Jan Aart Scholte

Civil Society and Democratically Accountable Global Governance

IN A DEMOCRACY, GOVERNORS ARE ANSWERABLE TO THE GOVERNED for their actions and omissions. When democratic authorities perform well, they warrant their public's support. However, when they err, rulers owe affected citizens apologies, explanations, compensations and possible resignations. When the damage of misguided governance is particularly severe, the public in a democracy may remove the responsible persons from office or even shut down the agency in question. In this way democracy is a continual correction of mistakes.

Unfortunately, little democratic accountability has operated in respect of contemporary global governance arrangements. The past 150 years have seen an unprecedented proliferation and growth of suprastate laws and institutions with transplanetary coverage. However, these regulatory instruments have included only weak, if any, formal accountability mechanisms. The leaderships of the organizations have not been subject to direct popular election. Nor has any global governance institution had a democratically appointed legislative arm. Citizens have in most cases been unable to take global authorities to court for redress. Most global governance arrangements have also lacked ombudspersons and formal external policy evaluation mechanisms, though the Bretton Woods institutions have over the past decade taken some modest steps in this respect.

True, a notional accountability chain does connect voters via national parliaments and national governments to global governance organizations, but the links have in practice been very weak. National political parties have rarely addressed global governance issues with any prominence in election manifestos and debates. A few exceptions aside, national parliaments have exercised only occasional and mild if any oversight over most suprastate regulatory bodies. In addition, many disillusioned citizens have concluded that the very system of

Published by Blackwell Publishing, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA.

parliamentary politics does not offer adequate channels to make their democratic voice heard, as reflected in low voter turnouts and widespread cynicism about professional politicians. In any case, relationships between national governments and global governance agencies have mainly flowed through unelected technocrats who lack any direct connection with citizens. Moreover, governments have on the whole intervened with global governance institutions only in respect of broad policy lines, leaving the suprastate bodies considerable unchecked prerogative in operational activities. In short, then, the conventional statist formula of democratic accountability does not suffice in relation to present-day expanded global governance.

In this unhappy situation, some citizens have looked to civil society activity as a way to obtain greater democratic accountability from United Nations (UN) agencies, multilateral financial institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and various private global regulatory arrangements that have emerged in recent decades. The hope and expectation is that civil society associations – like business forums, community organizations, faith-based groups, labour unions, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), professional bodies, think tanks and more – could bring greater public control to global governance.

This article explores these possibilities in three main steps. The first section below reviews the growth of civil society engagement of global governance. The second part elaborates on four general ways that civil society associations have promoted increased accountability in global governance. The third section identifies six broad circumstances that have affected (and often limited) the extent of civil society achievements in this area. That six-fold diagnosis can, in the conclusion of the article, suggest ways to enhance the future contributions of civil society groups to global democracy.

The analysis presented here draws on eight years of observations of civil society involvement in an incipient global polity.[1] Much of that research has focused more particularly on civil society activities in respect of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the

[1] J. A. Scholte, 'Global Civil Society', in N. Woods (ed.), *The Political Economy of Globalization*, London, Macmillan, 2000, pp. 173–201; J. A. Scholte, 'Civil Society and Governance in the Global Polity', in M. Ougaard and R. A. Higgott (eds), *Towards a Global Polity*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 145–65; J. A. Scholte, 'Civil Society and Democracy in Global Governance', *Global Governance*, 8: 3 (2002), pp. 281–304.

broader governance of global finance.[2] More recently, discussions with some 350 civil society actors in seven countries across the world have included considerable attention to issues of accountability in global governance.[3]

These various investigations have suggested that civil society associations do indeed offer significant possibilities to increase democratic accountability in global regulatory arrangements. This is especially important since, as noted above, other accountability mechanisms for global governance are at present so weak and unlikely to improve substantially in the short and medium term. This is not to say that all civil society activities inherently and automatically enhance democratic accountability in global regimes. Nor is it to suggest that civil society initiatives are the only or a complete way to make global authorities more answerable to their publics. But it is to affirm that civil society contributions in this regard are considerable and worth fostering further.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

This is not the place for lengthy ponderings on definitions of civil society.[4] Suffice to say that the term has historically carried multiple and sometimes blatantly contradictory meanings. Thus current usages by, say, the CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation and the World Bank diverge considerably from Lockean, Kantian, Hegelian and Gramscian formulations. The issue is not to determine a definitive definition, but rather to craft a concept of civil society that is intellectually and politically relevant to the context at hand.

[2] R. J. O'Brien, A. M. Goetz, J. A. Scholte and M. A. Williams, *Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, ch. 5; J. A. Scholte, *Civil Society Voices and the International Monetary Fund*, Ottawa, North-South Institute, 2002; J. A. Scholte with A. Schnabel (eds), *Civil Society and Global Finance*, London, Routledge, 2002. See also J. A. Scholte, 'The WTO and Civil Society', in B. Hocking and S. McGuire (eds), *Trade Politics: International, Domestic and Regional Perspectives*, 2nd edn, London, Routledge, 2003, pp. 146–61.

[3] J. A. Scholte, *Democratizing the Global Economy: The Role of Civil Society*, Coventry, Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation, 2003.

[4] Cf. J. L. Cohen and A. Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1992.

In relation to contemporary world politics, civil society might be conceived as a political space where voluntary associations seek, from outside political parties, to shape the rules that govern one or the other aspect of social life. Civil society groups bring citizens together non-coercively in deliberate attempts to mould the formal laws and informal norms that regulate social interaction. Although in practice civil society arenas cannot be wholly separated from official and commercial spheres, veritable civil society associations do not pursue for themselves public office or pecuniary gain.

Given their aim to influence social rules, civil society activities unfold in close relation to a governance apparatus. In earlier times, governance effectively came down to government, and civil society organizations operated almost entirely in relation to the state. However, today's world exhibits more polycentric governance, where substate (local and provincial) and suprastate (regional and global) agencies exist alongside – and with some autonomy from – national states. Civil society associations have therefore predictably redirected some of their attention from states to other sites of governance, including global regulatory institutions.

Civil society engagement of global governance is now part of the daily fare of politics.[5] For example, so-called 'anti-globalization' protests have railed against the IMF, World Bank and WTO, while many business forums and think tanks have suggested milder reforms of the global economic architecture. Human rights advocates have campaigned for a permanent International Criminal Court. Peace groups have pushed for enhanced global regimes of arms control and conflict management. Women's associations have promoted increased gender sensitivity across the whole of global governance. Environmental movements have argued for tighter global regulation

[5] Cf. T. G. Weiss and L. Gordenker (eds), *NGOs, the UN, and Global Governance*, Boulder, CO, Rienner, 1996; P. Willetts (ed.), *'Conscience of the World': The Influence of Non-Governmental Organisations in the UN System*, Washington, DC, Brookings Institution, 1996; J. A. Fox and L. D. Brown (eds), *The Struggle for Accountability: The World Bank, NGOs and Grassroots Movements*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1998; J. W. Foster with A. Anand (eds), *Whose World Is It Anyway? Civil Society, the United Nations and the Multilateral Future*, Ottawa, United Nations Association in Canada, 1999; O'Brien et al., *Contesting Global Governance*, op. cit.; A. M. Florini (ed.), *The Third Force: The Rise of Transnational Civil Society*, Washington, DC, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000; M. Edwards and J. Gaventa (eds), *Global Citizen Action*, Boulder, CO, Rienner, 2001; *Global Civil Society Yearbook*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001–3.

of various ecological conditions. Trade unions have urged greater adherence to global labour standards. Health and development groups have called for more effective global arrangements in respect of transworld diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria. Other NGOs have espoused revisions in the global communications regime so as to bring greater digital inclusion and media diversity across the world. Networks of religious revivalists have pressed for spiritual renewal in the global order. Still other civil society organizations have addressed global governance arrangements in respect of children, consumer protection, corruption, cultural preservation, education, food security, humanitarian relief, intellectual property, migration, refugees, sports, tourism and more.

Most global governance agencies have now devised mechanisms of one kind or another to engage (at least to some extent) with these initiatives from civil society associations. Most global regulatory institutions have developed elaborate websites and upgraded other public communications to address civil society audiences. Most have also increased their release of information to civil society circles in the name of 'transparency'. Most have made arrangements to include civil society groups in their conferences and workshops. Many have arranged briefings and other events specifically for civil society organizations. Many have appointed civil society liaison officers who regularly attend civil society venues. Many have adopted formal guidelines for staff engagement with civil society organizations.[6] Some have set up civil society advisory bodies and have formalized civil society involvement in their policy-making processes.

Thus, for example, the IMF circulates a quarterly *Civil Society Newsletter* to well over 1,000 recipients. The World Bank maintains publicly accessible information centres in many of its resident missions across the planet. Each UN global summit (Beijing, Cairo, Johannesburg, Monterrey, etc.) includes a parallel civil society forum. The Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS) serves

[6] Cf. S. Cleary, *A Handbook for Working with Civil Society*, New York, United Nations Development Programme, 1996; United Nations General Assembly, 'Arrangements and Practices for the Interaction of Non-Governmental Organizations in All Activities of the United Nations System. Report of the Secretary-General', Doc. A/53/170, 10 July 1998; World Bank, *Consultations with Civil Society Organizations: General Guidelines for World Bank Staff*, Washington, DC, World Bank, 2000; IMF, 'Guide for Staff Relations with Civil Society Organizations', 2003 (at www.imf.org).

sixteen global governance institutions in the UN family. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has involved representatives of trade unions and employers' associations in its Assembly for over 80 years, while in June 2003 the Director-General of the WTO established an Informal NGO Advisory Body.[7] At the same time the UN Secretary-General convened a Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations Relations with Civil Society to propose improvements in this area.[8] Today it is a rare global governance agency that, like the Bank for International Settlements, has given no significant attention to relations with civil society associations. Even the privately run Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) has maintained discussions with civil society groups such as Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR).[9]

To be sure, these arrangements by global governance bodies have had various shortcomings. Most of the measures for civil society liaison are quite new, and most global civil servants are inexperienced in executing them. On the whole, transworld regulatory institutions have so far treated contacts with civil society associations as a secondary priority, and inputs from these citizen groups have not been fully integrated into policy processes. In general global governance agencies have tended to reach mainly Northern, urban, elite, English-speaking civil society professionals, failing to engage wider (and often more marginalized) constituencies. And clumsy handling of exchanges with civil society organizations has sometimes unhelpfully disrupted relations between global governance bodies and their member governments.

Nevertheless, transworld governance agencies have in recent years increasingly taken proactive steps to engage with civil society associations, recognizing that these relationships can yield important gains. For example, civil society organizations can serve as significant agents of public education, countering widespread ignorance about global governance. In addition, inputs from civil society groups can bring helpful information and insights to policy processes, including data

[7] Author's communications with Ricardo Meléndez-Ortiz, Executive Director of the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development and Hans-Peter Werner, External Relations Officer of the WTO, June 2003.

[8] *UN News*, 3 June 2003, at www.globalpolicy.org/ngos/int/un/access/2003/0604panel.htm.

[9] See www.cpsr.org.

and perspectives that are missing in official circles. Discussions with civil society bodies can also provide global governance agencies with an important gauge of the political viability of existing and contemplated policy measures. And, so many people presume, well-conducted relationships with civil society associations could enhance the democratic legitimacy of global governance arrangements with increased public participation and public accountability.

CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTIONS TO ACCOUNTABLE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

On many occasions civil society associations have indeed made global authorities more publicly answerable for their projects, programmes and overall policy approaches. Civil society organizations have elicited this greater accountability in four main ways: by increasing the public transparency of global governance operations; by monitoring and reviewing global policies; by seeking redress for mistakes and harms attributable to global regulatory bodies; and by advancing the creation of formal accountability mechanisms for global governance. Examples of important contributions can be cited under each of these four headings. That said, the overall achievements of civil society advocacy in furthering the democratic accountability of global governance have remained relatively modest to date. There is much potential – and need – to do more in this area.

Transparency

It is well-nigh impossible to hold governors to account if their governance is invisible to constituents. If regulatory operations are to be subject to effective public scrutiny, then they must be open to public view. Citizens need to be aware who is governing them, towards what objectives, with what decisions, by what processes and using what resources. Only then can people have adequate grounds to judge the performance of the rules and rulers that govern them. Public transparency is therefore a crucial precondition for effective democratic accountability.

A number of civil society associations have provided a significant democratic service by pressing global governance agencies to

undertake greater public disclosure about their work. For example, civil society activists have urged the institutions to increase their public visibility with brochures, annual reports, websites, exhibitions, speeches, media appearances, etc. In addition, certain civil society associations have campaigned for the governing bodies to release key policy and project documents, so that citizens can better analyse circumstances and choices for themselves.

For example, in 1997 pressure from the Brazil Network on Multilateral Financial Institutions (Rede Brasil) ensured that the World Bank's Country Assistance Strategy for Brazil was published and also translated into Portuguese.[10] The following year civil society organizations in Canada and France made public the previously secret text of a Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) that was being negotiated through the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).[11] Also thanks largely to pressure from civil society groups, the Paris Club (an intergovernmental forum to regulate problems related to bilateral debts) opened a public website in 2001.[12] Before the Quebec Summit of the Americas civil society groups, led by the Hemispheric Social Alliance (HSA), pursued a yearlong 'liberate the text' campaign, which insisted that authorities should publish the negotiating document for the Free Trade of the Americas Agreement (FTAA) so that the terms would be open for public discussion. Governments finally relented just prior to the conference in April 2001. Other associations like the Toronto-based Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) have pressed globally operating firms to disclose more, and more readily comprehensible, information about their product sourcing and labour practices.

As the MSN example illustrates, civil society groups have sometimes also stressed the need for *effective* transparency. It is one thing to release information into the public domain; it is another to make that information understandable to all affected people. So some civil

[10] M. Chiriboga, 'Latin American NGOs and the IFIs: The Quest for a South-Determined Agenda', in Scholte with Schnabel, *Civil Society and Global Finance*, op. cit., pp. 35–6; author's interviews with civil society practitioners in Brazil, January 2002.

[11] E. Smythe, 'State Authority and Investment Security: Nonstate Actors and the Negotiation of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment at the OECD', in R. A. Higgott et al. (eds), *Nonstate Actors and Authority in the Global System*, London, Routledge, 2000, pp. 74–90.

[12] www.clubdeparis.org/en/index.php.

society advocates have urged global governance agencies to make themselves truly visible to laypersons. For example, budgets need to be presented in ways that are easily followed. Published statements about policies need to be free of technical terms, obscure acronyms, professional jargon and other specialized vocabulary that can both confuse and alienate the general public. These civil society groups have argued that documents should be translated into the relevant languages and that hard copies need to be made available for people who lack internet access. In other words, various civil society associations have pressed that 'transparency' should go beyond rhetoric and lip service to be democratically meaningful.

Policy Monitoring and Review

Once policy practices are publicly visible, civil society associations are in a position to advance democratic accountability in global governance through watchdog and evaluation activities. For example, advocates can check to see that authorities comply with their constitutions, official resolutions and public declarations. In this vein a global civil society network called Social Watch has since 1995 tracked progress (or otherwise) towards reaching the goals of UN summits on poverty eradication and gender equality.[13] Across the world, human rights groups have monitored governments' compliance with UN human rights conventions, sometimes submitting to UN commissions parallel reports that challenge official accounts of the situation in the country.

In addition, civil society organizations have undertaken countless studies to document the consequences of various global governance policies. A number of these investigations have uncovered shortfall, error, incompetence and harm. For instance, in the late 1990s hundreds of civil society associations joined with the World Bank in a Structural Adjustment Policy Review Initiative (SAPRI) to assess the effects of macroeconomic reforms in eight countries.[14] Research by civil society groups in many countries has also put a critical spotlight on the previously little-questioned Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement of the WTO. Civil society advocates

[13] www.socwatch.org.uy.
[14] www.saprin.org/.

across the world have exposed detrimental consumer, labour and environmental practices of under-regulated global businesses. Studies by women's organizations have highlighted gender implications of various global governance arrangements that the authorities themselves have tended to overlook. Likewise, civil society investigations have documented country, class, race, age and other social inequalities that global regimes have often inadequately addressed or even compounded.

Civil society associations have in addition alerted the public to ethical lapses in the operations of global governance. For example, the Uganda Debt Network has monitored the government's Poverty Action Fund to watch that officials do not misuse IMF/World Bank debt relief monies that have been earmarked for primary education, sanitation, etc.[15] Another civil society initiative, Global Forest Watch, has since 1997 tracked illegal logging and its impacts on local populations in ten countries across the world, thereby performing a monitoring function that some governments have neglected.[16]

Pursuit of Redress

Civil society organizations have also provided channels through which citizens – in principle from any country, culture or social sector – can seek the correction of mistakes in global governance. In this regard civil society groups have pressed to have rules changed, officials replaced, institutions reconstructed and reparations paid. The associations concerned have taken grievances about global governance to auditors, ombudspersons, parliaments, courts and the mass media. For instance, groups in the global black people's movement have pursued reparations for historical crimes of colonialism against people of colour. This issue figured prominently in the NGO Forum at the UN's World Conference on Racism in Durban in 2001. Géledes, a black women's association in São Paulo, has prepared a case on this matter to present before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

[15] www.udn.or.ug/; author interviews in Uganda, November 2001 and August–September 2003.

[16] www.globalforestwatch.org/.

In addition, certain civil society activists have staged symbolic public 'trials' with informal 'tribunals' as a way to call global governance authorities to task. For example, the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT), created in 1979 by the Lelio Basso International Foundation, has publicly examined various cases against global corporations, the IMF and the World Bank.[17] Similarly, an International People's Tribunal on Debt was held at the 2002 World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre.

As well as such largely symbolic exercises, civil society groups have in some cases helped to exact corrective actions from global governance agencies. For example, NGOs have halted several World Bank-funded dam constructions or obtained better compensation arrangements for people adversely affected by these projects.[18] In addition, pressure from advocacy groups has on different occasions elicited measures to compensate vulnerable circles for, say, the removal of subsidies in IMF-supported macroeconomic reforms.

Promoting Formal Accountability Mechanisms

Civil society associations have also sought to improve democratic accountability in global governance by urging the creation and use of formal mechanisms to monitor and control the agencies concerned. In this vein a number of civil society organizations have urged local, national and regional elected assemblies to undertake more scrutiny of global governance institutions. For example, in response to a campaign from some 40 civil society groups, the French government has since 1999 submitted a publicly available annual report on its activities in the Bretton Woods institutions to the National Assembly in Paris.

Certain civil society activists have also campaigned for the establishment of official policy assessment mechanisms for global governance institutions. For instance, pressure from civil society groups

[17] www.grisnet.it/fib/tribu%20eng.html; 'When People Judge: The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal', *Corporate Watch*, 11 (Summer 2000).

[18] L. Udall, 'The World Bank and Public Accountability: Has Anything Changed?', in Fox and Brown, *The Struggle for Accountability*, op. cit., pp. 391–436; S. Khagram, 'Toward Democratic Governance for Sustainable Development: Transnational Civil Society Organizing around Big Dams', in Florini, *The Third Force*, op. cit., pp. 83–114.

was instrumental in the creation of an Inspection Panel for the World Bank in 1994 and an Independent Evaluation Unit for the IMF in 2001.[19] Subsequently a number of civil society associations have also actively monitored and contributed inputs to these review mechanisms. In addition, civil society associations in many if not most countries across the world have promoted ideas and practices of corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a voluntary accountability regime for companies, in particular those that operate globally. The many civil society groups that have promoted CSR schemes include the Instituto Ethos in Brazil, the Conference Board of Canada, the Forum for Responsible Investment in France, and the Social Venture Network in Thailand.

In short, various civil society efforts have sought to advance democratic accountability in global governance, at a time when few other actors have concertedly pursued this goal. Civil society associations have highlighted and righted some wrongs as a result. However, much more could and should still be done on each of the four lines just reviewed. An important step in building more democratic global governance is therefore to encourage further civil society activities in the area of accountability promotion.

CHALLENGES

At least six general issues need to be addressed if civil society associations are more fully to realize their potentials as promoters of democratic accountability in global governance. These challenges concern resources, networking, official attitudes, the mass media, political culture and the democratic accountability of civil society organizations themselves. Depending on how they play out in particular contexts, these six influences can either create significant opportunities or present formidable difficulties for the democratization of global governance through civil society actions.

[19] Fox and Brown, *The Struggle for Accountability*, op. cit.; A. Wood and C. Welch, *Policing and Policemen: The Case for an Independent Evaluation Mechanism for the IMF*, London and Washington, DC, Bretton Woods Project and Friends of the Earth–US, 1998.

Resources

Accountability promotion requires resources. Research and advocacy on global governance cannot be accomplished without funds, staff, premises, equipment and supplies. In the words of an activist who has taken the cause of Toronto's urban poor to the United Nations, 'to build democracy you need time, space and resources, but we often have none of these'.[20]

Transworld civil society advocacy in particular demands significant means. True, global internet communications have become relatively inexpensive for many associations, but other groups (especially in marginalized parts of world society) lack computers or face high user charges. Meanwhile air travel, conference calls and translation services remain costly for all. Thus intensive transworld activism – which is often necessary to address issues of global governance effectively – is generally only available to well-endowed organizations. As one community activist in eastern Uganda has noted, 'It is hard for a rural woman to go to the global village.'[21]

Some civil society groups that address global governance matters have enjoyed relatively ample resources and therefore greater possibilities to extract accountability from the agencies concerned. These fortunate bodies include certain think tanks like the Brookings Institution, business associations like the World Economic Forum (WEF), NGOs like Oxfam, and faith-based organizations like the Roman Catholic Church. Regrettably, if predictably, the better endowed civil society associations have resided mainly in privileged quarters of world society: Northern countries, professional classes, English speakers, etc.

However, the exceptions highlight the rule that most civil society engagement of global governance has occurred on a shoestring. The great majority of community associations, NGOs, religious groups and trade unions have operated with small budgets and limited long-term financial security. Even some business forums (especially among small entrepreneurs) and think tanks (especially in the South) have led a precarious existence. These organizations have

[20] Josephine Grey, Low Income Families Together, during a discussion with the author in Toronto, May 2002.

[21] Zainab Wambedde, Mental Health Uganda, during a discussion with the author in Mbale, September 2003.

had only a few staff specifically dedicated to global governance issues and have often relied heavily on voluntary and low-paid labour. Exacerbating these resource difficulties, most civil society associations that deal with global governance issues are relatively young. Having been newly established in the past two decades, if not the last few years, these groups have as yet had little time to build up assets or institutional experience. And lots do not survive. Indeed, in many parts of the world a substantial proportion of registered civil society organizations are moribund.

Of course, the provision of adequate resources for civil society activities is by itself no guarantee of enhanced democratic accountability in global governance. Indeed, eagerness to obtain funds has led some civil society associations to compromise their autonomy. These co-opted organizations become voices of – rather than watchdogs over – official agencies, political parties and powerful individuals in global governance. However, dubious politics around some resource provision to civil society groups does not alter the fact that adequate resources are a precondition for effective accountability initiatives.

Networks

Resource shortages for civil society activity to further accountability in global governance can often be partly alleviated when associations collaborate in networks.[22] A civil society organization that is weak in isolation can become stronger through cooperation with other groups. For example, networking through Transparency International since 1993 has lent considerable added strength to dozens of national campaigns to increase openness and reduce corruption in the global economy.

Most civil society networking occurs among similar types of groups. Thus trade unions have cooperated with other trade unions, for instance, in the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the World Confederation of Labour (WCL). Likewise, human rights organizations have joined forces with each

[22] On civil society networks, see M. Keck and K. Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1998; S. Khagram, J. V. Riker and K. Sikkink (eds), *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

other in the International Federation of Human Rights (IFHR), consumer advocates have come together in Consumer International (CI), and so on.

However, accountability in global governance can also be promoted through networks that encompass several sectors of civil society. For example, NGOs, religious groups, trade unions and business forums have teamed up to advocate reconsideration of official policies on poor country debts. Cross-sectoral networks can be particularly helpful in strengthening the position of subordinated populations, for instance, when black movements combine efforts with women's movements. The World Social Forum, launched in 2001, has been particularly effective in this respect.

The WSF illustrates another especially fruitful form of civil society networking with respect to global governance matters, namely transborder cooperation among associations in different countries. In particular, South-North and South-South coalitions have often strengthened the position of weak civil society groups in poor countries. Thus local civil society actors in India had greater effect in demanding accountability from Union Carbide for the Bhopal disaster of 1984 when they collaborated with sympathizers across the world.

Of course civil society networks can be problematic. For one thing, effective networking requires resources that many associations do not have. In addition, networks often lack clearly established procedures to formulate and execute joint positions, so that collective decision-taking among the participating groups can be cumbersome and confused. Moreover, members of a civil society network invariably have to negotiate differences – sometimes quite considerable divergences – regarding priorities, analyses, strategies and tactics. Such negotiations can become all the more difficult in cross-sectoral and transborder advocacy networks, where cultural diversity may generate major communications difficulties. Indeed, in some contexts like contemporary Russia, collaborating with allies abroad has provoked governing circles and the general public to have considerable distrust of many NGOs. Furthermore, like any other political entity, civil society networks to one degree or another involve power hierarchies and internal power struggles that can undermine efforts at cooperation. However, civil society associations that successfully address the challenges of networking can greatly enhance their impacts on accountability in global governance.

Official Attitudes

In addition to how they connect with each other, the ability of civil society associations to promote democratic accountability in global governance also depends considerably on their relationships with ruling authorities. On the one hand, if global regulators are knowledgeable about civil society groups and eager to involve them in policy processes, then the chances that civil society activities can generate greater public accountability are much enhanced. On the other hand, if global regulators are ignorant about civil society organizations, averse to engage with them, and reluctant to allow them political space generally, then the prospects for democratization of global governance via voluntary collective citizen action are substantially weakened.

One significant indicator of official attitudes is the formal position that global governance institutions accord to civil society organizations. Depending on their nature, official rules of engagement can have either enabling or disabling effects for civil society activities. For example, the charters of the UN and the WTO specifically sanction relations with civil society bodies, while the constitutions of the IMF and the OECD lack such a provision. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has published guidelines for relations with civil society associations, while the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) has never even formally recognized the existence of interlocutors in civil society. The World Bank has created a number of joint committees with civil society practitioners, while the Group of Eight (G8) has never contemplated such a thing.

The ways that staff of global governance institutions apply the rules and procedures for interactions with civil society groups makes a difference, too. Unsympathetic officials have ignored, belittled or obstructed civil society efforts to bring greater accountability to global regimes. In these negative scenarios, authorities have treated contacts with civil society groups as a public relations exercise and have only sought views from sympathetic civil society actors. In contrast, other officials have seriously tried to expand space for all sorts of civil society inputs to global governance and to respond concretely to civil society critiques of global governance policies and processes. Positively inclined global authorities have taken multiple initiatives to maintain channels of communication with civil society groups and to publicize research and demands from civil society within the

global institution. To date, however, no global governance agency has systematically trained its professional staff in relations with civil society groups or made good performance in civil society liaison a significant criterion for staff evaluation and promotion.

Also important are the attitudes that states adopt towards civil society contacts with global governance bodies. Some governments have taken a relaxed position towards direct links (that is, bypassing the state) that civil society associations in their country might maintain with global regulatory institutions. However, other governments have opposed such relations as an attack on state sovereignty and have discouraged or actively blocked these relationships. A number of governments in the South have also objected when civil society groups (especially those based in or funded from the North) have lobbied for policies (e.g. on social and environmental clauses) that those governments underplay or reject.

Mass Media

Along with the approach of official circles, circumstances in the mass media have also significantly broadened or restricted the possibilities for civil society associations to bring greater accountability to global governance. When newspapers, magazines, radio, television, websites, CD-ROMs, etc. give considerable publicity to matters of global regulation, civil society campaigns for greater accountability can more readily attract a large and informed audience. However, if mass media communications mainly ignore global governance, publics are correspondingly less receptive to civil society initiatives on this subject, and the authorities feel less pressure to respond.

In addition to the quantity of attention, the quality of mass media coverage of global governance also makes a difference to civil society work. In positive situations, the press offers clear, detailed, probing and nuanced reporting on global regimes, and civil society associations can build on sound public understanding to pursue demands for accountability. In many other contexts, however, mass media treatments of global governance are muddled, careless, superficial and sensationalized. On these occasions the mass media are sooner a hindrance than a help to serious civil society campaigns. Moreover, mass media reporting about global governance has sometimes lacked a sharp critical edge that would enhance civil society efforts to

promote public accountability. Indeed, much of the contemporary mass media are themselves powerful global actors with vested interests in the status quo. Such mass media organs can have limited concern to encourage accountability, particularly to weaker sectors of society. It seemed telling that, for example, mainstream media gave almost no space to representatives of Southern governments and civil society groups to explain their positions at the Cancún Ministerial Conference of the WTO in 2003. Meanwhile, alternative media that open more critical channels have generally struggled at the margins in most parts of today's world, if indeed they exist at all.

Apart from coverage of global governance in general, the quantity and quality of press treatment of civil society initiatives more specifically can also help or hinder accountability campaigns. On the positive side, public visibility through the mass media has allowed a number of civil society initiatives to gain large audiences and increased followings. In particular, newspapers and television have substantially raised the profile of the so-called 'anti-globalization movement' since the so-called 'Battle of Seattle' in late 1999. In contrast, however, the WSF has thus far failed to gain headlines in most of the world press, even though this initiative has attracted tens of thousands of participants for several years running. Nor have the mainstream media given much attention to the day-to-day work of civil society associations, that is, outside the limelight of periodic street demonstrations. In addition, many journalists have oversimplified and caricatured civil society positions on globalization, for example, by suggesting that 'NGOs are against trade'. Hence the mere fact of mass media attention is not necessarily a plus for civil society efforts to enhance accountability in global governance. The quality of coverage also matters.

Political Culture

A fifth key circumstance shaping the effectiveness of civil society activity as a means to obtain more democratically accountable global governance is political culture, that is, the established ways that questions concerning the acquisition, allocation and exercise of power are handled in a given social context. For example, some countries, regions or sectors of society might have long-standing rituals of citizen mobilization and a deeply embedded democratic political

culture. In contrast, other sites have few such habits. Thus in Canada civil society groups could obtain taxpayer funds to bring scores of dissidents from Latin America to the People's Summit that challenged the FTAA meeting in Quebec. However, in terms of political culture such a scenario was unthinkable when Qatar hosted the Doha Ministerial Conference of the WTO later that year.

So the structural relationship between state and civil society has, depending on the context, discouraged or encouraged organized citizen action for democratic accountability in global governance. The authoritarian heritage of tsarist and communist regimes has done much to keep civil society at bay in contemporary 'democratic' Russia. Patrimonial relations have made business and labour associations largely tools of state in Brazil and Egypt. The historical succession of pre-colonial kingdoms, colonial rule and Idi Amin has tended to make most civil society groups in Uganda endure pains of structural adjustment in silence.[23] In contrast, rulers in liberal orders have usually treated critical monitoring of regulatory bodies by self-generated civil society associations as a normal and expected part of politics. Indeed, global governance bodies that are dominated by liberal states have generally accepted civil society activism in principle, even if these multilateral agencies have not always dealt with it comfortably in practice.

The political culture of citizenship in a given context also matters for the chances that civil society will bring greater democratic accountability to global governance. Some political cultures are marked by a strong tradition of citizen activism, while others are defined by deference towards governing authorities. More recently, a culture of consumerism and entertainment has lured many people – including younger generations in particular – away from active citizenship. Likewise, an environment of pervasive cynicism about politics can greatly discourage citizen activism through civil society associations. Indeed, in contexts where citizens tend to regard all governance as corrupt, many people may look sceptically on the motives of civil society organizations as well, doubting that civil society could be a space where persons of integrity could pursue public interests.

Another problem of political culture – one that poses particular difficulties for civil society work on global governance – are

[23] Discussion with Nduhukhire Owa Mataze, Uganda Martyrs University, Nkozi, 3 September 2003.

nationalist, statist and territorialist mindsets. In many contexts across the contemporary world, people retain deep-seated habits of conceiving of the political arena solely in terms of the territorial national state. Indeed, some political environments are marked by strong isolationist tendencies. Clearly civil society associations that work on global governance issues have greater struggles to attract attention and support to the extent that their publics are not accustomed to think globally about politics.

Civil Society Accountability

Finally there is the accountability of civil society groups themselves. Just like the global governance agencies that they may critique, civil society groups have an obligation to answer to stakeholders for their actions and omissions.[24] In the words of one veteran civil society campaigner at the United Nations, 'If civil society organizations are going to deal with democracy issues, then they also have to have a self-critical reflection on how they work themselves.'[25] Or, as another democracy advocate has put it, 'When you point a finger you need to do it with a clean hand'.[26]

Regrettably, most civil society groups have operated very limited and unimaginative accountability mechanisms in relation to their own activities. At best, the organizations have tended to have no more than loose oversight by a board (often composed largely of friends, who are in some cases paid), periodic elections of officers (with low rates of participation and sometimes dubious procedures),

[24] Cf. M. Edwards, *NGO Rights and Responsibilities: A New Deal for Global Governance*, London, Foreign Policy Centre, 2000; L. D. Brown et al., 'Civil Society Legitimacy: A Discussion Guide', in L. D. Brown (ed.), *Practice-Research Engagement and Civil Society in a Globalizing World*, Cambridge, MA, Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations, Harvard University, 2001, pp. 63–79; H. Slim, 'By What Authority? The Legitimacy and Accountability of Non-Governmental Organisations', paper for the International Meeting on Global Trends and Human Rights – Before and After September 11, Geneva, 10–12 January 2002; M. Edwards and A. Fowler (eds), *The Earthscan Reader on NGO Management*, London, Earthscan, 2002.

[25] John Foster, North-South Institute, in discussion with the author in Ottawa, May 2002.

[26] Perry Arituwa, Uganda Joint Christian Council, in discussion with the author in Kampala, August 2003.

occasional general meetings (with sparse attendance), minimalist reports of activities (that few people read) and summary financial records (which often conceal as much as they reveal). Such pro forma accountability mainly addresses the bureaucratic requirements of governments and donors. It does not actively engage the association's stakeholders or promote genuine organizational learning. Thus – in civil society just as much as in governance and market circles – formal accountability may fall well short of effective accountability.

Worse still, some civil society players in global politics have not met even minimal standards of accountability. Such groups lack a clear constituency and operate without any public mandate. Their leadership is self-elected and stays in office indefinitely. They rarely if ever consult their supposed constituents. They do not report publicly on their activities. They lack rigorous financial monitoring. They offer aggrieved parties no channels for complaint and redress. Hence one hears cynical talk of MONGOs (My Own NGOs), BRINGOs (Briefcase NGOs), come-and-gos, self-serving religious and trade union elites, etc.

Moreover, many civil society practitioners have expressed scepticism about the need to develop their accountability. They do not see how demonstrations of accountability are related to their mission. They perceive only risks and no returns in the exercise. They regard it as an overly expensive undertaking. And they argue that the 'real' accountability problems lie with actors other than themselves – like global governance agencies.[27]

Neglect of their own accountability can greatly compromise the potentials of civil society associations to democratize global governance. For one thing, unaccountable civil society organizations generally fail to correct shortcomings in their performance and thereby underachieve. In addition, unaccountable civil society bodies can lose moral credibility and indeed can give the whole sector a bad name. Unaccountable civil society actors can also reflect and reinforce low democratic standards in society at large.

Moreover, accountability shortfalls can be politically costly to civil society work. Again and again, authorities have seized upon issues of accountability to reject the legitimacy of civil society associations.

[27] L. Jordan, 'The Importance of Rights to NGO Accountability', draft paper, August 2003.

Many politicians, officials, business leaders, journalists and academics have asked why unaccountable civil society actors should have the right to influence the course of globalization. In this light, civil society organizations need to become more accountable if they wish to retain and expand their involvement in and impact on global governance.

Fortunately an increasing number of civil society associations have in recent years begun pursuing innovative initiatives to develop their own accountability. In this vein, for example, the NGO Steering Committee of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development created an elaborate self-regulatory framework for promoting accountable civil society involvement in UN work on environment and development, although that process became increasingly burdensome and fractious until it collapsed in 2001.[28] With more success the Canadian Council for International Co-operation has overseen a self-regulatory Code of Ethics for its members since 1995.[29] The Philippine Council for NGO Certification has developed a highly rigorous scheme of nonofficial oversight for civil society in that country.[30] In 1999 scores of civil society associations in India formed a Credibility Alliance that promotes guidelines for 'minimum norms', 'desirable norms' and 'good practices'.[31] Under its strategy 'Fighting Poverty Together' (1999–2003), ActionAid has given particular attention to developing NGO accountability to poor people themselves.[32] Similarly, the Humanitarian Accountability Project (HAP) started in 2000 has given special attention to raising NGO accountability to the recipients of international emergency relief.[33] Thus their own accountability has become a notable governance concern for many civil society organizations, although much more remains to be done in this area.

[28] F. Dodds, 'From the Corridors of Power to the Global Negotiating Table: The NGO Steering Committee of the Commission on Sustainable Development', in Edwards and Gaventa, *Global Citizen Action*, op. cit., pp. 203–13.

[29] www.ccic.ca.

[30] www.pcnc.com.ph.

[31] http://credibilityalliance.org/; presentation by Anil Singh of the Voluntary Action Network India at Sawarung/Ford Foundation conference on NGO accountability, Bandung, January 2003.

[32] J. Chapman and A. Wameyo, 'Monitoring and Evaluating Advocacy: A Scoping Study', ActionAid, January 2001.

[33] www.hapgeneva.org/.

CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis suggests that civil society associations can make important contributions to greater democratic accountability in global governance. Already these activities have reached a notable scale, and considerable opportunities exist to broaden them further. Moreover, accountability through civil society interventions is a fairly immediately available way forward, inasmuch as it requires no major constitutional reorganization of global regulatory arrangements.

On the other hand, as elaborated in the third section above, civil society enhancement of democratic accountability in global governance does not occur automatically and on the contrary faces multiple challenges. Some of the difficulties (like official attitudes and political culture) relate to the environment of civil society work, while others (accountability within civil society) lie with the associations themselves. Thus civil society is not an easy answer to the global accountability problem. Nor can organized voluntary citizen action be expected to secure accountability in global governance on its own, without concurrent interventions from parliaments, judiciaries, official expert evaluations and the mass media.

Improvements in a number of areas are required if civil society contributions to accountability in global governance are to be maximized. Funders need to commit more resources to these activities, particularly to those associations that give voice to marginalized groups in world society such as underclasses, people of colour, rural populations and women. Civil society organizations need more fully to exploit the possibilities of networks, especially links across countries and across sectors. Official quarters need to make themselves more amenable to civil society inputs, by improving both the institutional mechanisms and the attitudes that they bring to consultations. The mass media need to raise both the quantity and the quality of their coverage of civil society and global governance. All parties need to resist forces of political culture that discourage active, critical civil society engagement of global regulatory structures. And civil society associations need to attend more rigorously to their own accountability, especially towards subordinated social circles that have had so little say in global governance to date.