

Agents of Change: by Shivana Naidoo, SustainUS

First para highlight Agents of Change program

Second para about your participation in CSocD

Third & Fourth para: transition into your work in Gandhi Ashram

Fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth para: mentioned below

Conclude with your experience of CSocD and Michael@sustainus.org info

Your profile with email

(When you think “UN” what immediately comes to your mind? Nations. Flags. Communication. Change. Outdated. Out-of-touch. Future. Idealists. Hope. Peace.) *delete the para*

(In my mind, the word that resounds the loudest is possibility. Even after President Bush failed to heed the warning of the UN concerning Iraq and even after so many people continue to pass away in places like Rwanda and Jammu- Kashmir, I still have a lot of faith in the United Nations. The mere idea of delegates from different countries coming together to in one centralized space to discuss and debate excited me.) *delete the para*

(For all change must first come from an idea, and all ideas must then be shared and developed in collaboration with others. Surely the UN would be a place where ideas translated into action, and the languages spoken would spark steady revolutions.) *delete the para*

(I knew, however, that attending this Conference on Social Development (CSocD) at the UN change the world. Like most of the delegates that SustainUS chose to represent youth at CSocD, I had spent time abroad volunteering in development work. This November, I returned after spending 15 months in India, serving as an Indicorps Fellow in Ahmedabad, Gujarat India. Since I had just returned to America, fresh out of working on development from the grass roots level, I wanted to better understand how it was that policy makers work together in the field of social development. In addition, most of my time in India was spent volunteering in the “*Ramapir No Tekre*”, a slum near the Gandhi Ashram in Ahmedabad. Thus, this conference was of particular interest to me because it focused on reevaluating the UN’s Millennium Decade Goal (MDG) of eradicating poverty.) *fifth para*

(Among the Plenary sessions (conference with all of the nations) and the many side events that occurred, it from one informal meeting of youth that I gained the most insight. This first was participating in a discussion with other American youth from the World Youth Alliance and other delegates from SustainUS, in order to write a ‘youth statement’ to assert our presence at the event. Amongst the members in youth

involved there were a variety of opinions. Some were very excited about writing the document and passing it out to other delegates. Others were skeptical that writing a statement at all would make a difference,) *sixth para*

(What was most fascinating was that everyone was concerned about the ‘language’ that we used, meaning that we were phrasing the statement in such a way as to be ‘heard’ by the UN delegation. The word poverty brought up an interesting debate among us. The UN’s definition of poverty is defined completely economically. Anyone anywhere in the world who makes less than \$1 USD is considered poor. However, most people in the room would agree that societal, cultural, as well as economic factors result in poverty. Why is it that the UN restricting itself to such a narrow definition? The debate ensued. ‘Surely it was a mistake. That is why the UN will never reach its goals, because it is neglecting to see the multilateral dimensions of such a widespread issue.’) *Seventh para*

(However, in my mind, the UN made complete sense. In the tekre [slum] I knew people who lived off of \$1US a day. Many of the families that adopted me into their homes actually made less than that, about \$40 or so. And somehow, I never saw them as poor. Even though they lived in one room 10 member family homes. Perhaps it is because they always placed heaping piles of kitchri out to be eaten, or because they always gave me so much love and shared with me their rich culture. But I also knew families who made substantially less than a dollar a day. These were some of the families of beggars, who send their children out on the street to please for paisas. In these homes, food was hard to find, health was far more neglected, and the misery in their eyes that I often thought was an act, was simply a glimpse into their inside. So it made complete sense for the UN to restrict their definition, to focus on those in extreme poverty, and to tackle those who needed their help most first.) *Eighth para*

(The debate that occurred in that room demonstrated how difficult it is to speak about development issues out of context. Very few other youth could understand why I would support that definition, because they themselves had not worked out on the field, and thus had different perspectives than I. In many ways the UN is criticized for the same reason. Most of the NGOs [non governmental organizations] that attended the Conference touted that there was a disconnect between the work they do on the ground, and the work the UN does in NYC. Both must work in tandem, and inform one another in order to make development sustainable. A side event was planned where the NGO’s at the conference met with a few delegates to express their growing concerns that their voices were being unheard. The UN delegates assured the NGO’s that the Secretary General himself had listened to their claims and agreed to begin working on improvements immediately. It became clear, by simply looking at the NGO representation, where the world stood in terms of being ‘heard.’ Since there are so many NGOs that want to attend conferences at the UN, there is an application process for the NGOs.) *delete the para*

(A survey of the ones that made the cut is telling. Most of the NGO’s came from Western and Eastern Europe. There were a few from China and South Korea. There were a number from Africa. A number of Christian and religious denominational NGO’s were

there. There were even some South Asian women, however, they all seemed to be a part of an NGO for the ministry. There were no NGO's from South, Central or Latin America. There are thousands of NGO's across the world that do incredible work, but their voices are just not heard. In the space of the UN, their voices do not even register a sound.) *delete the para*

(Even without being represented by a particular NGO, India was heard. There were a few side events of that featured case studies from Tamil Nadu about the elderly and Tsunami, many women of color from NGO's were of Indian origin (where are all of the South Asian men at these events?!), and everyone would refer back to the status of women, with examples both for triumph and improvement that related back to India. India has become, for a variety of reasons, one of the most visible and perhaps exoticized places in the world. However, being heard without using your own voice, your own words, your own informed perspectives, inevitably leads to misunderstanding. How do Indians both in India and abroad get more involved in the process of developing and sustaining our world? How should we invest our time and energy so that the voices of India continue to be heard and resound in the ears of those on the WHO and Wall Street? If and only if, youth both here and in India are involved in the process of making a difference, not so silently, by getting involved in their communities, by being aware of their society and its pressures and pits, can we continue to have an impact locally and globally. Imagine the possibilities.) *delete the para*

Conclude the article by your experience of Agents of Change program and how they make a difference in your participation @ CSocD and mention that for more information about agents of change please contact michael@SustainUS.org

Shivana Naidoo, 23yrs old; recently spent 15 months in Ahmedabad, Gujarat India as an Indicorps Fellow working with Manav Sadhna and Project Ahimsa, helping to use music as a tool to cultivate creativity and communal harmony for impoverished children. She also helped form "All-in-One," a Hindu and Muslim youth performance group. A 2004 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, Shivana founded ATMA, an all-female a cappella group at UPenn that sings music of the South Asian Diaspora. Shivana has also attended the Juilliard School Music Advancement Program, where she played the cello. Shivana aspires to become a physician and practice medicine that serves underprivileged and multiculturally diverse communities both within the United States and abroad.

You could add more info about ATMA initiative and provide your email information.