

A GLOBAL EXPERIMENT

In the 1970s and early 1980s, international interaction within FoEI amounted to an informal annual gathering, which enabled the exchange of information amongst internationally-minded individuals from industrialized countries,

Friends of the Earth was conceived from the beginning as an international body. Originally, David Brower simply appointed friends of his living outside the United States to be his personal representatives. This rather dirigiste approach to internationalization soon gave way to a more formal recruitment process.... Recruitment became a response to spontaneous initiatives in countries in which the idea spread by a process more akin to osmosis than conscious policy.⁶

As this recruitment process continued, national member groups recognized the benefit of operating as an international organization, particularly as it enabled joint accreditation to United Nations bodies, such as the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).⁷ Initial meetings resulted in FoEI members agreeing to a common position against nuclear power and nuclear proliferation; however, for the most part, the annual meetings were conversations amongst concerned environmentalists from different countries lending each other support and sharing ideas. As one early FoE member from FoE France (Les Amis de la Terre) describes, "FoEI was small, but promising... [and] ties were close and personal."⁸

As one of their first international activities, FoEI campaigners attended the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment to lobby governments on environmental and nuclear issues. Jointly with staff from The Ecologist magazine in the United Kingdom, FoE campaigners instigated the publication of a daily newspaper, *ECO*, during the UN conference negotiations. The *ECO* publication was

⁴ Interview with Marijke Torfs, FoEI International Coordinator, October 2004

⁵ Interview with Meena Raman, past FoEI Chair, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (FoE Malaysia), February 2006.

⁶ Burke 1982, p. 106

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Samuel, Pierre (1992) *Remembrance of Things Past*. In FoEI *LINK: 25th Anniversary Special*. July/August. Issue 73, p.8.

well-received by government delegates, officials, civil society actors and the media, particularly when *ECO* staff gained access to a closed meeting hosted by Chinese delegates and released the secret Chinese proposal in *ECO* the following morning.⁹ FoE has since published *ECO* at dozens of international conferences, some by invitation and others as a campaigning device.¹⁰ Even though FoEI member groups were engaged in common activities, the member groups decided against any formal collaborative structure. In 1976, a proposal to open an official FoEI coordinating body was rejected by other member groups and, in fact, “the dominant desire for the national organizations to assert their independence led to successive decisions not to establish a secretariat.”¹¹

By 1978, the “volume of international communication” had grown to such an extent that one FoE member group initiated the production of FoE LINK, an internal publication produced five times per year from the San Francisco office of FoE USA.¹² Prior to LINK, the annual meetings served as the main coordination mechanism and opportunity for information exchange at the international level. As one FoE member recalls,

Throughout the first ten years, FoEI members had worked, in general, on their own issues. Some of these were common concerns, of course, with the nuclear threat dominating the agenda. A few groups crossed paths regularly while others made contact only now and then. Information exchange and a limited amount of internal debate happened through FoE LINK, produced by David Chatfield’s office in San Francisco. The 1976 Meeting had rejected the idea of any formal co-ordination, such as a Secretariat. International work in FoE’s name sprang mainly from individual initiatives.... But when we met in Reagan’s America in 1981 the mood had darkened.¹³

The 1981 FoEI Annual General Meeting in Washington took place in a new context and triggered a critical shift within Friends of the Earth International. FoEI member groups were dismayed at the reversal of hard-won victories from the 1970s by Ronald Reagan’s newly elected Republican government in the United States and believed that they needed to modify their tactics to deal more effectively with a government that strongly advanced economic growth without consideration of environmental and social impacts. In addition, promises made by governments at the United Nations conferences – including the Stockholm UN Conference on the Human Environment – were not being met by government action. FoE members were also faced with new evidence in the form of the newly released World Conservation Strategy (1980) and the Brandt Commission report on North-South issues (1980), which exposed both the increasing degradation of natural systems as well as the growing gap between rich and poor. For FoE member groups, the lack of action by governments on these critical social and ecological issues was alarming and made worse by the new US government “which willfully ignored or distorted environmental concerns.”¹⁴

These external triggers began to shift FoEI member group focus from emphasizing only tactical adjustments made within specific local and national campaigns towards working globally and adopting a broader international interpretive frame for tactical innovation. If the powerful actors in society were reversing individual campaign victories, FoEI would need to respond by widening its horizons and tackling the root causes of environmentally and socially harmful development which they felt would require a higher level of coordination at the international level. A one person Secretariat was established as an experiment in 1980-1981 in Brussels, which led to an agreement that better communication amongst

⁹ Turner, Tom (1986) *Friends of the Earth: The First Sixteen Years*. San Francisco, USA, Earth Island Institute.; Innis, Stuart (1993) “Friends of the Earth: Earth Gets a New Friend” *Senior Thesis*. FoEI historical archive, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

¹⁰ MacArthur, Mairi (1989) *The Growth of FoEI: A Personal View*. July. FoEI historical archive, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

¹¹ Burke 1982: 107

¹² MacArthur, Mairi (1993) *Location of FoEI Annual Meetings, Location of Secretariat*. FoEI historical archive, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

¹³ MacArthur, Mairi (1991) *Mairi MacArthur takes a personal look back at her memories of FoE International as the network enters its third decade*. FoEI historical archive, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

¹⁴ Ibid.

groups was needed to cooperate effectively at the international level and strategically counter political trends.

Location and Staff of FoEI's International Secretariat

Source: FoEI Historical Archives

[1978 – 1980 FoE LINK produced approximately 5 times per year, from San Francisco office of FoE USA]

1980 – 1981 Brussels, Belgium (Nils Hoch, part-time)

1982 – 1983 Gothenburg (Per Ohlsson, part-time)

1983 – 1987 Amsterdam, The Netherlands (Marie-Jose Goedmakers, 1983-85; Pieter Lammers, 1985-1987; Nicola Ramsden, 1987-1988; all part-time)

1988 – 1990 London, United Kingdom (Nicole Mueller, full-time)

1991 – present Amsterdam, The Netherlands (initially Bert van Pinxteren, Eka Morgan, Theo Ruyter, Jenni Richardson; many volunteer part-time, full-time staff over the subsequent years)

In 1981, the International Secretariat was welcomed by member groups as a structural addition to support FoEI's international collaboration, as this FoE member describes,

In 1981, I recall little disagreement about the way forward. The meeting decided to make the Secretariat permanent and Per Ohlsson volunteered to run it part-time from Sweden. It was a turning point for FoEI. There have been many discussions about where and how the Secretariat should be organized but its actual existence has never been questioned.¹⁵

The need for collaboration at the international level was also supported because FoE member groups had placed a number of international issues – including tropical forests, global warming and Antarctica – on the agenda of the annual meetings starting in 1979. These global issues joined the anti-nuclear and anti-whaling discussions of earlier years. At the meeting in 1981, discussions expanded to other international problems including global air pollution, food and toxic chemicals. FoE members made commitments to voluntarily work together and campaign at the global level on a broader array of global environmental issues, a tactical approach that was reassessed at the AGM in 1982. FoEI was learning how to establish its campaigning and tactics at the global level,

In 1982 we had to admit that our grand plans of the year before – to campaign for the entire global commons – had made little progress and we adopted the formula of a 'Lead Group' in the hope of a clearer focus on each issue.

The 'Lead Group' consisted of a FoEI member group who would stimulate discussion and action on a particular international issue during the months between general meetings. This organizational arrangement has evolved in the years since 1982 with a later amendment which mandated the selection of two lead groups – one from the North and one from the South – and also the appointment of international campaign coordinators. In 1983, an Executive Committee was created to further support international coordination between meetings. In 1995, the first international coordinators for specific campaigns were housed at the International Secretariat. In 1996, the AGM created a part-time support position, an International Campaigns Officer (which in 2000 became the International Campaigns Coordinator), to support all the diverse international campaigns. The first international campaign coordinator meeting was held in 1998 to address discrepancies and find synergies across campaigns. It is important to note that the international coordinators, Executive Committee and staff at the International Secretariat are largely elected from the FoEI member groups themselves rather than being hired from outside the network. Also, the mandate of all of these positions is to stimulate and support campaign activity rather than to direct campaign activity. As one FoE campaigner notes regarding the International Secretariat,

The FoEI secretariat has always been small. They help facilitate the work of member groups. They facilitate conversation, development of strategy, fundraising for member groups, especially for members groups from the South. They are a small number of people who can only do so much. Today it is not that much bigger and still has these functions. This is unlike

¹⁵ MacArthur, Mairi (1991) *Mairi MacArthur takes a personal look back at her memories of FoE International as the network enters its third decade*. FoEI historical archive, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

organizations such as World Wildlife Fund or Greenpeace where campaigns are driven more from the centre than FoE.¹⁶

In another personal interview, the interviewee corrected me when I asked if the working group, regional coordinator or thematic group was “underneath” the international campaign coordinator by saying that the international campaign coordinator is not underneath, but supporting the work of the campaign.¹⁷ FoEI remains a decentralized structure.

By instigating all of these organizational changes, FoE member groups developed what has become referred to as FoEI’s “3-tier structure” at local, national and international levels.¹⁸ Other structural adjustments to FoEI have since been made in order to support FoEI member groups in thinking and acting outside of their national boundaries and working at the regional level. In 1986, the European member groups of Friends of the Earth International created a regional network, CEAT (Coordination Européenne des Amis de la Terre – also known as FoE Europe) to coordinate activities within the European Union, specifically in response of the growing importance of the European Community.¹⁹ The regional network structure has since been imitated in Latin America and the Caribbean (2001). The creation of these structures was designed to increase the effectiveness of FoE member group campaigns and enable region-wide and international level campaigns, while maintaining FoE’s commitment to local and national autonomy and campaigns and to a decentralized, participatory structure.

As described above, David Brower instigated international level brainstorming and some joint international activity in the early years of FoEI; however, this voluntary international participation was questioned at the 1986 Annual General Meeting in Malaysia. FoE Malaysia (Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM)) challenged FoEI member groups to adopt a more coherent international agenda and to join together on international campaigns. Malaysian national environmental issues could not be addressed without such international campaigning. For example, halting the destruction of Malaysian tropical forests required changes in the policies and activities of foreign corporations and governments.²⁰ At the 1987 Annual General Meeting, FoEI member groups responded to FoE Malaysia’s challenge by calling for a detailed examination into the development of Friends of the Earth International. The result was the 1988 paper on “The Future of FoEI”, written by an elected working group and the Executive Committee. The paper outlined proposals for increasing the number and effectiveness of international campaigns, the expansion of the International Secretariat, the movement towards regional cooperation amongst member groups, the representation of FoEI at international meetings, and collaboration and contacts with other organizations and networks.²¹ The paper begins by noting the historical beginnings of FoEI as “a rather symbolic international movement” with the annual meeting as the sole coordinating body. The paper notes some of the key changes that require FoEI to adopt a more international level coordination, including political changes, global environmental problems, and the emergence of other key civil society players on the international stage including Greenpeace and a host of issue-based networks. According to the authors of the 1988 paper, the strategic response they recommended to these changing conditions is the following,

FoEI has to redefine its position in these confusing surroundings. We want to maintain our decentralized structure, with member-groups being autonomous. We want to maintain our character of being grassroots based, linking environmental issues with social issues, linking environmental consciousness with the need for structural and cultural changes. But we need to make our organization stronger: sufficient information exchange, more commitment from member-groups to each other, international campaigners with enough resources, the start of a

¹⁶ Interview with Mike Childs, Political Coordinator, FoE England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI), February 2005.

¹⁷ Interview with Mae Ocampo, past FoEI International Membership Development Coordinator, October 2004.

¹⁸ FoEI (1991) *Friends of the Earth International*. Brochure, FoEI historical archive, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

¹⁹ Executive Committee (1994) *Discussion Paper about the Need for an International Agenda for FoEI*. FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 10 August.

²⁰ Interview with Meena Raman, past FoEI Chair, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (FoE Malaysia), February 2006.

²¹ Executive Committee (1988) *Annual General Meeting paper about the future of Friends of the Earth International*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 25th August.

publications and press policy. Being present at the international level whenever [it is] relevant to our campaigns or [promotes] the image of our organization.

In this quotation and in the paper, the authors emphasize those features that make FoEI unique: its decentralized structure, its commitment to participatory democracy, its national and international presence, its recognition of the interconnectedness of social and environmental issues, its search for root structural causes to local, national and international problems, and its promotion of solutions and alternatives. These fundamental elements have remained remarkably robust as guiding principles of FoEI over the years. The 1988 paper also identified triggers for greater international collaboration, including the challenge to address a transnational political environment, to tackle global environmental issues, and to meet the needs of developing country member groups. In order to create the conditions for international collaboration, the authors recommended fundraising specifically for international activity and hiring or appointing international campaign coordinators, who both represent FoEI at intergovernmental meetings and brief, inform and stimulate FoE national groups. The authors note that collaboration has not been an equal priority for all FoEI member groups,

FoE groups vary in size, strength, importance in their own country, strategy, issues etc. For some, being a member of FoEI is important for their image, for others not. Some work on the international level anyhow, also outside FoEI, others not. This causes inequality and tension.

The authors note that member groups have a particular responsibility to be involved in international activities because FoEI has a policy of one member group per country. Each group, therefore, has been specially recruited and needs to be involved at the international level. The authors note that an early attempt to outline these responsibilities in a “contract of agreement” resulted in a response from FoEI member groups that was “quite embarrassing” as only seven of the thirty-two member groups signed. Similarly, member groups’ response to paying the annual subscription to FoEI was “not very positive.” It would not be until the 1990s that international collaboration would reach a more established form.

BUILDING AN INTERNATIONAL AGENDA: 1990 - 2006

At the 1992 Annual General Meeting, FoE member groups agreed to “officially [see] itself as a ‘federation,’ not merely a ‘network’”.²² This change signaled a step towards “a clearer international image and role”²³ and the “structure of still autonomous organizations but with some clear mutual commitments and the will to present themselves jointly.”²⁴ At the same 1992 meeting, FoEI member groups expanded the role of the FoEI Chairperson by providing the Chair with a particular mandate to develop an international agenda. In January 1994, the Executive Committee began discussions on the need to develop such an agenda and, in August of 1994, presented the FoE member groups with a discussion paper “about the need for an international agenda for FoEI”.²⁵ The discussion paper opens with the following statement,

We are a federation of organizations that on specific issues work together, but we lack a common picture of what are the most essential steps to be taken to achieve our common aim: a sustainable and socially just global society. National members of FoEI are keen not to get international responsibilities imposed on them, but as we are together building up FoEI as an effective and impressive international movement, our obligations grow to have active input in international discussions and events. FoEI members do recognize that to a certain extent and agreed in 1992 on a special mandate for the FoEI Chair person that gives some potential for developing an international agenda.

An international agenda might guide representatives of FoEI and its members in indicating what we stand for and therewith increase our influence. It should not replace our bottom-up approach of identifying campaigning areas by identifying willingness of national groups to cooperate, but add to that approach another one, looking at the needs on the international

²² FoEI (1992/1993) *LINK*. FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, December – January, Issue 52, p.17.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 16

²⁴ Executive Committee (1994) *Discussion Paper about the Need for an International Agenda for FoEI*. FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 10 August, p.3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

level and then looking at the possibilities FoEI has or should develop.... It is not our intention to come to a concrete international agenda right now, but to get an idea about the need for such an agenda and the character of it.

The Executive Committee encouraged FoEI member groups to “think globally, act on all levels” rather than only on the local and national level. Reinforcing the informal nature of FoEI, the authors emphasized that the international agenda would not require new internal rules for the organization but was meant to improve mutual understanding of an international agenda and the “opportunities and obligations of the members towards this agenda.” The 1994 discussion paper presents a historical overview in which it outlines the primarily grassroots, local and national focus of FoEI member groups in the 1970s, and the gradual shift in the 1980s towards more international collaboration. The authors argue that this change stemmed from three developments which were partly catalyzed by FoEI efforts: the growing coordination of governments at the international level; the expansion of civil society activity on environmental issues in the South including the inclusion of new FoEI members from non-industrialized countries; and the shift in perception from individual environmental problems to an integrated approach that touches on elements of international cooperation. In response, FoE member groups expanded their international work. In the 1990s, this was further stimulated by three other developments: the growth in the environmental movement and recognition of sustainability in the lead-up to and following the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the transitions in Central and Eastern Europe, and the aggravating international economic climate due to economic crises in industrialized countries. The paper also notes new targets such as the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, Multilateral Development Banks, and the increasing interest amongst business, industry and other interest groups in environmental issues. The Executive Committee concludes the paper by noting that that “the slogan ‘think globally act locally’ is too limited at this time since international developments require the environmental movement to be present at the international level in addition to the focus on the local and national levels. The Executive Committee notes, in the 1994 paper, that discussions of international collaboration at annual general meetings have not necessarily resulted in action once the FoEI campaigners returned to their national contexts,

It is actually quite disappointing to see the vast difference between the commitments the representatives of FoEI-members make during AGMs and the outcome. It seems that only a few groups really have internalized international FoEI-work in their own agenda. In most groups the whole concept of FoEI stays with a few individuals, the majority of the activists do not or hardly realize they are part of it or do not see the relevance for their own activities....This needs to be changed and if this does not happen, FoEI might run the risk of gradually becoming of less importance, as also those that do not understand the need will get disappointed with the lack of response. And as the image of FoEI will disappear, so will its ability to raise funds and assist its member groups.²⁶

As one FoE member notes, the democratic and bottom-up structure of FoEI and the autonomous campaigns carried out by the FoEI member groups result in FoEI “missing out on maximizing impact with the work that we do because only specific campaigners in the campaign know about it and the rest of the network doesn’t.”²⁷ There has been a tendency towards greater international collaboration and cohesion across FoEI member groups since the 1994 discussion paper was released. This was partly due to the impassioned plea made by Ricardo Navarro, from FoE El Salvador (Centro Salvadoreño de Tecnología Apropiaada (CESTA)), at the 1994 Annual General Meeting. One FoE member describes this moment in the following way:

The most recent AGM will be remembered in FoEI history as the inauguration of a political debate on the role of the network. The passionately political words of Ricardo Navarro from FoE El Salvador pushed us headlong into a high-level discussion. He proposed to repudiate existing development models in favour of universal sustainability, which entails a fair society

²⁶ Executive Committee (1994) *Discussion Paper about the Need for an International Agenda for FoEI*. FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 10 August, p.3.

²⁷ Interview with Daniel Mittler, FoE Germany; Greenpeace International; August 2002.

with access to resources, political justice, and respect for diverse traditions.... My impression is that we planned FoEI activities differently, and more maturely, in Estonia. In addition to the old agenda from past AGMs (campaigns, programs, financial difficulties), we added something new: the examination of campaigns, programs and projects through the lens of FoEI's political challenge.²⁸

Ricardo Navarro was encouraging FoEI member groups to create political declarations that outline the FoEI position on existing globalization and development paths.

In 1994, Navarro's statements and general discussion on international issues resulted in the FoEI member groups deciding "to develop an international agenda, which will offer an alternative vision for the future."²⁹ This international agenda evolved over the years through discussions, international campaigns and publications, and has been further supported by the first strategic planning exercise for FoEI, which began in 2004. The Executive Committee presented "a roadmap for a comprehensive and coherent strategic planning process for the federation" at the AGM in Croatia in 2004. This roadmap "recognized our thinking has been at times fragmented, the strategic 'whole' has not always been clear" with the result that "FoEI has not always been able to leverage, to the extent that we can, the enormous strength that we have" and "make the best use of our diversity, our outreach capacity of being the respected yet hard-hitting campaign organization that we are."³⁰

The strategic planning process was accepted at the 2004 AGM and FoEI member groups embarked on a two phase process of defining a strategic plan. In 2005, FoEI member groups defined the core set of values, vision and mission for the organization. In 2005 and 2006, local, national and regional meetings were held to define strategies to achieve the vision outlined in Phase I; a roadmap for strategies, structure or processes by which the strategies can be implemented; and a means to measure progress for strategy implementation. The creation of an international agenda and strategic plan was triggered by the increase in transnational activity by governmental and corporate actors and by the need to respond to global environmental issues. A third trigger for change came from inside FoEI as its global expansion resulted in a creative clash amongst different cultures. It is the impact of the FoEI's establishment of North-South links that I address next in developing an understanding of the approach which FoEI has adopted to working globally.

NORTH-SOUTH LINKS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

In 1985, FoE hosted the International Citizens Working Conference on Acid Rain in the Netherlands. It was attended by 80 delegates from 28 countries and served as the launching platform for an international coalition to fight acid rain.³¹ According to one FoE member, this conference was part of a shift in FoEI having a more "international feel" as the conference was supported by representatives from "North, South, East and West". However, the conference organizers "realized too late" that "the content of the conference had been planned from a mainly Northern viewpoint."³² The speakers from the North focused their discussions on energy alternatives and pollution control, and were met by "the different perspectives of the South which now came openly and forcefully [with] intense discussions about broader underlying problems such as poverty and economic injustice."

This was not the first time that FoE had been confronted with cultural differences in tactical approach and interpretive frames of environmental and social issues. In 1979, FoE published in ECO and LINK an article by Anil Agarwal, an activist from India, strongly warning campaign groups from the North not to

²⁸ FoEI (1994) *Towards Universal Sustainability* in LINK, FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Issue 62/63, p. 26.

²⁹ FoEI (1994) *Annual Report*. FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, p. 4

³⁰ Executive Committee (2004) *Making FoEI Strategy Focused: Strategic Planning for Friends of the Earth International*. FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

³¹ MacArthur, Mairi (1989) *The Growth of FoEI: A Personal View*. July. FoEI Historical Archives.

³² MacArthur, Mairi (1991) *Mairi MacArthur takes a personal look back at her memories of FoE International as the network enters its third decade*. FoEI historical archive, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

impose their models of campaigning and tactics on Southern groups.³³ Further discussion on Third World issues was stimulated by discussions in LINK during 1980 and 1981;³⁴ however, it was not until 1986 and the first Annual General meeting held within a developing country that FoEI was forced to innovate its tactics and approach again, changing how it works globally and altering its interpretive frame on the nature and causes of global environmental problems. According to John Hontelez, Chair of Friends of the Earth International from 1986 until 1996, this shift in perception can be traced to a particular event in the FoEI history: the Annual General Meeting in Malaysia. Hontelez recalls the change,

When I arrived, the first developing country [nongovernmental organizations] NGOs had just joined FoE, and the most articulate of these was FoE Malaysia. In fact, the [Annual General Meeting] AGM where I was elected was in Malaysia [in 1986]. FoE Malaysia didn't like the volunteeristic relationship inside FoE International. For them, international ... cooperation was not an add-on but a necessity. For the US and the EU, it wasn't like this – even with the nuclear debate and even on other issues such as oceans (which is inherently international). These groups worked on issues like air pollution and water pollution and, especially in industrialized countries, you can do a lot at a national level. The international cooperation was really an add-on and something that also depended on personal interest. The meetings of FoE during the first years – the international annual meetings – were the only thing that happened at the international scale.

Malaysia challenged that. If the groups were not committed to an international campaign then FoEI is worth nothing. They said that, in our [non-industrialized] countries, issues such as the destruction of tropical forests can not be sorted out nationally. The consumers and companies that are doing this are in your countries – the western countries (US and EU and also Japan). For them it was, by definition, an absolute necessity to work internationally.... The real push for a stronger and more centralized FoE came from Malaysia. It led to some good discussions and it challenged everyone to keep radical. ...

This is one of the things that I found interesting about working in FoEI. These [nonindustrialized country] groups were teaching the industrialized country people that, at least in their situation, it was not possible to separate environment from health from development from justice and from human rights. These issues are separated in our democracies. They are struggles that are organized by different civil organizations that hardly work together. In developing countries, it is artificial to separate these issues.³⁵

FoE Member groups, particularly from industrialized countries, were challenged by FoE Malaysia to shift their interpretive frames and recognize the international linkages inherent within their campaigns and adapt their tactics accordingly. FoEI's founding mission "to promote...the conservation, restoration and rational use of the natural resources and beauty of the Earth" has evolved over time to incorporate these new insights. Appendix A below details the evolution of the mission statement and description of FoEI at its founding, and at critical points in its evolution in 1985, 1992, 2002, 2003 and 2005. One observation that can be made is that there has been an increasing emphasis placed on the social aspects of sustainability including issues of peoples' sovereignty and human and peoples' rights, equity and justice, the promotion of ecological and cultural diversity, and the empowerment of indigenous peoples, local communities, women, groups and individuals. This is in large part due to the global expansion of FoEI into developing countries with FoE members from those countries introducing their integrated perspective on environmental and social issues as John Hontelez describes in the quotation above. In the 1985 report, environmental issues are described as being interconnected with social, economic and cultural factors, and the problems of poverty, land reform, and decentralization of power to those who are affected by decision-making.

By 1992, the mission statement includes references to ecological, cultural and ethnic diversity, participatory democracy, and the need to achieve "social, economic and political justice and equal access to resources and opportunities for men and women on the local, national, regional and international

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Interview with John Hontelez, FoEI Chair 1986-1996, May 2006.

levels.”³⁶ As one FoE member noted, “words such as ‘social’, ‘human’, or ‘cultural’ come through much more clearly” at the 1992 FoEI AGM than in the past.³⁷ In a 1994 position paper, the FoEI Executive Committee suggests that “social and justice dimensions, the equity principle between nations and individuals” sets FoEI apart from conservation organizations, “centralized populist organizations like Greenpeace International as well as narrowly focused one-issue networks.”³⁸

It is important to note that the focus on social justice issues was driven not only by developing country member groups. One FoE campaigner from FoE Scotland reflects on the importance of justice focus for his work in Scotland,

Some academics try to paint the picture that there are rich well-resourced Northern FoE groups focusing on traditional conservation issues in contrast with the poor, radical, dynamic Southern FoE groups that are focused on people and humanity. This isn't the case.... This didn't fit with my experience with the groups that I worked with in Scotland where poor people were living next to landfill sites. The issue of environmental racism is relevant in the North as much as the South and connects to the United States environmental justice movement.³⁹

For this FoEI campaigner, the social justice issue was an issue that connects campaigners across the North and the South. Similarly, another FoEI campaigner expresses this same sentiment,

Most environmental problems are caused by the rich and dumped on the poor and this plays itself out as a race issue. In Europe, it is more class than race and in North America it is race. It is critical to understand how environmental issues and justice issues are interlinked.⁴⁰

As social justice and equity issues became central to FoEI's work, FoEI member groups developed a radical international campaign that specifically addressed questions of inequality amongst countries globally. This cross-cutting campaign is on Ecological Debt, described in the following way within FoEI's 30th anniversary publication:

Repayment of southern [financial] debt is increasing seen as ecologically impossible, unjust and humane. But Friends of the Earth's new Ecological Debt Campaign, led by FoE Ecuador, takes the case further. The balance of repayments, they argue, should actually be reversed. [In other words,] ecological debt cancels external debt. “Ecological debt” is defined as the cumulative debt of northern industrialized nations to Third World countries for resource plundering, environmental damage, and the free occupation of environmental space to deposit wastes from industrial countries. Ecological debt is closely related to illegitimate external debt, which burdens impoverished people, is contracted fraudulently or for wasteful projects, or grows due to compounding interest payments and unilaterally raised interest rates.⁴¹

As an example of inequality in environmental issues, FoEI cites the issue of climate change, because its origins are predominately Northern and its impacts on ecological and social systems will be felt strongly in Southern countries. Similarly, nuclear testing and toxic waste disposal by industrialized countries has had health impacts on ecosystems and people in non-industrialized countries. FoEI argues that by canceling external debt, developing countries would be able to undertake sustainable natural resource management rather than unsustainable developments, such as shrimp farming in Ecuador, established to create the financial resources to repay loans. In order to further the Ecological Debt campaign, FoEI member groups have established the “Ecological Debt Creditors Club” for Southern peoples as a “counterpart to the Paris Club of industrialized creditor countries that meet to negotiate Third World foreign debt.” This creditors club demands not only financial compensation but also the restoration of ecosystems and natural resources. Since its launch in 2001, the Ecological Debt campaign has been

³⁶ FoEI (1992) *Annual Report*. FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, p. 2.

³⁷ FoEI (1992/1993) *LINK*. FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, December – January, Issue 52, p.17.

³⁸ Executive Committee (1994) *Discussion Paper about the Need for an International Agenda for FoEI*. FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 10 August, p. 4.

³⁹ Interview with Kevin Dunion, Past FoEI Chair, Past Chief Executive, FoE Scotland, November 2005.

⁴⁰ Interview with Daniel Mittler, FoE Germany; Greenpeace International; August 2002.

⁴¹ FoEI (2001) *Sparks of Hope, Fires of Resistance: FoEI Celebrates the Sustainable Path Forward: 30th Anniversary Publication*. FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, p. 32.

adopted by other non-profit organizations and become a component of FoEI activities,

Some aspects of the way we have focused on ecological debt have come through the systems of FoEI. For example, the debt agenda has influenced FoE discussions on trade, environment and sustainability and have also manifested themselves in presentations that FoE makes at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development and in lobbying around the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.⁴²

The Ecological Debt campaign and FoEI's focus on social justice and equity issues has also led to further exploration among FoEI member groups of the connections between environmental and human rights, and the publication of a common position report that highlights the intersections between these two issues.⁴³ Generally, FoEI members describe FoEI campaigners as being "social environmentalists"⁴⁴ that work on "social and environmental aspects at the same time."⁴⁵ In 2005, FoE member groups agreed to a new set of core values, vision statements and mission which explicitly reference the intersection of social and ecological issues (see Appendix A). The list of core values includes ecological and cultural diversity; peoples' sovereignty, human and peoples' rights; and equity and environmental, social, economic and gender justice.⁴⁶ This shift is also evident in the 2005 FoEI vision statement and its explicit focus on the social aspects of environmental issues:

Our vision is of a peaceful and sustainable world based on societies living in harmony with nature. We envision a society of interdependent people living in dignity, wholeness and fulfillment where equity and human and peoples' rights are realized.

This will be a society built upon peoples' sovereignty and participation. It will be founded on social, economic, gender and environmental justice and free from all forms of domination and exploitation, such as neo-liberalism, corporate globalization, neo-colonialism and militarism.

Friends of the Earth International is a worldwide grassroots environmental network campaigning for an ecologically sustainable, just and peaceful world. We are a vibrant, credible and effective federation, driving social transformation and securing sustainable, gender just and equitable societies.⁴⁷

In this excerpt from the vision statement, it is apparent that FoEI member groups place as much emphasis on social justice, equity and empowerment as on environmental issues. Notably, the mission agreed on in 2005 is the first FoEI mission statement to place social issues as its first mission item rather than the historical priority given to an opening environmental statement. The mission statement begins with FoEI's aim "to collectively ensure environmental and social justice, human dignity, and respect for human rights and peoples' rights so as to secure sustainable societies." This is followed by its environmental aim "to halt and reverse environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources, nurture the earth's ecological and cultural diversity, and secure sustainable livelihoods." Other mission statement items include FoEI's aim of empowerment of all peoples and its commitment "to bring about the transformation towards sustainability and equity."

DREAMING THE SAME DREAM

The international annual general meetings is a key space where FoEI member groups exchange ideas and share experiences, deliberate on critical issues and possible alternatives, and develop a vision of working together towards a common goal of sustainable and just societies. Mairi MacArthur, the first FoEI Chair, notes the power of the annual general meeting:

FoEI was not invented, in any one place or according to any one model. It has evolved as its members have evolved and it is still doing so. The autonomy of the FoE groups is partly due to this history and their first period as a loose federation with no central structure at all. But the principle of autonomy is also central to what makes FoEI unique. The groups share the

⁴² Interview with Kevin Dunion, Past FoEI Chair, Past Chief Executive, FoE Scotland, November 2005.

⁴³ FoEI (2004) *Our Environment, Our Rights: standing up for people and the planet*. FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

⁴⁴ Interview with Ann Doherty, Past FoEI Communications Coordinator, July 2005.

⁴⁵ Interview with Mae Ocampo, FoEI International Membership Development Coordinator, October 2004.

⁴⁶ FoEI (2005) *Outcomes of the Penang Visioning Workshop*, FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, October.

⁴⁷ FoEI (2005) *Annual Report*. FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

commitment to “Think Globally” but, from the beginning, “Acting Locally” has meant working in ways best suited to their people’s cultural, social and political traditions. It is basic to what makes FoEI international (rather than multinational). The groups have long recognized, however, that their diversity can also be a weakness. Some have many more staff and resources than others, some develop greater expertise in certain areas, some place the priority of international work high and some low. Yet, once a year, these inevitable differences must take second place to the common task of moving the international agenda forward. It is excellent that the Annual Meeting has become such an important, well-attended event in the FoEI calendar in recent years. Once around that table, each Council Member, large or small, has something valid to contribute; each voice carries the same weight. Listening to each other, with patience and perception, is always necessary and we were not particularly good at it in the early 1980s. The North has had to learn to listen to the South, the West to the East, old groups to the new and native English speakers to everyone.⁴⁸

Innovation flows from this interaction between different perspectives: North, South, East and West; old and new; problems and solutions; social justice and the environment; and grassroots and international. It is this dynamic exchange and tension between different perspectives that ensures innovation within FoEI. In one interview, Beatrice Olivastri, Chair of FoE Canada, remarked that “there is a continuing tension about how you weigh issues and how you interpret priorities into an international campaign” which unfolds through strategy sessions at the meetings. She notes:

When I talk about creative tension, I am referring to the Biannual General Meetings and the planning and decision-making that occurs at those sessions... It’s the ebb and flow of passion and energy and opinions that all are in one room when you get all these high energy organizations together with different priorities with their national priorities and needs and plans. What I always find quite interesting is the process where this person from this country has this set of ideas and, I tell you, passion about what they want to achieve and someone else from another country has another set of ideas or different take on it. What I like about FoE – I refer to the meetings as raucous – something comes out of those meetings – in that exchange of heat, energy, people.⁴⁹

The FoEI approach embraces diversity. Rather than concentrating on specific issues or particular tactics, FoEI has remained an open networked organization that welcomes the flux and flow that comes with celebrating cultural differences and maintaining a commitment to an informal, decentralized structure. One would think that with all of FoEI’s internal diversity, the member groups would experience difficulty in developing a common position on their values, mission and vision; however, in the 2005 strategic planning process, FoEI member groups have done just that. In 2006, FoEI expanded on this common framework by defining its common campaign strategies through a bottom-up and democratic process and specifying the approach it will take to implementing their strategic plan together. FoEI’s unique approach to working globally has emerged from the iterative interaction of members across cultures and scales spanning the grassroots level to the global political arena. As a past FoEI Chair describes, this approach has the potential to enable both coherence and diversity:

So you see that we do have the richness and different ways of working and that is the challenge. Our approach is that before we could understand how we work differently, we had to understand why we work. What is the core of our work? What is our mission? So we share the same mission in how we want to influence the world. Then, afterwards, we can explain to each other how we do things in different ways but dream the same dream.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ MacArthur, Mairi (1989) *The Growth of FoEI: A Personal View*. July, FoEI historical archives, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

⁴⁹ Interview with Beatrice Olivastri, co-founder and CEO, FoE Canada, September 2004

⁵⁰ Interview with Meena Raman, past FoEI Chair, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (FoE Malaysia), February 2006.

APPENDIX A: The Evolution of FoEI Mission Statements

1971

FoEI's founding mission – to promote...the conservation, restoration and rational use of the natural resources and beauty of the Earth

Source: Burke, T. (1982). "Friends of the Earth and the Conservation of Resources." Pressure Groups in the Global System. P. Willetts. London, UK, Frances Pinter (Publishers) Ltd., p. 107

1984-1985

Friends of the Earth is rooted in a powerful idea: that the Earth needs friends....

Underlying FoEI are several fundamental concepts:

- Commitment to the preservation, restoration and rational use of the environment is
- FoEI's bonding philosophy. An underlying respect for the Earth's natural wealth and diversity, and a common understanding of the need to sustain its ecological systems, hold together FoE organizations and their actions. Essentially non-ideological, FoE looks continually for new ways to promote the protection of the earth's people and the environment on which they depend.
- Citizen participation is critical in effective international work. FoEI promotes new ideas for international citizen action, and works to empower and inform citizen organizations on a wide range of environmental issues. Decentralization, democratic values, and effective control of changes by those most directly affected by them, must accompany work to create change.
- Environmental problems cannot be approached in isolation from social, economic and cultural factors that influence them. Poverty and environmental degradation often go hand in hand. Inequality and militarism have a direct impact on the human and financial resources allocated to environmental issues. Land reform may be the key change necessary to protect valuable tropical forests from intrusion by marginal farmers.
- Through cooperation with other organizations, FoE works to build networks of people approaching the same problem from differing perspectives. In addition to FoE National groups, we are linked directly or indirectly with dozens of other environmental, consumer, human rights and peace organizations worldwide.
- FoEI stresses the importance of positive alternatives in approaching environmental degradation. For example, FoE promotes "soft energy paths" while attacking nuclear energy, and sustainable agricultural systems.

Source: FoEI (1984-1985) Annual Report, FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, p.5.

1992

Mission Statement:

Friends of the Earth International is a worldwide federation of national environmental organizations. This federation aims to:

- Protect the earth against further deterioration and restore damage inflicted upon the environment by human activities and negligence;
- Preserve the earth's ecological, cultural and ethnic diversity;
- Increase public participation and democratic decision-making. Greater democracy is both an end in itself and is vital to the protection of the environment and the sound management of natural resources;
- Achieve social, economic and political justice and equal access to resources and opportunities for men and women on the local, national, regional and international levels;
- Promote environmentally sustainable development on local, national, regional and global levels.

Friends of the Earth International has a democratic structure with autonomous national groups which comply with the guidelines established by the federation.

Friends of the Earth member groups are united by a common conviction that these aims require both strong grassroots activism and effective national and international campaigning and coordination. They see Friends of the Earth International as a unique and diverse forum to pursue international initiatives, taking advantage of the variety of backgrounds and perspectives of its members.

By sharing information, knowledge, skills and resources on both a bilateral and multilateral level, Friends of the Earth groups support each other's development and strengthen their international campaigns.

Source: FoEI (1992) Annual Report, FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, p.5.

2002

Friends of the Earth International is a global federation of national environmental organizations that aims to:

- Protect the earth against further deterioration and repair damage inflicted upon the environment by human activities and negligence
- Preserve the earth's ecological, cultural and ethnic diversity;
- Increase public participation and democratic decision-making, both of which are vital to the protection of the environment and the sound management of natural resources;
- Achieve social, economic and political justice and equal access to resources and opportunities for men and women on the local, national, regional and international levels;
- Promote environmentally sustainable development on the local, national, regional and global levels.

Friends of the Earth has a democratic structure with autonomous national groups which comply with the guidelines established by the federation.

Friends of the Earth member groups are united by a common conviction that these aims require both strong grassroots activism and effective national and international campaigning and coordination. They see Friends of the Earth International as a unique and diverse forum in which to pursue international initiatives, taking advantage of the varied backgrounds and perspectives of the members.

By sharing information, knowledge, skills, and resources both bilaterally and multilaterally, Friends of the Earth groups support each other's development and strengthen their international campaigns.

Source: FoEI (2002) Annual Report, FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, p.2.

2003

Friends of the Earth International is a global federation of national environmental organizations that aims to:

- Protect the earth against further deterioration and repair damage inflicted upon the environment by human activities and negligence
- Preserve the earth's ecological, cultural and ethnic diversity;
- Increase public participation and democratic decision-making, both of which are vital to the protection of the environment and the sound management of natural resources;
- Achieve social, economic and political justice and equal access to resources and opportunities for men and women on the local, national, regional and international levels;
- Promote environmentally sustainable development on the local, national, regional and global levels.

Friends of the Earth International is the world's largest grassroots environmental network, uniting 71 diverse national member groups and some 5,000 local activist groups on every continent. With approximately 1.5 million members and supporters around the world, we campaign on today's most urgent environmental and social issues. We challenge the current model of economic and corporate globalization, and promote solutions that will help to create environmentally sustainable and socially just societies.

Our decentralized and democratic structure allows all member groups to participate in decision-making. Our international positions are informed and strengthened by our work with communities, and our alliances with indigenous peoples, farmers' movements, trade unions, human rights groups and others.

Source: FoEI (2003) Annual Report, FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, p.2.

2005

Core Values

- Ecological and cultural diversity
- Peoples' sovereignty, human and peoples' rights
- Equity and environmental, social, economic and gender justice;
- The intrinsic value of nature and the inextricable link between nature and people;
- Participatory democracy and other forms of participatory decision-making processes;
- Solidarity, responsibility and human dignity

Vision of the World

Our vision is of a peaceful and sustainable world based on societies living in harmony with nature. We envision a society of interdependent people living in dignity, wholeness and fulfilment in which equity and human and peoples' rights are realized.

This will be a society built upon peoples' sovereignty and participation. It will be founded on social, economic, gender and environmental justice and free from all forms of domination and exploitation, such as neoliberalism, corporate globalization, neocolonialism and militarism.

We believe that our children's future will be better because of what we do.

Vision of the Network

Friends of the Earth International is a worldwide grassroots environmental network campaigning for an ecologically sustainable, just and peaceful world. We are a vibrant, credible, effective federation, driving social transformation and securing sustainable, gender just and equitable societies.

Our strength comes from our solidarity, passion and shared beliefs. We respect each other and value our diversity. We inspire and bring about change by living according to our values, and we learn from our experiences. In turn, we are inspired by successful campaigns and strengthened by the friendships and alliances we forge.

Mission

1. To collectively ensure environmental and social justice, human dignity, and respect for human rights and peoples' rights so as to secure sustainable societies.
2. To halt and reverse environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources, nurture the earth's ecological and cultural diversity, and secure sustainable livelihoods.
3. To secure the empowerment of indigenous peoples, local communities, women, groups and individuals, and to ensure public participation in decision making.
4. To bring about transformation towards sustainability and equity between and within societies with creative approaches and solutions.
5. To engage in vibrant campaigns, raise awareness, mobilize people and build alliances with diverse movements, linking grassroots, national and global struggles.
6. To inspire one another and to harness, strengthen and complement each other's capacities, living the change we wish to see and working together in solidarity.

Source: FoEI (2005) Outcomes of the Penang Visioning Workshop, FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, October; FoEI (2005) Annual Report, FoEI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands