



Strengthening Global Civil Society

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This paper results from an international conference held at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Study and Conference Centre in Italy, July 2005



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Definitions

Throughout this paper, the term 'progressive' is used. Progressives are here defined as those who are committed to the values of human rights, gender equality, social justice and democracy. There is of course debate about where precisely the definitional boundaries are drawn. But for the purposes of this paper, it is a useful concept, allowing us to distinguish between different parts of global civil society.

While an international non-government organisation like Human Rights Watch could be categorised as progressive, a transnational terrorist group like Al Qaeda (arguably also part of global civil society) most emphatically is not. This may seem an obvious point, but highlighting it serves to counter the widely held view that global civil society is progressive in itself.

About the author

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Executive summary

Global civil society is a deeply contested concept. What precisely it means, whether it is a good or a bad thing, whether it is a truly global phenomenon or essentially a western concept, and how global civil society organisations might be made more accountable for their impacts are just some of the questions that are the subject of a lively and ongoing intellectual and political debate.

To examine some of these issues afresh, the Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr) convened a high-level three-day conference at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Centre in Italy in July 2005. Participants were drawn from the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. A central focus of the discussion was 'strengthening global civil society', but the event necessarily looked more broadly, re-examining some of the key tenets of global civil society.

While drawing heavily on the discussion at the Bellagio meeting, this paper is not a summary of the views expressed there. Rather the paper sets out the author's personal perspective on these issues. It makes two central observations about global civil society.

First, contrary to the views of some of its most enthusiastic advocates, global civil society is not inherently progressive. Global civil society is extraordinarily heterogeneous and the groups that comprise it can be illiberal, anti-democratic and violent as well as liberal, democratic and peaceful. Put another way, if organisations like Oxfam International and Greenpeace are part of global civil society, arguably so too is Al Qaeda. Furthermore, even those global civil society groups that advocate progressive values – development non-government organisations (NGOs) for example – may sometimes act in ways that run counter to those values.

Second, while the role of global civil society should not be overstated (it is generally much less powerful than governments, international organisations and the private sector), there are plenty of recent examples of where global civil society groups have been a force for progressive social change. The International Campaign against Landmines and the Jubilee 2000 campaign for debt relief are two of the best known and most successful. More generally, parts of global civil society have succeeded in putting new issues and ideas onto the international agenda, and in effecting changes in national and international policies. They have helped to improve the transparency and, to some extent, the accountability of global institutions, and to mobilise public awareness and political engagement.

The policy challenge is therefore not to promote global civil society *per se*, but rather to strengthen those parts of it that can help to secure progressive outcomes. This paper identifies four specific areas where action could help to achieve this.

Creating a more level playing field for the global south

One of the potential strengths of global civil society is the role it can play in bringing the voices of marginalised people into global debates about public policy, particularly people from developing countries in the global south. But at present, too many global civil society organisations remain biased towards northern agendas, with southern-based civil society groups often lacking the resources to adequately represent themselves in global civil society networks and in other global forums. To address this, donors, international institutions and private foundations should promote global civil society networks that are more globally representative, and help to strengthen southern organisations' capacity for research and policy analysis, as well as promoting financial independence, sustainability and advocacy training.

Supporting free media and access to information

Strengthening progressive elements of global civil society requires a national and global environment in which there is a diversity of media opinion, access to information and opportunities to communicate and organise more easily across national borders. Where these conditions exist, and global civil society movements are able to utilise them, the impact of global civil society organisations can be very powerful. The 2005 campaign Global Call to Action against Poverty and the associated Live 8 concerts is a dramatic example of the use of global media and information networks to raise issues, put pressure on governments and mobilise public opinion across the world.

In those regions of the world where the media is censored and access to information is tightly controlled, the opportunities for global civil society activism are much more limited. But pushing the boundaries of

these limits and finding imaginative ways to open public space for debate are absolutely central. Independent media initiatives, like openDemocracy, are particularly important, creating an innovative new space for political debate.

Supporting media organisations and outlets should be a priority for international donors, including governments, global institutions and private foundations. However, donors need to be wary of creating media markets that are over reliant on foreign funding. The aim must be to facilitate a sustainable, self-funding, independent media, strongly tied to local communities and contexts.

Making global civil society more accountable and transparent

Too often, progressive global civil society organisations do not meet the standards of accountability and transparency that they demand of others. There are various proposals for addressing these failings. One interesting initiative is the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership – International (HAP-I), a network of civil society organisations dedicated to ensuring that humanitarian action is accountable to its beneficiaries, through a set of agreed principles. To increase the accountability of global civil society groups to the communities in which they operate, there is also a case for ensuring representation of those communities on the governing boards of those organisations. And there is a role for codes of conduct, certification schemes, greater transparency and new forms of regulation, to ensure high standards on the part of global civil society organisations.

Establishing a new relationship with global institutions

Global civil society organisations and movements have made important contributions to some aspects of global policymaking and the work of global institutions, particularly on the issues of human rights, development and the environment. But their expertise is still under-used, and the processes for consulting global civil society, by global institutions, are still inadequate.

In respect of the United Nations (UN), the 2004 Cardoso Panel Report on UN-civil society relations (UN 2004) made a series of sensible recommendations, but these have been largely ignored. There were two particular changes advocated by the Secretary-General and the Cardoso Panel: first that the UN should improve its accreditation process for civil society organisations (to avoid a situation in which only the 'usual suspects' are consulted by the UN). Second, the UN should help address north-south imbalances, by giving greater financial and technical support to southern-based organisations.

This paper endorses both of these recommendations but it also offers a third: there should be much more experimentation with different ways of consulting global civil society groups. This could include greater use of the 'Arias Formula' (which allows civil society groups to address the UN Security Council outside its official sessions) or of 'alternative reports' from civil society groups on particular issues.

What is true of the UN is also true of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the regional development banks, and the World Trade Organization. All could benefit from a more open and structured dialogue with global civil society groups, particularly those that represent communities that are affected by the actions of these organisations, and those with recognised policy expertise on specific issues.

A. Specific policy recommendations

1. Creating a more level playing field for the global south

ippr recommends that:

- Global civil society organisations and networks become more globally representative by ensuring that individuals from developing countries hold senior positions within their organisations or by decentralising their operations as much as possible.
- Wherever possible, global civil society organisations and networks provide capacity building and support for southern partners.
- Governments, global institutions and donors provide increased aid to strengthen southern organisations' ability to adequately represent themselves in global forums. This should include strengthening southern organisations' capacity for research and policy analysis.

2. Supporting free media and access to information

ippr recommends that:

- Global civil society actors prioritise the development of media initiatives in more 'closed' regions of the world, for example more web-based forums and blogs in the Middle East.
- Governments, global institutions and donors increase their financial and practical support to local media and push authoritarian governments to curb censorship and permit greater freedom of expression.
- Governments and international donors support the creation of public broadcasters with editorial independence, which are financially sustainable and tied to local communities and context.

3. Making global civil society more accountable and transparent

ippr recommends that:

- Global civil society organisations continue to develop robust codes of conduct. The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership – International's principles of accountability are a good example that could be followed and adapted by others.
- Global civil society organisations incorporate representatives onto their Boards from the diverse communities in which they operate.
- National governments effectively regulate the actions of global civil society within their borders, but that this should *not* limit an organisation's peaceful freedom of expression, freedom of association, or freedom to participate in public life. Internationally agreed standards and practices should be followed and greater self-regulation among organisations should be encouraged.
- Global civil society organisations and networks provide, as a minimum, timely and accessible information on their funding and activities, while opening up their internal processes to external scrutiny where possible.

4. Establishing a new relationship with global institutions

ippr recommends that:

- Some of the key recommendations from the Cardoso Panel Report of 2004 (UN 2004) be implemented, including proposals for opening up accreditation to a wider group of global civil society actors and providing more support for southern-based organisations and networks.
- Global institutions and national governments engage with global civil society actors, at the national or regional level, before all major intergovernmental meetings.
- Global institutions utilise the experience and expertise of global civil society actors, through the greater use of 'alternative reports' from global civil society alongside country reports from governments.

B. What is ‘global civil society’?

The term ‘global civil society’ emerged in the latter half of the 20th century, and over the last two decades it has become something of a buzz phrase in academic and political circles. But it is also a deeply contested concept. What precisely it means, whether it is a good or a bad thing, whether it is a truly global concept or merely a western one, how it might be strengthened, and how it might be made more accountable for its impacts are just some of the questions that are the subject of a lively and ongoing intellectual and political debate.

The starting point (and often the sticking point) is the question of definition: in particular, the issue of whether it should be defined structurally or normatively. Many proponents of global civil society have stressed the latter, asserting that global civil society is a progressive concept, that is to say, one that advances the values of social justice and human rights. Mary Kaldor, for example, has written that ‘global civil society is also about the meaning of human equality in an increasingly unjust world’ (Kaldor *et al* 2003). This paper suggests that we should start with a structural definition of global civil society, and only then consider the normative questions that arise from this.

Global civil society can be structurally defined as encompassing all associations, excluding governments, private sector actors and families, that act transnationally. This transnational activity has been facilitated by the wider process of globalisation, including easier travel and communication across borders, and by the information and communication technology (ICT) revolution, which has provided unprecedented levels of access to information. These various processes have enabled like-minded groups to co-operate and co-ordinate their activities across national boundaries. The emergence of ‘global issues’ like climate change and HIV and AIDS has also encouraged a coming together of social activists globally around particular issues.

International non-government organisations (INGOs) have been the most visible part of the global civil society movement. Their numbers have grown dramatically in the last few decades, up from 1,083 in 1914 to about 13,000 in 1981 to over 47,000 by 2001 (UNDP 2002, Anheier and Themudo 2002). Groups like Oxfam International or Greenpeace are among the best known of these INGOs – and their campaigning and policy agendas are essentially progressive.

But this is not true of many parts of global civil society. As Thomas Carothers argues: ‘civil society everywhere is a bewildering array of the good, the bad and the outright bizarre’ (Carothers 2000). Its organisations and movements can increase or decrease human security. They can protect or undermine human rights. And they can attack or undermine democracy and liberal values (Scholte 2003). Various groups of racists, ultra-nationalists and religious fundamentalists have, for example, increasingly used global communications and transnational networks to preach intolerance and violence. Organisations like Al Qaeda could arguably be defined as part of global civil society.

The diverse groups that occupy the structural space that can be defined as global civil society therefore promote widely varying agendas. There is not a single civil society viewpoint but rather multiple views, often profoundly contradictory ones. On women’s issues, for example, there are civil society groups that passionately support the right to abortion and others who passionately oppose it. Any discussion of global civil society must recognise the reality of this plurality of values.

The normative question about global civil society is therefore this: given the great variety of organisations that occupy this space, and given the diversity of their agendas and perspectives, which parts are worth supporting and in what ways? This is the major focus of the rest of this paper. However, there is one other common criticism of global civil society that must be addressed first: the claim that the concept is a purely western one.

A western concept?

Global civil society is seen by some as promoting the European Enlightenment version of democracy and human rights – and imposing these values elsewhere in a form of neo-colonialism. On this reading, global civil society names an ‘old tendency of local and regional civil societies to link up and to penetrate regions of the earth that had previously not known the ethics and structures of civil society in the modern European sense’ (Keane 2001).

Certainly the criticism that global civil society or existing global civil society movements are *western-dominated* is a valid one. Western Europe and North America are still home to the headquarters of the majority

of INGOs and there are higher membership levels concentrated here than in any other regions of the world (Kaldor *et al* 2003). Furthermore, activists from the north significantly outnumber those from the south and gender and racial inequalities persist within global civil society movements and networks.

Although moves are being taken to address these issues through a greater emphasis on capacity-building and advocacy training, global civil society still shows 'many of the same patterns of inequality that mark the globalised world more generally' (Scholte 2003). Section D1 below on 'Creating a more level playing field for the global south' suggests how this might be addressed in policy terms.

But arguments as to the 'western' nature of global civil society can be overstated. While the idea of global civil society may have its roots in Europe, and while many organisations may continue to be western dominated, it is not true to say that it is the sole preserve of Europeans or westerners. Today, civil society exists in all regions of the world, although for obvious reasons it tends to be stronger in more democratic and liberal states than in authoritarian and illiberal ones.

A more valid point to make is that global civil society organisations could be much more sensitive than they sometimes are to the local context in which they operate. Section D3 below, 'Making global civil society more accountable and transparent', outlines some of the strategies that civil society organisations themselves are developing to address this.

But at the same time those global civil society movements that are working to promote gender equality, human rights or democracy should be robust in asserting that there are some universal principles and standards to defend. For example, in Afghanistan, Nigeria and Sudan, there have been recent high-profile cases of women being sentenced under Sharia law to stoning to death for adultery. Such practices can never be acceptable under any circumstances. In these instances a clear distinction can be drawn between promoting what are now internationally recognised universal norms, such as basic human rights standards, and the promotion of solely 'western values'.

Rather than imposing a set of western values, or being perceived to do so, progressive global civil society organisations should aim to work in solidarity with local partners in defence of universal principles and standards. This has sometimes been described as 'bringing the global home' (UN 2004). This might involve helping local civil society groups to hold their national governments to account for the agreements they have made in international forums, for example on women's rights or environmental standards.

In 2003 a civil society coalition, Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR), was launched that brought together local and regional civil society organisations with a number of global civil society organisations, including Oxfam GB. It focused on women's rights, targeting those African states that had signed a specific Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and lobbying them to ratify it. The Protocol needed 15 countries to ratify it before it became law. In 2005 the Protocol came into force and as of January 2006 17 countries had ratified it. This is a good example of a network that brought together a range of local and global civil society actors to hold national governments to account.

Another important initiative is Civil Society Watch, run by Civicus. In situations where the rights and freedoms of citizens and civil society are threatened or curtailed, this network will expose and attempt to prevent or overturn those violations (see www.civicus.org). This is an initiative worthy of further support and of emulation.

C. What kind of impact is global civil society making?

Global civil society has been traditionally most visible in its mass demonstrations aimed at global institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. In 1999 in Seattle, for example, co-ordinated protests from a wide range of organisations and movements involved around 50,000 people in over 500 protest groups – with similar protests in cities in more than 20 countries. These protests hastened the collapse of the Seattle trade meeting. In addition, the annual gatherings of the World Social Forums (also known as the Porto Alegre Forums) have provided a space to criticise the actions of the International Financial Institutions and other global institutions on issues like trade.

Global civil society actors and movements have also put new issues onto the international agenda. They have played a key role in providing a more competitive pool of policy ideas, as well as providing new research and information to mobilise public opinion around an issue. Some campaigns have succeeded in identifying issues previously ignored by states. For example, in relation to environmental standards, including tackling climate change, it is unlikely that the international agreements signed up to in last 20 years would exist without the advocacy, campaigning and intellectual input of INGOs and others.

There are many examples of where the efforts of global civil society have brought about changes in national and international policy. The Jubilee 2000 campaign is an obvious example of successful global civil society activism. Drawing on an international movement of organisations, based in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America, it put pressure on politicians in developed countries to reduce the debt burden borne by some of the world's poorest countries. These efforts played a significant role in securing debt relief concessions from G8 countries, including an expanded heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative and bilateral commitments to write off debt.

More recently, the Global Call to Action against Poverty, including the UK-based Make Poverty History campaign, mobilised public opinion around debt, trade and aid issues, in the run-up to the 2005 G8 Summit in Gleneagles. It was billed as the largest ever anti-poverty alliance, bringing together some 150 million people in 72 countries and some 30 million text messages were sent urging G8 leaders to act (Holland 2005). Although some campaigners were disappointed with the lack of progress on some issues, significant commitments, particularly on debt, were secured at the Summit.

Similarly, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines successfully worked to eradicate antipersonnel mines, winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 in recognition of this achievement. And human rights activists campaigned successfully for the establishment of the International Criminal Court in 1998.

The global civil society campaign 'Publish what you pay', a coalition of over 280 NGOs, founded in 2002 by Global Witness, CAFOD, Oxfam, Save the Children UK, Transparency International UK and George Soros, Chairman of the Open Society Institute, has also had a real impact. It called for greater transparency over the revenue payments made to host developing-country governments by international oil, mining and gas companies. In part as a reaction to this campaign, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) was launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002.

Similarly, the Global Transparency Initiative (GTI) recently targeted the Asian Development Bank, calling for greater disclosure of its policies and activities. In 2005 the Bank adopted a new Public Communications Policy. While this disclosure policy does not meet all of the principles outlined in the GTI draft of a Transparency Charter, it makes important progress in several areas and currently represents one of the most open information disclosure policies adopted by any International Financial Institution. This is a good example of where national and global action have combined to ensure greater accountability and transparency.

Global civil society makes a range of other contributions to global policy discussions. It can be used, in the words of one participant at our Bellagio seminar, to counter 'global hypocrisy'. Global civil society networks can play a role in holding governments and international institutions to account for the commitments they make and for the inconsistencies of their actions and policies.

Global civil society can also be an important source of support (both moral and practical) to people living under authoritarian regimes where local civil society is repressed. Indeed, the rise of global civil society is often associated with the fall of authoritarian states in Eastern and Central Europe in 1989 and with the rise of democracy movements across Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. During those decades Latin

American campaigners were increasingly supported by North American human rights groups, and East European activists forged links with West European groups. The latter groups in both examples often provided material support and publicity, and helped put pressure on governments and institutions (Kaldor 2003). This has been labelled the 'boomerang effect' in which appeals to the international community 'bounce back' and put pressure on governments to reform or open up (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

But don't overstate it...

While some global civil society movements have made a significant impact on national and global policy, it is also important not to overstate the phenomenon. For example, the protests against the invasion of Iraq in 2003 failed to prevent military action, despite more than a million people marching in London, with similar numbers in Rome and Barcelona and hundreds of thousands in Berlin, Madrid, Paris, Sydney, New York and other cities around the world. Patrick Tyler (2003) wrote in the *New York Times* of 'two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world public opinion' but it is clear that state interests and power can overrule civil society.

In general it is important to acknowledge that governments, global organisations and the private sector are much more powerful and influential than civil society groups. Global civil society is not an alternative to national governments or global institutions, nor can it fully substitute for the formal procedures that legitimise global inter-governmental institutions and global decision-making.

Another point to recognise is that global civil society organisations, almost by definition, ignore the trade-offs between political priorities. Global civil society actors will rarely have to face the difficult task of balancing competing demands, which is the business of political parties and governments. Global civil society therefore can make an important contribution to politics and policymaking, but it should not be seen as a replacement for functioning political parties and systems.

D. How do we strengthen global civil society?

At the Bellagio seminar, a number of important practical ideas were suggested for strengthening the contribution of global civil society to the achievement of better global public policy outcomes and to the advancement of progressive values. These fall into four broad areas, discussed below.

1. Creating a more level playing field for the global south

One of the potential strengths of global civil society is the role it can play in bringing the voices of marginalised people into global debates about public policy, particularly people from the global south. But it can only do this effectively if global civil society organisations allow the voices of the global south to be properly heard. While some do so, at present too many global civil society organisations remain biased towards northern agendas, with southern-based civil society groups often lacking the resources to adequately represent themselves in global civil society networks and in other global forums.

To address this, global civil society networks should ensure that they are more globally representative. In part this means altering current imbalances as to where organisations and networks are based. The majority still have their headquarters in, and conduct much of their business from, northern capitals. Some INGOs are leading the way in becoming increasingly decentralised, shifting their operations to southern bases. The decision of the INGO ActionAid International to move its headquarters from the north (London) to the south (South Africa) serves as a good example that should be taken up by others.

There is also a need to address the fact that activists from the north still outnumber those from the south. This means much greater capacity-building and training, as well as support, is required for those from the south. Some southern-based networks already provide effective training for grassroots activists. Examples like FEMNET (The African Women's Development and Communication Network) and ARROW (Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women) provide advocacy and leadership skills training for activists campaigning locally on women's rights and related issues.

CIVICUS, the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, is another good example of a network encouraging capacity building and strengthening global civil society action. This is an international alliance with an estimated 1000 members in about 100 countries that has worked for over a decade to strengthen civil society throughout the world. A recent campaign focused on the Millennium Development Goals. The campaign built networks between trade unions, faith-based organisations, and service-orientated development, environmental and human rights NGOs. By encouraging these organisations to work together to advance their goals, these networks provided peer group support and training (see www.civicus.org). Wherever possible, global civil society organisations and networks should be encouraged to provide capacity building and support for southern partners.

Governments and international institutions should also provide, where possible, increased aid to strengthen southern organisations' ability to adequately represent themselves in global civil society networks and in global forums. To date this has meant an over-reliance on advocacy training and ensuring financial accountability. These are undoubtedly important, but there should also be much more focus on strengthening southern organisations' capacity for research and policy analysis. This will ensure that they can successfully compete with, or rather complement, the work of partners in the north (see also Section D4 below, 'Establishing a new relationship with global institutions').

2. Supporting free media and access to information

Strengthening progressive elements of global civil society requires a national and global environment in which there is a diversity of media opinion, access to information and opportunities to communicate and organise more easily across national borders. Where these conditions exist, and global civil society movements are able to utilise them, the impact of global civil society organisations can be very powerful.

The impact an effective media campaign can have was probably most recently shown in the clever marketing of the Global Call to Action against Poverty. In the UK, the use of celebrity endorsements, including the 'click' films in which the clicking fingers of Brad Pitt, Kate Moss and others symbolised the death of a child every three seconds, allowed the Make Poverty History campaign to reach a much wider (and younger) audience than it otherwise might have. A survey by Oxfam found that 84 per cent of British 16- to 24-year-olds said the campaign and the Live8 concerts had had the greatest impact on them last year, ahead of

London's Olympic bid victory and the General Election (Barkham 2006).

Some activists have criticised these methods and their simple use of symbols (see Sankore 2005) but there is no denying that successful global civil society movements increasingly use the media as an important tool.

Improving access to the media and to information is also crucial, particularly in more 'closed' regions of the world. For example, the Arab population of the Middle East and North Africa region has one of the most restricted media sectors in the world. According to the 2003 Arab Human Development Report just 53 different newspapers are published per 1,000 people compared to an average of 285 in the rest of the world (UNDP 2003).

Pushing the boundaries of these limits and finding imaginative ways to open public space for debate are absolutely central. Some interesting developments are occurring within the Middle East region, including the popularity of the Arabic satellite television station Al-Jazeera. Millions watch its news bulletins and as many as 30 million tune in to its flagship debate programme 'Countertrend' or *al-Itijah al-Mua'akis* (Saghieh 2004). While accusations of political bias in Al-Jazeera's reporting persist, this development represents an important step in a region where state-controlled media, press censorship and the repression of civil society remain the norm.

Independent media initiatives, like openDemocracy (www.openDemocracy.net), are also critically important, creating an innovative new space for political debate. Bitterlemons (www.bitterlemons.org) is another good example – it focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and presents both Israeli and Palestinian viewpoints, in an attempt to bridge differences and find common ground.

Supporting these kinds of initiatives across the Middle East and North Africa could help to stimulate greater public debate in the region. The rise of blogging shows that the appetite for free expression exists within the Middle East. Salam Pax, a blogger who chronicled Iraq's political situation (and deterioration) in the run-up to and following the 2003 invasion, attracted much international attention. Blogs now exist from Jordan to Egypt to Iran and provide an important, though unregulated, forum for public and political discussion.

There is a role here for governments, global institutions and private trusts and foundations too. To further media freedom and access to information – the lifeblood of civil society – they should increase their financial and practical support to local media and where possible strongly press the region's governments to curb censorship and permit a plurality of voices to be heard. Much is already being done – some estimate that around US\$140 million is spent by governments and private donors around the world for media and media-related activity every year (Puddephatt 2006).

Eastern Europe provides some good examples of how these funds are spent. For example, the EU, US, and the Soros Foundation have all provided media assistance to countries in the former Yugoslavia in recent years. This has included seed funding to help establish independent media outlets, such as radio and television stations or newspapers, and providing professional training for staff.

This practical support should include help with establishing strong independent regulatory frameworks and, where possible, the creation of an effective public broadcaster. There are precedents for this already, for example the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK) established a Temporary Media Commissioner in 2000, to promote independent and professional media. A legal framework for free media should safeguard journalistic and editorial independence and prevent the distortions that arise from intrusive state interference or excessive commercial pressure.

However, international donors need to be wary of creating a false media market based on foreign funding. For example the US strategy in the Middle East has largely bypassed state broadcasters, instead funding independent stations or outlets. Where repressive governments control state broadcasters, there is clearly a need to be careful about the type of external support that is provided. However, avoiding state or public broadcasters altogether is not a viable long-term strategy. There remains a vital role for public broadcasters that can operate with editorial independence and without commercial pressures.

Future media support by international donors should therefore focus on building the capacity and independence of local and national partners. This might include the provision of low interest loans, business and professional training or technical support. The long-term aim should be to facilitate sustainable, self-funding media markets that are strongly tied to their local communities and context. The BBC World Service Trust, for example, works with local media organisations in many developing countries to improve their capacity to scrutinise government policies and to facilitate wider debate.

3. Making global civil society more accountable and transparent

Too often, progressive global civil society organisations do not meet the standards of accountability and transparency that they demand of others. There are various proposals for addressing these failings.

One of the Bellagio participants described an existing 'pyramid of accountability' for most global civil society organisations, with international donors at the top, followed by governments and then the organisation's board of directors. The people that these organisations claimed to represent are often at the bottom of this pyramid. The suggestion was that this pyramid needed to be inverted.

In a similar vein, One World Trust and others have argued that the lines of accountability should run (as equally as possible) in four directions: upwardly to donors, governments and foundations, downwardly to beneficiaries (those that services are provided for or on whose behalf an organisation claims to speak), inwardly to an organisation's own staff and mission, and lastly horizontally to peers (Kovach *et al* 2003). This approach enables the traditional pyramid of accountability (with donors at the top and beneficiaries at the bottom) to be opened up, while still maintaining clear lines of financial accountability. Organisations may not be able to prioritise all four lines at all times, but under this model they should not disregard their accountability to other groups or in other directions.

The INGO ActionAid International has led the way in this field, through the development of its Accountability Learning and Planning System. This is an organisational strategy that prioritises the perspectives of the poor within all levels of ActionAid's operations, with the goal of ensuring greater downward accountability. Similarly, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership – International (HAP-I) network of member organisations is dedicated to ensuring that humanitarian action is accountable to its beneficiaries. A condition of membership is that each organisation must apply the HAP-I's principles of accountability (see box). The network is currently also developing a 'manual of humanitarian accountability'.

**Humanitarian Accountability Partnership - International
Principles of accountability:**

1. Respect and promote the rights of legitimate humanitarian claimants
2. State the standards that apply in their humanitarian assistance work
3. Inform beneficiaries about these standards, and their right to be heard
4. Meaningfully involve beneficiaries in project planning, implementation, evaluation and reporting
5. Demonstrate compliance with the standards that apply in their humanitarian assistance work through monitoring and reporting
6. Enable beneficiaries and staff to make complaints and to seek redress in safety
7. Implement these principles when working through partner agencies.

(www.hapinternational.org)

Another suggestion put forward at Bellagio was for each global civil society organisation or network to have a Board that incorporates or is drawn from those countries or communities in which they operate. This may be difficult to organise in some circumstances (such as a conflict situation), and might involve some training or capacity building in other contexts, but it is one possibility for ensuring greater accountability and scrutiny from affected communities.

Towards codes of conduct

Over the past decade, and in response to some of the issues raised in the last section, there has been a real increase in the use of voluntary codes of conduct and certification schemes. Current estimates are that self-regulatory initiatives are in operation in over 40 countries worldwide (Lloyd 2005).

Humanitarian organisations have often led the way in developing basic standards governing the operation of global civil society organisations active in this area. Alongside the HAP-I's principles, the Canadian Council for International Co-operation's Code of Ethics, for example, sets out the minimum ethical standards Council members must meet in conducting their activities. Where possible, other organisations and networks should seek to learn from these examples of best practice and to develop their own.

Some codes of conduct have been criticised as lacking effective forms of enforcement. For instance, the Red

Cross Code of Conduct, with 373 signatories, has no mechanism for verifying whether signatories have complied with the code and no formal structures or systems in place through which a breach can be reported (ibid). Simply signing up to a code of conduct is clearly not enough. There should also be mechanisms in place to ensure that a code is enforced or that, as a minimum, some right of redress is provided for. In contrast, the HAP-I's principles of accountability do state that there should be processes of complaint and redress for beneficiaries and staff.

The regulatory framework

A senior member of the Red Cross, in the wake of the tsunami of 26 December 2004, was reported to have described humanitarian activity as 'the world's largest unregulated industry' (Macan-Markar 2005). At their worst, global civil society organisations, for example international relief NGOs, appear to be more interested in competing with other organisations than working effectively to address a common problem. There are even reports of fraudulent NGOs emerging to take advantage of the foreign funds available for organisations undertaking development (Lloyd 2005). Other organisations do not make reports of their activities widely available and may have opaque decision-making processes.

Some argue that self-regulation is the most effective strategy for global civil society, and that any attempts by governments to introduce binding regulations will close down the space in which global civil society can operate. While self-regulation is often effective, there may be circumstances in which global civil society actors cause damage to local communities, and where some form of government regulation may be appropriate.

But regulation is not unproblematic. Calls to increase the regulatory capacity of governments raise fears that authoritarian governments will use regulatory powers to curb the legitimate activities of national and global civil society actors.

In January 2006, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed legislation that introduced new government restrictions on NGOs and expanded the grounds for closing or denying registration to them. The law grants government officials an unprecedented level of discretion in deciding what projects or even parts of projects can be considered detrimental to Russia's national interests. It gives registration officials broad power to close the offices of any foreign NGO that implements a project that does not have the aim of 'defending the constitutional system, morals, public health, rights and lawful interest of other people, guaranteeing the defence capacity and security of the state' (HRW 2006). There are real fears that this new NGO law will be used to interfere with the work of NGOs themselves.

Similarly, in Egypt, since mid-2003, NGOs of all kinds have faced two challenges: becoming registered and obtaining funding permission. Interference by the Egyptian security forces has affected both processes and restricted essential rights to freedom of association and expression. Most worryingly, Human Rights Watch has documented numerous cases where the Egyptian security services rejected NGO registrations, decided who could serve on NGO boards of directors, harassed NGO activists, and interfered with donations reaching the groups (HRW 2005).

There is clearly a balance to be struck. National governments should develop the capacity to effectively regulate the actions of global civil society within their borders. But this must not come at the expense of the freedom of expression and association of those civil society actors. The regulatory framework should not be used to repress global civil society organisations and legal frameworks should safeguard a space in which civil society can operate.

Principles for government regulation

Any governmental regulation of global civil society should:

1. Be based on internationally agreed standards
2. Protect freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom to participate in public life
3. Ensure transparency of accounting and activities, including transparency of sources of funding
4. Promote self-regulation, to encourage organisations to themselves establish agreed standards and co-ordinate their activities with others.

Transparency

Global civil society has not always lived up to the standards of transparency it has advocated for others. The One World Trust's *Global Accountability Report* compared, among other factors, the transparency of INGOs with that of transnational corporations and global organisations (Kovach *et al* 2003). It found that INGOs were less transparent than both, at least in terms of the online information that they provide. INGOs often failed to provide information that was likely to be of significant use to stakeholders, including details on how money was spent and how well they had achieved their stated aims (ibid, Lloyd 2005). While this assessment was limited in terms of scope and the indicators it used, it should prompt INGOs and other parts of global civil society to enhance their own transparency.

One way in which INGOs in particular are trying to address such issues is through a greater emphasis on reporting. Groups such as the WWF (UK) now produce their own environmental reports and this is an important way of maintaining a link with supporters and stakeholders. Growing numbers of INGOs are also signing up to new transparency and stakeholder engagement standards like the Global Reporting Initiative to ensure that they too comply with emerging best practice (SustainAbility 2003). As a minimum, global civil society organisations and networks should provide timely and accessible information on their activities, as well as opening up their internal structures and processes to external scrutiny where appropriate.

4. Establishing a new relationship with global institutions

Global civil society organisations and movements have made important contributions to some aspects of global policymaking and to the work of global institutions, particularly on issues of human rights, development and the environment. But their expertise is still underused, and the processes for consulting global civil society, by global institutions, are still inadequate.

However, improving the relationship between global civil society organisations and global institutions is often difficult to do. There are two key issues. On the one hand, there is a need to better structure processes of engagement or consultation. The huge number and diversity of global civil society actors, and the inequalities among them, make it important that rules and standards be applied. On the other hand, it is important that these structures are not over bureaucratic or too formalised, and that they do not erode spontaneity and diversity (Zadek and Edwards 2003). Achieving the right balance is critically important.

The UN has, in some ways, gone further than many other global institutions in opening itself up to civil society. For example, the UN has included parallel civil society forums at each of its global summits. But it has also struggled with accusations of uneven and politicised engagement. It still tends to be the 'usual suspects' – northern-based, well established organisations – that are consulted by the UN, and then often in an ad hoc way. Only 251 of the 1,550 NGOs associated with the UN Department of Public Information, for example, come from the global south, and the ratio in relation to NGOs in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is even lower (Edwards 2002).

An awareness of this problem, and a desire to address it, led Kofi Annan to establish the Cardoso Panel on UN-Civil Society Relations. Two key themes stand out from the Panel's report, published in 2004 (UN 2004). First, it argued that the UN should become a more outward-looking institution, making more of its role as a global convenor of diverse constituencies around a single issue. It made a number of recommendations for improving NGO and civil society engagement with the UN. This included calling on NGOs to represent themselves differently in the UN system, particularly through forming broad networks to help the UN with selection and quality assurance. This was a sensible recommendation. If implemented it would encourage more effective and representative engagement with global civil society.

The Cardoso Panel also acknowledged that the current UN process for accreditation is over politicised, expensive and a barrier to participation to some developing countries. The Panel argued for the creation of one centralised mechanism, managed by the Secretariat, to process applications. Although Member States maintain some control (and therefore politicisation may still be an issue), this proposal would help ensure faster, more efficient decision-making, with applicants more likely to be judged on their merits.

A second key theme was to 'connect the global with the local'. The Panel called for locally designed strategies for globally agreed goals like the Millennium Development Goals and emphasised the importance of engaging with local and national civil societies (UN 2004). It also emphasised the need to address north-south imbalances. The Panel proposed establishing a fund to enhance the capacity of southern civil society

to engage in UN processes and partnerships, funded by governments, foundations, UN sources and global civil society itself. Networks and organisations from developing countries often struggle to finance their involvement in international forums.

What is true of the UN is also true of the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO. Some of these organisations have devised mechanisms to engage (to some degree) with those parts of global civil society that seek access. For example, the World Bank maintains publicly accessible information centres in many of its resident missions around the world, and in June 2003 the WTO established an Informal NGO Advisory Body. But there is more that could be done. As a first step these global institutions could experiment with different ways of facilitating the involvement and input of global civil society, avoiding over formalised or bureaucratic processes, but ensuring that a more diverse range of global civil society actors are consulted.

For instance, there could be more meetings with global civil society groups on particular topics before official intergovernmental meetings. The 'Arias formula', used to invite NGOs to address the UN Security Council outside its official sessions, is a good model for this within the UN, as Edwards and Zadek (2003) and others have highlighted. Another useful suggestion is the greater use of 'alternative reports' from global civil society actors, to be considered alongside country reports from governments. Some UN Treaty bodies already use these, but the same principles could be used for example in the WTO to allow civil society groups to put forward recommendations on specific trade issues (Edwards 2002).

Overall, there is a need for regular forums at the international level that allow governments and intergovernmental institutions to discuss policy challenges and brainstorm ideas with global civil society groups. There is clearly a leadership role for the UN here, especially since it has not been a target of the demonstrations that have affected the International Financial Institutions.

E. Conclusion

Some parts of global civil society have played a significant role in mobilising public opinion and awareness, and spurring action on global issues. 'To victims of land mines, to villagers threatened with displacement and pauperisation by massive dam projects, to business executives tired of being shaken down for bribes, to people struggling for democracy and equity within their countries, transnational civil society may appear a very good thing indeed' (Florini 2000).

But civil society is not a panacea, nor is it beyond criticism. This paper has attempted to provide a balanced picture of this complex phenomenon, recognising the opportunities but also the limitations of global civil society. Most importantly, it has set out a number of practical suggestions for engaging more intelligently with global civil society, particularly those parts of it that can enhance the quality of global public policy outcomes and help advance progressive values.

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