

The Practice of Working in Coalition

Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts interviewed three Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) leaders from across the globe whose work centers on the project of coalition building. The answers below detail their philosophies about, strategies for, and practical responses to the complexities of this work.

Pascale Charhon is the director of the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), a network of more than six hundred European NGOs working to combat racism in all European Union (EU) member states. The organization aims to fight racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, and Islamophobia and to promote equality of treatment between EU citizens and third country nations and to link local, regional, and national initiatives with European initiatives. For more information, visit www.enar-eu.org.

Gerald Lenoir is the coordinator of The Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), an organization that works to engage African Americans and other communities in a dialogue that leads to actions that challenge U.S. immigration policy and the underlying issues of race, racism, and economic inequity that frame it. For more information, visit www.blackalliance.org.

Sandeep Pandey is the founder of Asha Parivar, an Indian NGO working for a just and humane society free of all discrimination based on religion, caste, gender, race, nationality, class, education, age, political power, muscle/military power, employer–employee relationship (and similar human created categories which become the basis for discrimination and domination), and to bring human beings in harmony with the rest of nature. For more information, visit www.ashaparivar.org.

Please begin by explaining how questions of race and ethnicity are implicated in your work.

Sandeep Pandey: India is a culturally diverse country. There are markedly different racial and ethnic groups co-existing, like the Indo-Aryans, Dravidians, Mongoloids, and a number of indigenous groups. There is also tension among these groups. Organizations like Asha Parivar try to forge unity among these

different groups on the larger issues of justice and human rights, an essential component of living a dignified life for anybody. We maintain that people preserving their ethnic identities can be part of a larger movement to create a just human order.

Gerald Lenoir: Questions of race are at the heart of BAJI's work. The immigrant rights movement is part and parcel of the struggle for racial justice in the United States. Racism is one of the principal dynamics of U.S. life and one of the key determinants of the life course of people in this country. The system of white privilege and black oppression has also been extended, in different ways, to shape immigration policy, foreign policy, and the social conditions of other peoples of color within the United States. Activists in the African American community must come to grips with the new realities of race in the United States. It is no longer predominately a bipolar affair. The black–white paradigm has given way to a much more complex picture, with Latinos being the largest minority group, and with Asian populations growing rapidly.

Pascale Charhon: As an antiracism network, race and ethnicity are deeply implicated with ENAR's project. ENAR's current priorities in the fight against racism and discrimination are to ensure adequate protection and legal redress for those experiencing racial discrimination and segregation and promote strategies to combat institutional discrimination, promote the development of progressive migration and integration policies, and increase recognition of antiracism in equality and fundamental rights.

The specific focus on racism must be a core aspect of European equality and fundamental rights policies. ENAR therefore promotes antiracism in the debate on the future of Europe and advocates the mainstreaming of diversity and antidiscrimination in all relevant EU policies. It also seeks to ensure that EU funding programs support antiracism activities.

How does coalition building fit within your organization's overall strategy for achieving your goals?

Gerald Lenoir: BAJI's goal is to develop a core group of African Americans who are prepared to actively support immigrant rights. It is necessary to build coalitions with immigrant communities and immigrant rights organizations to further the mutual cause of economic and social justice for all. Now, more than ever, the struggle against racism requires cooperation among communities of color, including immigrant communities.

The immigrant rights movement must see itself and consciously promote itself as a part of the U.S. racial justice movement. Immigrant rights leaders must provide immigrants the opportunity to learn about the historic and current struggles against racism in the United States. Immigrants of color must see themselves as part of the broader struggle against racism in the United States.

Pascale Charhon: Given that ENAR has a key role to play in pushing the European Union to take action to promote antiracism and in monitoring European developments to ensure they do not undermine fundamental rights, it is essential to build coalitions with other stakeholders to reinforce ENAR's overall advocacy objectives and promote antiracism in the most efficient way. Coalition facilitates the exchange of information, expertise, and best practice in different policy areas linked to antiracism and antidiscrimination. ENAR also strives to strengthen the role of civil society. For NGOs, working at the European level depends upon articulating and defending the views of civil society from the grassroots and the regional. In this sense, it is essential to make the voice of civil society heard and integrated into European legislation to ensure positive change in the day-to-day lives of those affected by racism and other forms of discrimination. Coalition building with other civil society stakeholders is therefore a core element of this objective.

For ENAR, coalition building takes place at different levels. ENAR can cooperate with stakeholders in the social arena on a "minimal" basis, such as exchanging information, intelligence, and expertise on national or EU policy developments. ENAR can also forge stronger coalitions through endeavors such as drafting joint policy papers and recommendations on specific EU legislative proposals, devising joint lobbying strategies toward the EU institutions, or by organizing joint conferences or events on specific issues. ENAR is also a member of certain platforms and networks working on issues such as migration, social policy, or social inclusion and poverty in order to join forces on issues linked to antiracism and antidiscrimination.

Among what primary groups are coalitions forged? Why is this the most productive relationship?

Sandeep Pandey: We work mainly with *dalits*, previously known as "untouchables," the lowest rung of the caste system of Hindu-dominated Indian society. The caste system is used to justify some of the most inhuman forms of repression. We also work with different religious communities to try to forge communal harmony. The India-Pakistan division in 1947 took place mainly on religious lines. Demand for a separate state for Muslims resulted in carving out Pakistan from a Hindu-dominated India. We work for Hindu-Muslim unity within India as well as for peace and friendship at the people-to-people level between India and Pakistan. In order to work toward creating a just and equitable world, especially in this part of the globe, these differences have to be overcome.

Pascale Charhon: ENAR mainly participates in advocacy coalitions and partnerships with other European networks and organizations working in similar fields, such as antidiscrimination networks working on other discrimination grounds (i.e., age, sexual orientation, disability). ENAR is also a member of

the European Anti-Poverty Network, an important partner on issues such as the social and economic inclusion of ethnic and religious minorities. In the field of migration and integration, which also impacts on ENAR's work on antiracism and antidiscrimination, ENAR cooperates with organizations that advocate for the rights of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

ENAR's relationship with these various stakeholders fighting for social justice in different fields is very productive in the sense that the basic objectives of the partner organizations are the same, while each organization brings their specific expertise in policy areas linked to antiracism and antidiscrimination. In this way, such coalitions enable each organization to pool expertise and resources in the most effective way, achieving their common goals and objectives. The expertise of the different organizations in particular policy fields enables a maximization of the overall advocacy strategies to promote antiracism and antidiscrimination. It also gives the partners of the coalition more leverage and credibility when trying to influence the European political agenda, given that several organizations are advocating together for one same objective.

What are primary challenges to coalition building?

Gerald Lenoir: There are several primary challenges to coalition-building, including the negative stereotypes harbored by African Americans and immigrants about each other, which are exacerbated by popular media and other venues. Add to this a lack of knowledge about and appreciation of each other's histories and struggles, which help to fuel those stereotypes and create distance between communities. In addition, the lack of a recent history of collaboration between immigrants and African Americans in many parts of the country means that adequate templates are not available to provide guidance as successful models. And finally, a lack of knowledge and understanding about the impact of racism and globalization on both African American and immigrant communities leads to the failure to take advantage of opportunities to work together for the common good.

Pascale Charhon: The main challenge to coalition building is that partner organizations do not always have the same priorities at the same time with regard to specific issues, and it can therefore be difficult to agree on which issue should be tackled as a priority and what the timeline should be for joint actions, thus hindering the coalition from devising the most effective advocacy strategies. In addition, different partners of a coalition can have differing views on particular aspects of a legislative proposal. This means that coalitions can be forged on the general aspects of a given issue, but that organizations sometimes go their separate ways on the specifics. This leads to "lowest common denominator" coalitions, which can hamper the effectiveness of the overall strategy of trying to promote an-

tiracism and antidiscrimination in the various policy areas of the European Union, as coalition partners are unable in such cases of joining forces on all aspects of a policy.

Sandeep Pandey: Age-old traditions and mindsets inhibit coalition building. For example, people of different castes do not dine together. It requires tremendous effort to even make people sit and eat together. Similarly, Hindus and Muslims have misgivings about each other based on consistent, pernicious propaganda encouraged by fundamentalists, governments, and the media. It takes lot of convincing to overcome these biases. One also invites the wrath of fundamentalists, who often use violence or pressure the administration into taking action countering the progressive movements, who obstruct any change aimed at achieving equality of human beings. The challenges are mainly social in nature but are made more complicated by vested interests.

How are differences in access to exercise of power negotiated?

Sandeep Pandey: The good thing about democracy is that numbers count. So, we try to mobilize as many people as possible in our movements to become a legitimate force in democracy. For this, we have to work on the issues which concern the lives of the poor, like subsidized food grains as part of Public Distribution System, employment guarantee benefits, etc. Within the organization, we have to ensure that marginalized voices like that of *dalits*, women, and religious minorities are represented in a fair manner by consciously promoting representatives from these segments of society. We are also trying to build links with people in Kashmir and the Northeast regions of India which feel alienated from the mainstream because of the manner in which government machinery, including armed forces, have treated people living in these regions. We do so by expressing solidarity with struggles going on in these regions for democratic and human rights. At the South Asian level, we're working toward an idea of a Visa-Free and Peaceful South Asia by involving people from different countries of South Asia in a people's campaign advocating against travel restrictions on movement from one country to another. More specifically, we wish to achieve a Nuclear Weapons Free South Asia Zone. A peace march was organized from India to Pakistan in 2005 and meetings have taken place in both countries on these issues. In the future, we hope to organize meetings in other countries of South Asia.

Gerald Lenoir: Often in a coalition, organizations with relatively little power or access to power must come together to raise their concerns constructively to the organizations in the coalition with greater power or access to power. The former organizations can enhance their power by coming together if there is a basis to do so. In the best of circumstances, differences are negotiated first through acknowledgement that the differ-

ences exist and then through frank, but respectful, exchanges of viewpoints and compromises based upon mutual benefit.

What work does coalition building accomplish that singular group organizing does not?

Pascale Charhon: Coalition building enables the different partners of the coalition to each bring their own specific expertise and to share it with one another. This wealth of expertise would not be possible for a single organization to achieve. This also has implications on separate organizations' resources. Civil society organizations generally have sparse resources, both financial and human, and coalition building enables strong policy expertise to be developed despite these limitations. This gives the coalition partners more credibility in the policy-making arena, which single organizations might not be able to achieve on their own. Another advantage of coalition building is the fact that more ideas come to the fore, enabling more creativity and imaginativeness in devising effective lobbying and campaigning strategies. Coalition partners can also share previous experiences and lessons to identify the best aspects of these experiences and apply them to the coalition's activities.

Gerald Lenoir: Coalitions can bring greater numbers of people in motion to make progressive social change possible on a broad scale. The struggle against racism must be anchored in an alliance of people of color to confront institutionalized racism and white supremacy. It involves unmasking the ideology of white supremacy and challenging economic, political, and social inequities based upon race.

Sandeep Pandey: Working in coalition gives legitimacy to democracy. Working with singular groups is always seen as a partisan activity, which does not go along with the spirit of democracy. In a democracy, you've got to be ready to deal with diverse groups.