

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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Introduction

Society has experienced greatly intensified globalisation since the middle of the twentieth century. Increased transplanetary connections among people have generated larger needs for rules and regulatory institutions to govern this more global world. Much of this new governance has come in the shape of expanded global-scale regimes of various kinds: multilateral agencies like the United Nations (UN); transgovernmental networks like the Group of Eight (G8) process; translocal collaborations like United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG); interregional arrangements like the Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM); private global regulatory mechanisms like corporate social responsibility schemes (CSR); and public-private hybrids like the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). As the extent and influence of global governance in these multiple guises has grown, so has pressure for greater citizen participation in and control over global policy processes.

Yet how can this citizen involvement be achieved, particularly in the absence of any realistic prospect that global regulatory bodies will in the foreseeable future obtain directly elected representative legislative assemblies? For large and growing numbers of citizens, policymakers and political theorists alike, the answer has been 'global civil society'. In their eyes, affected publics can engage global regulatory processes through voluntary associations of citizens that seek, from outside political parties, to shape the rules that govern one or the other aspect of global affairs.

Civil society activities have indeed become an increasingly more prominent feature of global politics since the 1980s. This citizen mobilisation in respect of global governance institutions has encompassed all manner of groups, including anti-poverty initiatives, business forums, clan and kinship unions, community associations, consumer advocates, environmental campaigns, ethnic lobbies, faith-based movements, human rights promoters, labour unions, peace advocates, peasant groups, philanthropic foundations, professional bodies, relief organisations, research institutes, women's networks, youth

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. Moreover, most global policymakers have been reluctant to engage with what seems in their eyes to be a diffuse swarm of often ill-defined and poorly accountable civil society activities. These officials have preferred to focus their relations with citizen associations on a restricted circle of well-known quantities, particularly major business lobbies and high-profile NGOs. Yet these better connected civil society organisations tend to draw on a narrow and privileged social base.

Such is the situation in 2006 after a quarter-century of intensified civil society engagement of global governance. The challenge before the Waterloo meeting on 18-19 October is to contemplate a future venue that would both improve the coordination of, and broaden the participation in, civil society inputs to global governance. This new mechanism for assembling civil society at large would advance both the technical performance and the democratic legitimacy of transplanetary regimes. At the same time the prospective framework would also enhance the competence and democratic credentials of participating civil society associations.

In addition to envisioning the shape of such a process, the Waterloo meeting is tasked to assess the conditions that need to exist in order to put the new instrument into place. After all, successful policy consists as much of implementation as formulation. A preset destination is rarely reached without a map. However appealing a vision might be, it will not progress beyond a vision if the inspiration is not linked to a course of practicable political action.

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 determined by the civil society participants themselves.

The Shape of a GCSF

The first part of this exercise in futurology sets out the general attributes of a Global Civil Society Forum as it might evolve by the mid-2010s. Six successive subsections below cover in turn: the aim and purpose of the instrument; its constituencies; its organisational arrangements; its modus operandi; its accountabilities; and its sources of legitimacy. The sketch is admittedly broad brush, leaving more detailed elaboration for a later date if the general model is judged to have merit.

Aim

The designation of this prospective framework of aggregation as a 'forum' is quite deliberate. In other words, the venue would serve as a site for assembly, exchange and debate. The GCSF would not be an instrument to formulate singular policy positions for the whole length and breadth of global civil society. Deliberations through the GCSF would certainly influence the policies of both the citizen associations and the governance

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 of contacts between global civil society associations and global governance institutions.

The GCSF thus also differs from the WEF and the WSF by having an explicit and specific function to provide channels of dialogue between citizens and global authorities. The GCSF exists to meet a need – affirmed widely in both civil society and global governance circles – for more systematic and inclusive mutual engagement. Hence when civil society actors assemble in the GCSF, they do so for the particular purpose of relating to one or several global regulatory mechanisms. Likewise, global governance institutions turn to the GCSF with the precise aim of disseminating information to and collecting inputs from civil society groups.

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 global affairs, including by business associations and by social movements as well as by NGOs.

This openness of civil society participation in the GCSF is qualified by two important conditions. The first qualification is that all associations who participate in GCSF activities must endorse and adhere to the Forum’s code of conduct. This statement of principles and practices was formulated through a broad consultation during the process of creating the GCSF and draws upon the accumulated experience of various frameworks of civil society self-regulation from around the world. Compliance with the standards

(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 circles.

The second qualification to open civil society participation in the GCSF follows on from the preceding remark, namely, that the Forum takes proactive steps to ensure a hearing for voices that tend otherwise to be excluded. After all, in civil society as elsewhere, purportedly ‘free’ markets invariably favour the strong. All too often global civil society engagement of global governance has manifested arbitrary hierarchies of opportunity that mirror structural inequalities within society at large, *inter alia* along lines of dominant and dominated regions, cultures, classes, genders, races, (dis)abilities, sexualities, ages, and urban/rural divisions. In recognition of these tendencies towards skewed access, another unit within the GCSF secretariat keeps the contours of civil society participation in Forum activities under systematic review. When this monitoring reveals that certain constituencies are consistently absent from or peripheral to a given dialogue where they have a prima facie stake, the GCSF offices overtly encourage greater involvement of the marginalised circles.

All of the above said, the GCSF does not claim or seek to be either exhaustive in its coverage of civil society or exclusive in its access to global regulatory institutions. Both

the creators and the subsequent organisers of the Forum have recognised and respected that some citizen groups prefer to pursue their relations (or indeed non-engagement) with global authorities through other venues. Likewise, it is understood that global governance agencies may wish also or instead to connect with global civil society outside the GCSF framework. The GCSF therefore rises or falls on its track record of delivery for the parties who choose to use it. The better the GCSF performs the more participation it attracts.

Institutional Structure

In keeping with its premium on openness and flexibility, the GCSF does not have a highly prescriptive constitution. In addition to a short statement of purpose, the Forum's founding document outlines a limited organisational structure comprised of three channels of engagement (for business associations, NGOs and social movements), a modest secretariat, and an overseeing board.

Channels

The GCSF structures its dialogues between civil society and global governance agencies through three streams, related respectively to business, NGOs, and social movements. The business channel assembles institutions such as chambers of commerce, industrial organisations, forums of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), associations of cooperatives, and other bodies that group market actors. The NGO channel encompasses consumer unions, development promotion bodies, environmental lobbies, human rights campaigners, humanitarian relief organisations, and other professional advocacy associations. The social movement channel provides a venue for popular mobilisations around issues such as peace and disarmament, employment conditions, land tenure, racial equality, poverty eradication, religious faith, animal rights, and so on.

The GCSF adopts this three-pronged approach in recognition of the highly diverse agendas and modus operandi that distinguish the different sectors of civil society. It would be artificial and impractical to compress the full range of civil society onto a single

platform that simultaneously included the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and the Assembly of the Poor in Thailand. Better that each of the broad categories of business forums, NGOs and social movements is accorded its own venue, so that all groups feel that they have a place that is more appropriate to their styles and aspirations.

Given that lines separating the three headings are not always clear cut, participating civil society associations self-select their preferred channel of engagement. So long as the group in question complies with the GCSF code of conduct, other civil society participants and the Forum staff may not deny an association entry to its chosen channel.

When accessing the GCSF, a global governance agency undertakes to engage all three channels in serious dialogue. The GCSF thereby seeks to counter past tendencies on the part of many global policymakers to focus their interchanges on a limited area of civil society, usually a sector with which they felt most comfortable. The GCSF structure seeks to ensure that global authorities hear a wider range of voices. At the same time, by bringing business, NGOs and social movements to the same venue, the different sectors of civil society become more acquainted with, and learn more from, one another.

In fact, engagement with the GCSF apparatus has inspired the creation of several cross-sectoral working groups, for example, regarding climate change and concerning intellectual property. These informal self-generating consultative processes have emerged as business, NGO and social movement associations have seen benefit in learning more about and from each other over a given issue. However, these ad hoc gatherings convene outside the GCSF framework, which is committed to remaining a tightly focused facilitating mechanism and resists moves towards bureaucratic expansion.

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.

Board

The governing board of the GCSF sets and reviews general policy guidelines for the Forum. The board also appoints the general and regional coordinators. The coordinators, through the executive committee, submit an annual report of GCSF activities to the board for its approval.

The twenty-one members of the GCSF board are drawn in equal measure from business, NGOs and social movements. Each of the seven regions elects one member from each of the three principal GCSF constituencies. Board members serve a three-year term, with the possibility of one successive renewal. Return to the board after a period off is permitted.

Elections for all twenty-one GCSF board seats are held simultaneously and conducted online. The electorate is composed of civil society associations who have participated in GCSF dialogues during the preceding three-year period. Each association has one vote within a given regional election. An association that has been active in the GCSF across more than one region may vote in all of the relevant board elections. The coexistence of the three channels, together with the multiple regional constituencies and the term limits, ensure that the GCSF board is not and will not become a narrowly based clique.

Operations

As indicated earlier, the GCSF mechanism is demand-driven. Thus the parties come to the Forum as and when they see advantage in doing so, rather than on any predetermined schedule. Certain interchanges have with time become fairly predictable in the yearly calendar, such as dialogues around the G8 summit, the UN General Assembly, and the Annual and Spring Meetings of the Bretton Woods institutions. Other GCSF-sponsored exchanges occur on an ad hoc basis, for example, around a special conference or a key policy consultation. In general this demand-driven approach generates fairly even levels of GCSF activity throughout the year.

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.

The GCSF has an operational budget to cover secretariat activities, including substantial interpreting and translation costs. In addition, a trust fund is available to enable participation in GCSF dialogues by poorly resourced civil society associations who would not otherwise be able to attend. Global governance agencies and better resourced civil society bodies finance their own participation in GCSF activities.

Contributions to the GCSF budget come from three main sources. Institutional donors, mainly philanthropic foundations and official bilateral and regional agencies, provide 60 per cent of the funds. No single institutional donor is permitted to contribute more than ten per cent of the total budget. Modest user fees charged to participating global governance agencies provide another 20 per cent of the budget. The remaining 20 per cent comes from individual citizen contributions. This diversification of funding sources assures the autonomy of the GCSF. It is hoped in time to replace the institutional

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

Accountability

As well as being a venue for the exchange of information and perspectives, the GCSF can in practice also serve as a mechanism to enhance the public accountability of the parties who participate in its proceedings. In respect of global governance agencies, for example, GCSF dialogues provide a context in which civil society associations can hold global authorities answerable for their actions and omissions. Citizen groups can use GCSF-sponsored meetings both to applaud good work of global governance bodies and to lay charges and pursue compensations for mistakes. In this way the GCSF can enhance the legitimacy of global regulatory processes.

In addition, the GCSF through its code of conduct contributes to greater public accountability of civil society involvement in global governance. Compliance with the code, as monitored through the GCSF secretariat, gives the citizen associations an important badge of credibility. Conversely, exclusion from the GCSF owing to transgressions of the code tends to push offending organisations to the margins of global politics and encourages them to correct malpractices.

Yet, given that the GCSF has these important powers of legitimation and delegitimation vis-à-vis both global governance institutions and civil society associations, it is crucial also to ensure the accountability of the Forum itself. The GCSF, too, must be answerable for the errors that it might commit and the damages that it might cause. The GCSF, too, must redress its mistakes with appropriate apologies, policy changes, resignations and/or reparations.

To whom is the GCSF accountable? Four broad sets of external stakeholders can be distinguished: civil society clients; global governance clients; funders; and the wider publics who are meant ultimately to benefit from civil society-global governance interchanges through the Forum. In addition, the GCSF also owes 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 to the satisfaction of the client regulators, then they will stay away. GCSF accountability to global authorities also has a financial dimension through the user fees that those clients pay. Thus global governance institutions can 'punish' poor GCSF performance with a loss of revenues through non-use of the venue.

The GCSF's accountability to donors is chiefly realised through the financial and other reporting procedures that those funders prescribe. Even more than in the case of global governance agencies, the power of the purse enables these stakeholders to signal displeasure with the Forum by withdrawing funds. However, as noted earlier, special care is taken to ensure that the GCSF does not operate at the behest of donors, as no single source of monies is permitted to contribute more than ten per cent of the GCSF operating budget.

The GCSF's accountability to wider publics is obtained largely through mass communications. The Forum opens itself to scrutiny by citizens at large with a published annual report, a detailed and continually updated website, regular press releases, and other public communications such as talks to interested groups by GCSF coordinators. As

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. Many in both civil society and official circles perceive that the GCSF has contributed to improved global regulation of labour abuses, pandemics, natural resource depletion, and other public policy challenges. Moreover, GCSF measures to counter arbitrary hierarchies of access to global governance are widely applauded as a contribution to global social justice.

With regard to legality the GCSF has gained wide respect and authority as more and more global governance institutions accord it formal status in their official operational guidelines. Several global regulatory bodies have even considered an amendment to their constitutional document in order legally to enshrine the role of the GCSF in their policymaking processes.

With regard to personality the GCSF owes some of its legitimacy to the popular appeal of certain leading figures who have played pivotal roles in its creation and subsequent operation. The commitment and inspiration of these activists has figured importantly in generating and sustaining media and wider public interest in the GCSF. Charismatic leadership has also helped to draw civil society and global governance participants to the GCSF, as well as to attract and retain high-quality GCSF staff.

With these diverse sources of legitimacy the GCSF has acquired quite firm political foundations to support its activities. That said, the status of the GCSF is by no means totally secure as of the mid-2010s. The reinforcement and growth of GCSF legitimacy is

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 GCSF-like instrument would be insufficient to reduce the political pressure. GCSF-sponsored dialogues would need to be seen also to deliver substantive policy outputs. CSOs must regard the GCSF as offering meaningful influence in global governance. An unresponsive GCSF could in fact backfire on official circles and increase citizen discontents.

Even if prevailing public policy discourses have shifted in favour of civil society interchanges with global governance institutions, some in official circles will likely remain reluctant to promote such dialogues. For example, one might anticipate considerable scepticism about, if not outright opposition to, a GCSF from governments who regard direct engagement of global governance by citizen groups in their countries as an infringement of state sovereignty. Promoters of a GCSF would need to take care not to alienate states, in particular powerful states that could scupper the project. Moreover, the GCSF could fail in its ambition to increase the voice of marginalised regions in global

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 roots and independent funding.

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.