

SCENARIO 1

A Global Civil Society Forum: Its Form and Creation

A Concept Paper for the Civil Society Conference

Waterloo, Ontario

October 17-19, 2006

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associations, and more. No global policymaker can now ignore the insistent presence – and influence – of civil society in global affairs.

That said, these substantial and growing civil society energies with regard to global governance issues have not always been channelled to optimal effect. All too often civil society campaigns on global problems have suffered from severe shortfalls of coordination and consolidation. As a result, limited civil society resources have been dissipated through fragmentation, duplication of efforts, and internecine competition.

In order to stimulate the Waterloo deliberations the present concept paper lays out one possible scenario of a future process for civil society engagement of global governance. The following pages discuss a prospective Global Civil Society Forum (GCSF) that could emerge over the coming decade. The first section below sketches the institutional features of this GCSF. The second section identifies key historical circumstances that could enable the construction of a GCSF during the next ten years.

The general tenor of the proposal is modest and incremental. A scheme to aggregate civil society voices can easily fall foul of the associations' laudable insistence on their diversity and autonomy. Most of these citizen groups will resist any project that construes aggregation to entail centralisation and amalgamation, particularly if such a strategy is seen to be encouraged by official circles. The initiative to develop something akin to a GCSF must therefore be treated as a cautious experiment whose pace and evolution are

institutions who participate in it. However, the GCSF as such would not formulate or advocate specific policy prescriptions.

In this respect the GCSF concept takes inspiration from the World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum that predate it. The WEF and WSF have succeeded in engaging large and diverse civil society constituencies over a number of years precisely because these venues have not, in hosting deliberations on global problems, imposed a specific policy agenda on participants. Like the WEF and the WSF, the GCSF would function as a facilitator of dialogue rather than as a campaign machine. It would be a meeting place for other associations and not a mega-organisation that encompasses and ultimately swallows its constituents.

In fact, the GCSF envisioned here has still fewer partisan hues than even the broadly based WEF and WSF. This newer Forum endorses neither the WEF mantra of 'entrepreneurship in the global public interest' nor the WSF slogan of 'another world is possible'. Instead, the pithy GCSF mission statement merely extols the virtues for global politics of informed civil society activism on the one hand and responsive global regulation on the other. The GCSF manifesto advances no other vision than a fairly anodyne assertion of the reciprocal benefits

Participation

The GCSF does not have a fixed membership roll. Subject to two conditions elaborated below, the Forum is in principle available to any civil society association and any global governance agency that wishes to make use of it. Participants in GCSF activities are thus constantly varying, depending on the policy questions under discussion.

From the side of official circles, the GCSF is accessed at one or the other moment by all of the different types of global regulatory bodies described earlier. At one juncture the official user might be a traditional multilateral institution like the OECD or the UN. At the next juncture it might be a newer form of global authority like the G8 or ICANN. The GCSF is not attached to any particular global governance agency. The Forum staff works closely with civil society liaison units in the various global regulatory bodies, but the GCSF itself is strictly independent – both constitutionally and in practice – from any of the governance organisations that use it.

From the side of civil society, the GCSF is open to a broad spectrum of citizen associations, covering all manner of issues, objectives, ideologies, cultural styles, organisational forms, tactics, and competences. This point must be stressed: the label ‘Global Civil Society Forum’ most decidedly does not designate ‘International NGO Forum’. The GCSF is deliberately designed to widen citizen access to global governance beyond an elite of (mainly North-based, professionally staffed, and male-led) international NGOs. The Forum offers space to all types of civil society initiatives on

(whose provisions are subject to periodic review) is monitored by a dedicated evaluation unit within the GCSF secretariat.

Application of a code of conduct might at first blush appear restrictive. However, the effect in the case of the GCSF is in fact to broaden civil society participation in, and increase its impact on, global governance. The standards set involve baseline norms (e.g. against racism and armed violence) rather than compliance with ambitious best practices that only the most highly resourced organisations could hope to attain. The code therefore serves to identify, expose and weed out ill intent and malpractice, so that global regulators can be assured of the bona fides of the civil society interlocutors that they meet through the GCSF. As a result, these authorities feel confident to give a serious hearing to a much wider range of civil society groups than the high-profile and professionally more adept actors that have in the past had disproportionate access to global governance

the creators and the subsequent organisers of the Forum have recognised and respected that some citizen groups prefer to pursue their re

Secretariat

The preparation, execution and review of civil society-global governance interchanges through the GCSF are coordinated through a secretariat. These offices are substantially decentralised, with most of the day-to-day work of facilitating the dialogues occurring through regional bureaux. These seven branch offices exist for Africa, Asia (East and South East), Asia (Central, South and South West), Australasia and Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America. This devolved structure promotes the inclusion of more diverse, more locally rooted, and less amply resourced voices alongside those of the major transnational civil society players. Each regional office is headed by a coordinator. At any one time at least two regional coordinators must be drawn from each of the respective constituencies of business associations, NGOs and social movements.

The small central office of the secretariat houses the bureau of the general coordinator of the GCSF. The regional coordinators assemble together with the general coordinator to form the GCSF executive committee, which operates on a consensus principle. The location of the central office rotates among the seven regions every five years. A new general coordinator, normally drawn from the host region, is likewise selected every five years by the GCSF governing board.

The GCSF central office also contains certain global departments. These units include the previously mentioned divisions to promote inclusion and to oversee the code of conduct. In addition, the central office contains a highly professional information and communications team that publicises the GCSF and its work. Each regional office also includes an information and communications officer with rich experience in civil society activism. Meanwhile an expert advisers unit maintains a thematically organised register of academics, consultants and witnesses who are prepared to assist GCSF-sponsored dialogues, normally on a pro bono basis. A finance unit administers GCSF incomes and expenditures.

GCSF-sponsored dialogues frequently take place at the offices or other meeting venue of the global governance agency in question. However, the GCSF also encourages global authorities to venture to its regional offices for encounters with civil society associations. This practice enables more citizen groups to assemble, including those with fewer resources for travel. In addition, consultations in the regions bring officials closer to the contexts of the civil society perspectives that are being articulated.

While sensitive to the problematic cultural politics involved, the GCSF uses English as its principal global lingua franca. In addition, GCSF operations in several of the regions are also conducted in other major languages of that region. For instance, French and Portuguese are employed alongside English in Africa. In Europe proceedings are conducted in French and Russian as well as English. Portuguese and Spanish serve as additional working languages for Latin America and the Caribbean. Arabic is also used in South and South West Asia. GCSF operations in Australasia and Pacific, East and South East Asia, and North America proceed principally in English, as these areas lack another generally recognised regional language.

contributions with allocations from global taxation (e.g. on airline tickets, carbon trading, currency transactions and Internet use).

Accountability

internally to its staff. Needless to say it is no small challenge to achieve these various accountabilities simultaneously and in a suitably balanced fashion.

The GCSF's accountability to participating civil society associations is mainly achieved through the board that these constituents elect. The board can hire, fire and otherwise amend the employment contracts of the GCSF coordinators. The board can also accept or reject the annual report submitted by the executive committee. If civil society users of the GCSF are unhappy with the board's performance they can unseat its members in the triennial elections. Civil society clients can also hold the GCSF accountable by voting with their feet. That is, the associations signal endorsement by joining Forum dialogues and rejection by eschewing the venue.

The GCSF's accountability to participating global governance institutions is principally achieved by the use/avoidance principle. If the Forum does not operate-0.ty sicisrs oarejectous through

noted earlier, professional information and communications officers form a significant component of the GCSF staff. Socially responsible mass media, including active investigative journalists, play an important role in keeping wider publics critically informed of GCSF operations. When presented in accessible forms, academic research likewise documents the strengths and shortcomings of the GCSF for the general public. For the rest citizens at large can enhance the public answerability of the GCSF by providing or withholding individual sponsorships, albeit that this channel of accountability is obviously more open to wealthier individuals and amounts to only a fifth of the total revenue.

Legitimacy

After initial fragility in its first years, the GCSF has confounded the sceptics and built up considerable legitimacy. The Forum dialogue process is widely trusted and respected, with consequent growing significance in global policymaking. Future funding of the GCSF through global taxation is therefore becoming an increasingly realistic proposition. The legitimacy of the GCSF derives from several sources: efficacy, democracy, morality, legality and personality.

With regard to efficacy the GCSF is widely seen to provide value and achieve objectives. The mechanism generally generates productive exchanges between civil society associations and global governance agencies. The parties by no means always agree with or persuade one another, but even amidst disagreement there is helpful exchange of information and perspectives, and participants gain valuable insight into the political realities that surround a given issue. The knowledge so obtained is useful: for global governance agencies in constructing technically sound, culturally sensitive and politically viable policies; and for civil society associations in pursuing adept and influential campaigns. The costs of the operation are relatively modest, certainly in relation to the very substantial benefits.

With regard to democracy the GCSF is viewed by most as offering a venue where affected publics have opportunities to participate in and demand answers from given

global governance institutions. In particular the GCSF is widely credited with enhancing voice and accountability in global governance for marginalised circles such as disabled persons, indigenous peoples, landless peasants, urban poor, disaffected youth, etc. The GCSF marks an important and innovative advance in global democracy, particularly in circumstances where directly elected global parliaments and a comprehensive global judiciary system are impracticable for the foreseeable future.

With regard to morality the GCSF has obtained substantial legitimacy by facilitating the progress of just causes in global governance. Ma

an object of continuing struggle for the Forum's proponents in both civil society and global governance circles.

Conditions for Construction

A Global Civil Society Forum on the lines sketched above would be a marked innovation in global governance processes. True, even on the modest proportions envisioned here, sceptics might doubt that a GCSF-like entity could emerge in the matter of a decade. Yet history has repeatedly shown that rapid and far-reaching shifts in regulatory processes are possible if the conditions favour such change. For example, few commentators imagined in the 1920s that comprehensive welfare states would emerge in the subsequent decades. Likewise, few observers in the 1930s anticipated that wide-ranging multilateralism would develop in the 1940s. If the general political climate is auspicious and astute actors grasp the opportunities, major institutional construction is possible in relatively short order. Thus the task at hand in the remainder of this paper is to identify the contextual circumstances that could favour the creation of a GCSF as well as the tactics that its proponents might adopt to exploit these potentials to maximum effect.

Perhaps the greatest circumstance favouring the development of a GCSF in the next decade would be a widely felt and growing need in both civil society and official circles for such a venue. Certainly the demand for a GCSF-like apparatus is already greater today than it was a decade ago. The very fact that the present project has arisen, that it has obtained funding, and that it has attracted high-quality participation is suggestive of the extent of attention and support that proposals for a GSCF could potentially draw.

Ample latent political demand for a GCSF-like instrument exists today among mobilised citizens. The early twenty-first century is experiencing substantial and increasing levels of public awareness of many global problems and significant public desires to influence the rules and regulatory institutions that govern global issues. Witness the World Economic Forum, the World Social Forum, the Jubilee 2000 initiative, the Global Campaign against Poverty, expanding fair trade schemes, etc. Likewise, emergent talk of

‘global citizenship’, ‘global civil society’, and ‘global democracy’ – terminology that now also circulates beyond the pages of academic political theory – speaks of an atmosphere conducive to a GCSF initiative. Large and growing circles of people see their interests on a wide range of questions to be served (at least partly) by global public policies. These citizens wish to have input into global governance processes and often turn to civil society associations to provide it. Thus, while the contemporary context offers little prospect of creating directly elected global legislatures, the situation is reasonably ripe for innovation in respect of civil society instruments in global governance.

Another shift in political climate that bodes well for the development of a GCSF is the general turn in discourses of global governance away from the scarcely qualified neoliberalism that prevailed until the mid-1990s. The political centre has in the early twenty-first century moved towards ‘Post-Washington Consensus’ ideas that prescribe what might be termed a ‘global social market’. This policy paradigm of ‘socially responsible globalisation’ shows considerable sympathy towards civil society involvement in governance processes. No longer does the dominant discourse suggest that globalisation can proceed to best effect through unregulated market forces. Rather, prevailing arguments maintain that global markets need strong institutional frameworks and proactive public policy interventions to prevent or correct the harmful social and environmental consequences of untrammelled capitalism. In a global social market approach, civil society serves important functions of both service delivery and input to policy consultation. The latter role is expressed in various developments such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process, civil society seats on the board of the Global Fund, and a proliferation of civil society liaison offices in global governance institutions. The GCSF would represent an extension of such initiatives.

One significant omission in global social market approaches that the developers of a successful GCSF would need to repair concerns intercultural relations. Although the Post-Washington Consensus is amenable to civil society engagement of global governance, the paradigm tends to assume that civil society activity is ipso facto modern

and western-oriented in character. Yet plainly much collective action on global issues arises in and from a host of diverse cultural contexts. If the GCSF is to be available to all voices in an emergent global polity that meet its baseline code of conduct, then the Forum board, coordinators, staff and participants must give high priority to cultivating intercultural recognition, communication and negotiation.

The turn from neoliberalism to a global social market model of regulating global affairs has not come without political struggle. Moreover, governing elites remain under sustained pressure from a host of quarters to raise the benefits and reduce the damages of globalisation and/or to distribute the gains and harms more equitably. Currently prevailing arrangements to govern global relations generally suffer from severe legitimacy deficits, derived in good part from very shaky democratic credentials. The upsurge of so-called 'anti-globalisation' resistance since 1999 has made elites more amenable to initiatives that could quiet citizen unrest. Promoters of a GCSF could therefore play on crisis sentiments in governing circles, arguing that a major new mechanism for civil society consultation could provide an important political safety valve and a boost to the legitimacy of global governance. At the same time, official circles would need to understand that the mere creation of a GCandociety ca the same150uitTc 0.1502nTw 17.

politics if promoters of the Forum did not carefully cultivate the support of governments in those countries.

It would also be important to keep major global commercial actors on board – or at least neutral towards – the GCSF project. Corporate endorsement of the initiative would be broadly in keeping with the currently popular ethos of CSR. However, as with powerful states, those constructing a GCSF would need to take considerable care not to alienate big capital. Opposition from major global companies would not only weaken the GCSF project in general, but it would also undermine the Forum's important potential to advance cross-sectoral dialogue between business associations and other parts of civil society.

Alongside governments and corporations it would be important for the success of a GCSF to nurture substantial, sympathetic and non-sensationalised mass media coverage of Forum operations. Widespread engaging and serious reporting of the GCSF in press and broadcast organs would be crucial if the Forum is to realise its potential contributions to public education about and public debate on global governance. Low levels of media coverage or high levels of bad press could deeply undermine the GCSF project. Hence the institutional structure of the GCSF described earlier included a dedicated, talented and well-resourced communications team.

Another crucial aspect of the general political climate that GCSF creators must address is the availability of philanthropic foundations and official donors that might substantially finance the early development of the project. Unlike several decades ago, considerable grants are today available for civil society engagement of global governance questions. These funds could be tapped until the GCSF accumulated sufficient experience and confidence to secure eventual majority funding from direct taxation. Given the sometimes fickle character of donor priorities, a particular challenge would be to sustain the interest of sponsors over the 15-20 years that it would be required for the GCSF to acquire firm

Needless to say, none of the contemporary historical circumstances that favour the creation of a GCSF will be effectively tapped in the absence of dedicated and visionary leadership of the initiative. To be successful the Forum would require a committed board whose members actively promote the project and recruit top-quality coordinators. It would be disastrous for the nascent GCSF to have a passive board of eminent persons who treat membership as no more than an honorific position. Likewise, the early coordinators of the GCSF would need to be hard-working inspirational leaders with a deep commitment to develop an important institution for the long term.

In sum, successful development of a GCSF would require a combination of:

- careful identification and encouragement of civil society demand for such a venue
- further strengthening of the global social market paradigm
- careful attention to the development of positive interculturality in the project
- cultivation of support in official circles, both national and multilateral
- cultivation of support from commercial circles, especially global capital
- systematic pursuit of a substantial quantity and good quality of media coverage
- committed, generous funders who respect the autonomy of the initiative
- dedicated and dynamic leadership

All of these conditions are in principle available in ample measure today. One may hope that activities such as the present Centre for Global Studies project can help to combine the mix of ingredients that ignites the current considerable potential for innovation.