

Looking back at the Pluralism Knowledge Program: conversation with the PKP coordinators in Indonesia, Uganda and India

By Carolina Suransky, Mukono, Uganda November 2012

In preparation for the final Pluralism Knowledge Program (PKP) conference in the Netherlands in 2013, Caroline Suransky, co-chair of the PKP, spoke to Zainal Bagir and Mustaghfiroh Rahayu (Indonesia), Emily Drani and John de Coninck (Uganda) and Ram Kakarala (India). In their conversations, they open ways to reflect on the pluralism program, its meaning and some of the highlights and difficulties they experienced along the way. The three conversations, which took place in Mukono, Uganda, offer a starting point for thinking about the content and objectives of the 'closing conference' which will take place towards the end of 2013.

Conversation 1: Zainal Bagir and Mustaghfiroh Rahayu (Indonesia)

Carolina: Has the PKP helped you to rethink issues of pluralism: conceptually, strategically, practically?

Zainal: Yes, in my mind the PKP is exactly that: rethinking pluralism. It gave us the space and opportunity to rethink issues of pluralism by doing research, giving workshops and through our participation in international aspects of the program. At the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS) we wanted to pursue the issue pluralism previously, but earlier we did not seem to have the space and time for it. The PKP offered us the possibility to do just that.

Carolina: What kind of conceptual changes or challenges to existing notions of pluralism, did the PKP bring to CRCS and its partners?

Zainal: A good example of the kind of conceptual rethinking we did, came with the idea of civic pluralism. This concept became central in our program. It gave us alternatives to talk about pluralism. Most importantly, it allowed us to differentiate between theological and political and social arguments on issues of pluralism. We first proposed this idea as one of the conclusions following a survey on the pluralism discourse in Indonesia which was published in 2008. Here we found that the discourse in Indonesia was dominated by theological debates. The debate was too polarizing. A shift to a discussion on the civic dimensions of pluralism was expected to provide us with a new language to address our problems by focusing on the notions of citizenship and multiple identities, and secondly by working on two levels: state policies and the formation of social ethos or consensus as elements of 'management of diversity'. Afterwards in 2009 and 2010, we further developed the idea through a series of

research, including those done by our partners in several places in Indonesia, consultations with the Regional Team, as well as by inviting lecturers to speak on different issues related to pluralism. As a result we published five books in 2011 —one is a theoretical exploration of the idea of civic pluralism and the others examine practices of pluralism in different areas of Indonesia. The concept of ‘civic pluralism’ grabbed people’s attention. The PKP allowed us to do research on this topic and in a later stage we disseminated knowledge which was based on our research findings. Dissemination of knowledge is not easy and knowledge does not disseminate quickly. We still need time and we need to overcome several difficulties. For instance, our book, which is written in Bahasa Indonesia, is already difficult to find in the bookshops. That seems to be the faith of books today: they get replaced by new work quickly, But, from time to time I see that our work is quoted and mentioned, so the impact continues.

Carolina: Has participation in the PKP changed the ways in which CRCS works or towards its main objectives?

Zainal: Yes, in the last few years, the PKP has been most significant program at CRCS. Since we joined the PKP, we published an annual report each year as well as many books and position papers both in Bahasa Indonesia and in English. The program helped to define the focus of CRCS.

Ayu: The program also helped us to realize something we had wanted to do for a long time, namely to organize workshops outside Java, for example, in Eastern Indonesia. We had been quite Java-centered, and when we started working in Kalimantan and Bali, we realized that dealing with pluralism is different there. These experiences helped us to adapt the program.

Carolina: Over the years, I noticed the strength of your PKP network. This was represented in the Indonesian regional team, but also beyond, with other academic – and NGO partners. What did that mean to you?

Zainal: We focused on bridging academic work and NGO work. The outcomes of these efforts may not be immediately clear, it takes time. But we can now see some of the fruits of our work. For instance, even though we did not plan to introduce new content and activities this year, and only focus on dissemination of knowledge, we suddenly found ourselves in the middle of an increasingly important issues in Indonesia, which we have noted since we first published our Annual Report on Religious Life in Indonesia in 2009. That is, the issue related to the defamation of religion law.

Ayu: This case made us connect with a center for legal studies in the university. The need to understand the legal dimension of the issue introduced us to this center. Since then we have continued our collaboration in the area of religious pluralism.

Zainal: We created a network by joining forces with other centers and CSOs. We actually did not always have the capacity to do what others expected of us. When it came to advocacy work related to the issue of defamation of religion, we could not deal adequately with the legal dimensions, but we did know where to go to in our network. So we were able to ask assistance from our colleagues in the Law Faculty to give academic support in dealing with the legal dimensions. Later we helped with the organization of a public examination of a decision of a certain court case. These kinds of things were happening and then we experienced that we were part of a wider network. These issues are still going on now that the Defamation of Religion Law has gone to the Constitutional Court for a review—for the second time. When it was first reviewed in 2009-2010, we issued a position paper which argued for the annulment of the law. The arguments were based on the research and analysis which we presented in our 2008 and 2009 Annual Reports.

Carolina: What have been the highlights of the pluralism program for you?

Zainal: What particularly stands out is the way how CRCS was able to develop a new network of academics both from within Gadjah Mada university and elsewhere. Secondly - although I wished it could have been more pronounced –is the international element of the program. Another thing is the ways we feel we managed to get attention not only from CSO circles but also from the government. We presented our Reports several times in the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Ayu: This is rather remarkable because in the Annual Reports we have always tried to be critical, also of the government policies. Two years ago, the Ministry of Religious Affairs started publishing their own annual report, which is a good development, in my view.

Zainal: We have been communicating with the Ministry. We are happy that they have their own report, because we expected them to present a really different perspective. I suggested that their report could be an alternative to other national and international reports on religious freedom, which they think do not always present the Indonesian situation objectively. The challenge to the Ministry's report would be similar: how could they be as objective as possible, given their location within the state? The fact is that when there are more annual reports on religious issues in Indonesia, it hopefully means that we have a better and more complete picture of what the real situation is and how the the challenges of the management of diversity in Indonesia are handled.

Carolina: How did the international aspects of the program add value to the local PKP?

Zainal: In general, and not only in terms of the international aspect, the people who were directly involved, for example the Regional team members and their own organization, got the most benefits. I wished that more people in CRCS and its network could have benefitted. We tried to broaden it, for example with our conference last year, when we invited Ram to give a lecture. We wanted to show how other people rethink pluralism. How other people deal with similar issues in different places. We translated Ram's pluralism working paper on Human Rights, Pluralism and Civil Society. We discussed the paper and it gave us a new perspective.

What was also good was the summer school where we discussed new things, like identity, development, that gave us perspectives from outside of our own circle. Those who participated in the summer schools benefitted a lot, but only 4 to 6 Indonesians could be there each year.

Carolina: Can you describe some of the problematic aspects that you experienced in the PKP?

Zainal: As I said earlier, I wished that the international aspects could have been more pronounced. Another problematic issue was that it is hard to come up with clear evidence of outcomes in a knowledge program. The strength of the program, namely generating new knowledge, may also be its "weakness". When it comes to generating and disseminating knowledge, we should not expect quick outcomes. For instance, we published a book 3 years ago, the impact of the book is still there, but we cannot immediately see the results of our work. That is problematic from a certain viewpoint, but it is to be expected from a program like ours.

In the first two or three years we focused on new ideas and concepts. Then it slowed down, it was time for a new phase: the dissemination phase. We tried to disseminate knowledge in different parts of Indonesia. We knew it was important to have more local involvement. That was the reason why we chose to also work with partners outside Java. We chose three places outside Java and we saw that this was really significant. We realized that we have to further develop this angle: how do we conceive pluralism in other parts of Indonesia? Actually, what happens in Java has national significance, but it not in the same way. What happens in Jakarta has an impact on what happens elsewhere, but we need to see how that impacts. All research centers which work in Java know that they have to go out of Java more often. But sometimes the practical issues of funding makes it impossible. It is so expensive. Going to Papua for example, is more expensive than going to Singapore, the Philippines or Thailand. That is unfortunate, but that is the reality. But if we will continue with pluralism, I think we should concentrate on what is happening in regions outside Java.

Carolina : What kind of issues would you like to see addressed in the final PKP conference in 2013?

Zainal: Conceptual issues, like we discussed 3 years ago at the conference in The Hague. Those were really good discussions on knowledge and change. For instance on affective knowledge, we did not follow up enough on this topic after the conference.

I could present a paper based on the 16 essays that we produced on advocacy strategy for pluralism. I would like to discuss how we could connect that to the conceptual rethinking of pluralism. We can also ask the PhD students to contribute. Finally, I also like the idea of creating a reader. Each of us can contribute and also suggest relevant texts for the reader.

Conversation 2 with Emily Drani and John de Coninck (Uganda)

Carolina: How would you describe the influence of the Pluralism Knowledge Program on the work of the Cross Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU)?

Emily: When CCFU joined the PKP, we had already included a 'managing diversity component' in our work. The idea was to deal with issues of difference. I think that the main benefit of being part of the pluralism program conceptually, was that it helped us to define what we wanted to focus on. It also gave us an opportunity to do research which helped to understand particular aspects of pluralism which we previously all lumped together as 'managing diversity'. At that time, we were not necessarily looking at - or going beyond - tolerance within civic engagement. We had previous opportunities to think about diversity in terms of ethnicity, but not necessarily opportunities to broaden our own thinking. Being on the program helped us to open up and look at different aspects of diversity and differences. Nowadays at CCFU, when we talk about differences, we also focus on pluralism in terms of sexual orientation, politics, religion and other things which make sense in local contexts. When we joined the pluralism program, our managing diversity component was still very new, we had not deeply explored it yet. The program allowed us to do that and conceptualize the idea of pluralism and managing diversity in much deeper ways.

Carolina: I noticed that, different from earlier on in the program, you now frequently use the term 'pluralism'. In the international program, it has become clear that this term takes on different meanings in each of the participating countries. You started with 'managing diversity', did the concept 'pluralism' help you to rethink or enrich your ideas on managing diversity'?

Emily: Initially we addressed values of respect and tolerance. Yet pluralism goes beyond that. It is not just about co-existence, but about engaging with the other. We probably would have come to those sorts of challenges, but the program made us go there a bit

faster.

John: There has been another implication: the program helped us to rethink the position of managing diversity as a critical issue that faces the country. It also made us reflect on how an organization such as CCFU consciously positions itself in relationship to that. In this regard, we made progression, because before the PKP came along, we were very much oriented towards culture, cultural resources, cultural perceptions and so on. We did not really go very much beyond that. In the last few years, we started looking at culture in terms of governance, in terms of the ways in which people and communities interact with each other, and how this is central in governance systems, not only from an anthropological perspective, or geographic perspective, but also from a political perspective.

I remember for instance the national PKP dialogue we had at the Uganda Museum. Some of the conclusions drawn at that first conference, where the PKP also brought in international delegates from other PKP countries and from Hivos, helped us to revisit pluralism and questions around pluralism which were very central to questions of managing a pseudo-nation state like Uganda. The PKP brought progression, because before we predominantly thought in terms of cultural resources and positive aspects of culture. The pluralism program challenged our conceptual understanding of governance, and how pluralism implicates itself in the notion of governance.

Emily: Maybe for us, we were actually are not rethinking pluralism, because we had not yet started using that concept. We were introduced to the concept and then we aimed to domesticate it and understand it in the Ugandan reality.

Carolina: Did you find that the concept of pluralism changed the ways in which you interact with others in your local network? Did it - for instance - lead to new partnerships, or did it give you a new role in your network?

Emily: I think that because of the PKP, we engaged with a greater diversity of people and institutions, for instance with religious institutions. In the context of the PKP, we looked at interaction with new and different stakeholders, beyond our usual partners. Previously we mainly engaged with people who were interested in culture and languages and so on. The PKP expanded our range of partners. Another thing that seems to have changed, is that previously we dealt with cultures as not particularly political. It did not involve sticky situations, because everybody can agree on the value of culture. Having to work with issues of pluralism, we got more into contradictions. When we talk for instance about gender diversity, it has become more political, a bit more than our previous focus on culture.

Earlier, we never had too much tension, but now we are dealing with issues that create more tension and there are many diverse views.

Carolina: Is that challenging?

Emily: Yes, I think that the PKP put CCFU in areas where there is more tension. But that is a good thing. It is good to engage with that. Not everybody might agree, which is a little different from when we deal with community museums or with heritage education. Both of these are useful perspectives, for instance in schools, but they do not necessarily create controversy. Although there are aspects of working in the field of culture which can also create controversy.

John: To get back to the issue of the changing network: I think we have played a role as a platform for different types of local partners to come together. To some extent that worked well with universities and civil society organizations. Some of them hardly knew about each other. But I don't think we were able to go very far in creating linkages between universities and civil society organizations. We did create some linkages with different partners, but often it would not go very much beyond a couple of lectures in a university or a couple of people visiting a civil society organization. It might still progress a bit. I think that some universities now work on related topics. An event such as the Uganda Summer School on Pluralism will also help. When we evaluated the summer school, some participants said: wow, we need to think a lot more about this. We also started to touch the participants in very personal ways, so maybe there will be a continuation. It might even come well after the current PKP program.

Carolina: I noticed that Prof. Mukasa Luutu, whom you invited as a guest lecturer in the Uganda Summer school, discussed some very interesting challenges to pluralism in Africa and in the Ugandan context. Is his focus on Afrikology an example of your engagement with pluralism?

John: Yes, it is a good example of the ways in which CCFU has been positively affected by PKP in other areas of its work. For instance, in our work on heritage education and the curriculum that we put together for schools, you will see the PKP appear in different places. We got to know Prof. Luutu because we are trying to engage with the work his university does on cross-cultural dialogues amongst minority groups in a region near Kenya. New sort of relationships are not necessarily in the box PKP, but they have become part of our work and our lives at CCFU.

Emily: Another example is the Ugandan Wildlife Authority. Previously, we did some work with them on nature conservation and culture. The seminars on cultural diversity and sustainable development in Fort Portal gave us an opportunity to reinforce our work with them and gave us an opportunity to look at ethnic minorities and diversity in relation to the environment, this was partly motivated being part of the pluralism discussion.

Carolina: Do you want to add other examples of the ways in which the PKP affected your ideas, objectives or strategies?

Emily: Yes. One of the objectives of CCFU is to influence policy. Through our research on pluralism and the family, we were able to have some influence on the development of a national policy on the family. So to some extent, the PKP helped us to reach that objective. But to promote broader issues of pluralism on a national level, we will need much more discussions.

Carolina: Earlier, you mentioned some influence on curriculum issues in schools. Can you say more about that?

Emily: Yes, in addition to some educational material we put together on heritage education, we also had conversations with the National Curriculum Development Center. Currently they review the curriculum at secondary schools. We had an opportunity to make an input into that process. Hopefully, when the new curriculum is out in 2015, there will be elements of the heritage education content that we proposed. Part of it is about how you manage diversity and how to encourage young people to respect each other and engage with each other. This is related to our PKP work.

Carolina: Can you describe one of the highlights of the PKP in the past few years?

Emily: For me it has been the national conferences, because a number of people told us: 'we had not thought about this'. They did not know about it. People thought it was useful to engage with the value of pluralism, to think about it. I think it was also useful for NGO's, we start hearing some partners use the term.

John: For me it is also about being able to open the door to new policy spaces. I really think that this is something that will last beyond the PKP. The influence on the national family policy and on education and curriculum policy were highlights for me. Maybe this summer school too, although I think that perhaps the bar was not quite high enough for admission to the program.

Emily: Yes, but it is good that we provide this opportunity of the summer school. I don't know any other organization which provides this kind of space.

John: One of the highlights for CCFU as an organization, has been the international summer school for Emily. The way she came back after participating in it....

Emily: I agree, it gave me a sense of new knowledge and the freedom to explore and criticize knowledge, which was quite different from my previous experiences in Uganda. I was only there for four weeks, but the amount of knowledge and the professionalism left a lasting impression on me. Also in terms of my personal understanding of pluralism. I learned that pluralism is something both on a personal level as well as on an organizational level. The way we talk about pluralism in CCFU today is really different to the way in which we spoke about it four years ago. Since then, there has been growth in my understanding of the whole concept and my ability to be a bit critical and talk about it with confidence, which was not the case before.

Carolina: Did the international aspects of the program add value for CCFU?

Emily: I think yes and no. I think the 'no' is because I feel that we could have benefited a lot more than we did. Apart from in the beginning of the program, we did not share very much anymore. In the last years, it became more like isolated local programs. That was a lost opportunity, because we could have had more enrichment. The value of international sharing becomes clear in events such as the Uganda summer school where international partners are able to contribute to the program. We also had this idea of university lecturers going to Indonesia, to see how things are done there. That was not possible of course, because of the funding. But it would have been nice to have more international partnerships. Of course, the international summer schools were good, but only a few of our partners were able to engage with that. And afterwards we were often not able to keep in touch with the participants in ways we would have liked to.

John: For me, the international dimension came alive with the Fort Portal event. That was very good. Actually there were two parts: the first seminar in Holland and the second one in Fort Portal. It also came alive in the pluralism working papers, with the research support Kosmopolis gave us and with Hivos agreeing to fund the research. But broadly I agree with Emily. We had a midterm mini-evaluation and then we asked ourselves: 'is this PKP really part of an international program?' And our answer was: 'not really'. We should have developed more mechanisms to interact. I would like to know for instance more about

what Zainal is doing in Indonesia and Ram in India as coordinator of the programs there. We could have developed more synergy.

Carolina: Were there problematic issues in the program?

John: Well, possibly a lack of self-confidence in the beginning. Also, in the beginning, we felt that we needed to maximize our reach and involve lots of partners all over the place. Then we ended up with a network that was too large and extremely difficult to keep alive. What was also difficult sometimes, was that individual interests would prevail over organizational interests in the network. That could be frustrating. And when organizations promised we'll do ABC and D and then six months later, not even half of A happened. Of course, there are many reasons for that, but it was frustrating. What became clear is that NGO's and universities are increasingly driven by money. If you talk about a little money, then interest wanes very quickly. Pluralism is not an easy issue to engage with, it requires effort and sometimes it seemed that people preferred to take an easier route. The fact that people are driven by money, contracts and consultancies and so on, has nothing to do with the core of what we want to do with the PKP. It is a wider problem. Sometimes you feel that people will not lift a little finger, unless they are paid to lift their little finger.

So, you may engage with a university and very quickly they will tell you: it is going to cost you so and so much. Then it seems as if we are subcontracting a university to do something, rather than us working together on something that is inherently interesting to both of us. Money should be not really be part of the discussion until the last minute. It should be like "Oh, by the way, there will be some costs, we don't know yet where to find the money, but we think we can find some money here and there. Bu the situation is not like that. For us, the biggest challenge was to get people to deliver what they promised, that has been frustrating. When I think of problems in the PKP, that is what I would put on top.

Emily: This has partly to do with the ways in which people value knowledge. Some people just want to learn because they get a certificate. Or institutions will do research only because it is a consultancy and they get paid for it. Once the report is delivered, it is done. With the PKP, we assumed that universities would think: this is a good area of study, we'd like to participate! But they wouldn't study it unless we paid. Another thing is that I would have liked the PKP to be more cumulative. We have been quite diverse in the knowledge that we generated. Here, our situation is different for instance from Indonesia where they might say: "we wrote five annual reports and can actually asses how the country has developed in terms of religious diversity in the last five years". We are not in a position to say that. We have done various things which are of interest to universities, family policy and

schools, but it has not been cumulative. At the same time, it has been good to develop different bodies of knowledge, coming from several contributors. PKP can provide a basis from which people can pick up, or they can make reference to it. That has actually been done: people have referred to papers and to research that we did. This could be another way to look at it. The diversity of knowledge has been valuable, but it did not make it easy to manage a kind of focused build-up.

Carolina: Do you think that the program was perhaps too ambitious in terms of the range of topics you tried to cover?

Emily: Yes, I think so. Also, we had quite a lot of assumptions about how we would work together and how people would be interested and make their own contribution. This turned out to be an over-expectation. But it has also been a lesson for the future for us.

Carolina: In the closing pluralism conference in 2013, we will be able to look back together as international partners. What kind of issues would you like to see addressed or address yourselves?

John: It may be an opportunity for each country to talk about their own perspective on the main challenges they faced and how they engaged with that. We could certainly contribute from a Ugandan perspective.

Conversation 3: Sitharamam Kakarala (India)

Carolina: Has the PKP program helped you to rethink issues of pluralism, conceptually, strategically, practically?

Ram: The PKP certainly came at a crucial time for civil society in India when existing forms of activism around secularism-communalism and issues of identity had reached a level where positions were very sharply polarized. In substance these issues have been acquiring a complex social character, demanding all the stakeholders to revisit the conventional wisdom and become more nuanced in their understanding. Thus PKP was an opportunity, a critical opportunity that provided a space to think beyond the demands of sharply polarized debates on these issues. What the PKP actually helped us to rethink is: (1) Where are the new sites of social action and what is the nature of these forms of social action? And, (2) the existing dominant modes of understanding identity matters, such as ‘what is your position on the Hindu-Muslim conflict?’ Or: ‘what is your position on caste in the Indian context?’ and the need

to reopen these position in the light of the demands emerging from the new sites of social action. In other words, what are the implications of these new sites of social action to the questions of pluralism and identity politics in India? This was crucial because the existing modes of understanding the political struggles for justice and social justice seem to have come to a kind of impasse, conceptually.

New sites such as the Pasmada Muslim Mahaz were emerging and new questions were being raised, say for example, on the concept of 'minority' or 'social justice', and they did not seem to fit easily in our understanding of civil society. The organized civil society sector, where NGOs are strong actors, was challenged by these new sites and movements such as the Pasmada. This is what we brought into the strategic framing of the PKP in India. Also, we encountered new questions on affirmative action which were raised by certain groups within the Dalit fold which we included in our study of pluralism. So, India during the last decade was rife with newer challenges in the social action space that have some fundamental challenges to some of the core concepts that animate civil society politics. These could be viewed as 'new forms of pluralism' that presented challenges and new opportunities before all stakeholders asking them to be open to the new ruptures and seeking their engagement at all three levels of Indian society: the state, the market forces, and the civil society actors.

Carolina: I noticed in Indonesia that one of your observations was that the way in which civil society organizations engage each other and deal with pluralism issues is rather different than the situation in India. For instance: in the PKP, we tried to set up a regional team, consisting of academics and civil society organizations in each of the participating countries, but in India that was not an easy thing to do. Can you reflect on this?

Ram: Yes, I think in the retrospect, the regional teams took on different forms in the different international locations. In the Indian context we tried to find appropriate partners in different areas and I identified some interesting people who came on board of the regional team. But unlike the Indonesian context, the regional team in India consisted of individual people, they did not come as representatives of associations, organizations or NGOs to share their concerns on pluralism. In the Indian context, it was individuals with shared sympathy and serious engagement with pluralism questions rather than institutional representation. Over time, we could bring in the Patna Collective on board, which is a sort of an NGO. But it took quite a while to establish a certain level of communication about pluralism questions. When the PKP started, the Indian NGOs we were concerned about, were primarily focused on dealing with communalism and communal activism (including caste-based activism) on a different level. The anti-communal organizations for instance were primarily concerned about the strong state response in prosecuting the culprits. The Dalit organizations pursued a politics of social justice

based on taking polarized positions. They would work hard to get the State to make the necessary legal changes and administrative interventions to help the victims of communal – or caste violence. Well, this is undoubtedly important work, somewhat like fire-fighting, which is a crucial thing. The civil society in India in a sense broadly confined to the politics of fire-fighting, as that takes significant amount of resources and energy. What was distinctly missing was a conceptual critic that provides a larger framework of analysis of civil society's activities in a middle-to-long term perspective. Thus the early intention of PKP was to go beyond these polarized positions with a view to identify, map, and analyze the larger picture of change in Indian civil society. We feel that the new challenges, both in the context of interreligious violence as well in caste questions, cannot be addressed by holding on to strongly polarized positions. This was a difficult dimension of the PKP work in India and involving NGOs. On that count, the cohesion of the Indonesian group was an interesting contrast.

We tried to take new challenges and new sites of social action, such as new identity movements, into account. As example, I refer to Pasmada which addresses caste and Islam questions in new ways. Recently there were elections in one of the major states in India. A leading minority leader of the Congress Party, who is also a central minister, said he is going to sacrifice his head for the cause of, the Pasmada groups among Indian Muslims. This is new, it is recognition of an emerging social movement which has a very different orientation than the kind of activism that NGO's have been doing thus far.

These are the issues we foregrounded in the PKP in India, we thought it would be useful to put this on the table and develop more insight into it. The contemporary complexities of pluralism made it clear for PKP that a simple "for or against minority rights kind of frame" was clearly conceptually as well as interventionally untenable. The PKP all through the existence struggled against that framework. It has been challenging to try to convince people to rethink this polarized frame of 'for or against'. NGOs put much emphasis on legal cases of victims. Most secular groups which work on communalism are primarily engaged with court cases, for instance in the case of the Gujarat violence victims after 2002. This is a long journey because many of these legal cases are still to be resolved 10 or 12 years after the riots. It is a painful process and it is important to recognize the significance of that kind of NGO work, undoubtedly. The PKP always made a point to underscore the value of such struggles. But doing only that kind of work is not going to be adequate in addressing the pressing questions of pluralism in India, and thus we perceived ourselves as a true 'complementary' process that aims at crating larger perspective on the civil society interventions on pluralism issues.

Carolina: What are some of the highlights of the PKP for you?

Ram: At the base, that is the identification of new sites of social action, the directions of change that we were able to identify and our opportunities to put these new ideas into circulation. Initially it was more difficult to present these points, as majority of civil society groups were not even considering to take note of these sites of action. In my view the situation has changed significantly over the last five years. We are convinced about the importance of what we have identified and mapped and the future of democratic social change in India cannot be understood properly unless adequate place is accorded to these new sites of action. It is something that we will continue to pursue. Another point is we managed to develop a small interesting network with reformist groups within the Islamic context. This may be quite a modest achievement, but in the large scale Indian political and social context it was not possible to make a direct impact on the State. We mainly focused on raising pluralism questions in very different ways and I certainly feel that this approach has a deeper potential for future interventions in bringing 'affective change' that is significantly important in transforming communities from within. One of the current challenges is to understand what is happening with neoliberalism and development and to rethink this as a social justice question and develop fresh understandings of new sites of eruptions and ruptures in Indian society. It is too early to draw definite conclusions about the impact of what we did, but we will continue to debate and disseminate these issues within the circles that we engage with.

Carolina: Did the international aspect of the PKP add value to this process?

Ram: Undoubtedly. Without the international aspect, conceptually we would not have been where we are today. The different pluralism programs and locations provided a unique opportunity to compare and understand different pluralism questions. This has been profoundly important from an Indian perspective. It is of significant value. I think we learn from each other, study our differences and of course the contrast is sometimes very sharp. Yet, that contrast is also very helpful. We value the comparative angle and it became a natural way of examining issues in the international part of the program. The second point on the significance is the international educational program aspects of the PKP. We brought in the summer school which has been immensely important in terms of shaping the way we study and understand pluralism issues, its conceptualization and the dissemination of knowledge. The participants of the program over the years enhanced our understanding of pluralism challenges in all the jurisdictions, for us especially in India. And there are other significant international aspects of the program such as the working paper series, the dialogues we had in the international context - for instance the Hivos conference on Knowledge and Change - and the PhD program.

Carolina: Can you describe some of the problematic issues you have experienced of the last six years of the PKP?

Ram: We were certainly hoping to make more interventions and we tried to get governmental attention. We made attempts, along with Patna collective, towards the framing of pluralism issues in certain new laws which were introduced. Our actual results are mixed. We hoped for far more mileage than what eventually happened. It was useful, but definitely falling short. When we subsequently reflected on this we concluded that we were stretching ourselves too much in order to reach the state. We tried to talk to people on the National and Presidential councils, including Sonia Gandhi herself. They were very interested to come. But then the interest of the politician in India is driven by complex interests--and many people eventually dropped out. In a similar way, major Congress leaders indicated that they were very keen to come and take part in activities and so on, but eventually they did not come. Well, actually there were a couple of Members of Parliament who came and spoke. But it was more limited than we expected. What seems most important, though, is that we strengthened social action processes by certain groups. We definitely contributed to this process, but it has not yet reached a threshold level where it would be seen as a national issue. Slowly, it is becoming part of the political process. We need to continue to find new interventions which will allow us to get beyond the polarization frame. Otherwise we will feed into one specific kind of direction, and if we are marked in a certain way in a dual context, it will not be easy to overcome that particular image. Our hope is that through a set of publications consolidating our work during the last few years, we will be in a position to bring some visibility to these issues and perspectives.

Carolina: Are there specific issues that you want to see addressed at the conference?

Ram: Yes, I think that India could present something on how neoliberal developmental processes affect social action. In this respect, we have been working on caste – class – and gender issues, involving religion and development. Neoliberalism is a reality in most, if not all societies, in the world today. That affects questions of new polarizations. In our international PKP conversations, we see that new eruptions around differences are happening. I think that we, from Indian context, can bring that into the frame which may create a converging point with other countries and their experiences. Terms such as counter-publics or unruly politics are rather new. They may be used with different connotations in different locations, but all of them refer to new eruptions. There seems to be a new push for change. What is interesting is to ask how these new eruptions challenge our notions of democracy, or even pluralism. What is the potential of these new eruptions to transform democratically? I think that the PKP could definitely contribute something in this debate.