

The National in Global: The Freedom from Debt Coalition and the Global Civil Society Movement on Debt and Development

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Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) is a Filipino advocacy group that seeks to lighten the debt burden which for the past two decades have pinned the Filipinos in deep poverty. An advocacy coalition, FDC was one of the earliest and biggest civil society organizations that emerged in the reclaimed post-Marcos democratic space. Leftist political blocs and civic-minded professionals (mostly from the academe) were instrumental in forming, developing, and sustaining FDC.

However, what remains largely unacknowledged and understudied is the role of transnational linkages forged by FDC over the years. Equally important—now that people from FDC also play a significant role in Jubilee South—is an analysis of the role that FDC played in shaping the transnational freedom-from-debt advocacy. In Southeast Asia, FDC has become the symbolic leader of the debt campaign because of its reputation as the longest-running coalition in the region, if not the longest-running debt campaign in the world. The Asia Pacific Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD) or the Jubilee South Asia-Pacific serves as the FDC's international arm. It was initiated by FDC and other groups from Nicaragua, Argentina, and South Africa. Eventually, Brazil, Haiti, Kenya, and Senegal joined to form the international coordination group. Jubilee South Asia-Pacific attempts to bring together debt and development movements and organizations from Africa, Asia-Pacific, and South America—the so-called global South.

This paper argues that as much as FDC relies on transnational linkages for funding and international exposure while continuously claiming policy independence, the transnational freedom-from-debt advocacy also benefited from FDC's efforts. FDC provided actual cases of fraudulent loans to the international campaign on debt relief and has lent its experience to civil society organizations in other countries in waging national campaigns against tainted foreign debts.

FDC's relationship with the global civil society movement on debt and development will be viewed under the optic of the various models on cross-national social movements. Giugni (2002:15) notes the *globalization model* which 'points to how the increasing interconnectedness of the world stimulates transnational structures and processes which might simultaneously affect movements in different countries. Moreover, globalization processes may also produce "transnational or supranational structures that take on

increasing salience for social movements” which “may bring *transnational opportunity* for mobilization” (Guigni 2002:16). The second model Guigni points to is the *structural affinity model* which “stresses the existence of similar structures in different countries that may lead to convergence patterns in movement activity” (2002: 15). The *structural affinity model* also takes into consideration the importance of shared social organizations or cultures which focus on the mobilization and framing processes of social movements (2002: 19). And lastly, the *diffusion model* which “explains similarities among movement[s] through direct (networks) or indirect (mass media) cross-national flows of information that might diffuse protest from one country to another” (2002: 15). What the *diffusion model*, therefore, maintains is that “similarities among social movements in different countries derive from the adoption or protest or certain protest features from abroad... taking into consideration the communication channel and a flow of information between transmitters and adopters” (2002:19). The FDC experience will not be made to simply fit into these models. On the contrary, these models explanatory power will be tested against FDC’s history.

Data for this research were culled from two major sources. Primary sources were interviews with key movement stakeholders and political entrepreneurs. Also considered are relevant documents that describe the broader sociopolitical processes which induce the emergence and development of FDC. These include policy pronouncements of relevant political or social institutions, printed media accounts, and internal and external organizational documents.

The original research was undertaken as a case study for a United Nations Research Institute for Social Development project on global civil society movement.

Source

Giugni, Marco. 2002. “Explaining Cross-national Similarities among Social Movements” in Smith, Jackie and Hank Johnston, eds. 2002. *Globalization and Resistance*. United Kingdom: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., pp. 13-32.