A justice-oriented global civil society infrastructure: vision or illusion?

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This background paper on civic justice sets the task of answering the question: “How can a stronger global civil society infrastructure help advance civic justice?” In order to answer the question we must first look behind it.

Three immediate prior questions jump out. What is civic justice? What is global civil society? And what do we mean by infrastructure?

This paper understands civic justice to pertain to our own sphere of action where civic energy drives social organization for justice ends. Civic action expresses citizens’ values and beliefs. It self-organizes in response to wider conditions in society for particular purposes. When those purposes are defined by justice ends, then we may call it civic justice.

Global civil society for civic justice is the domain of civic action that lies beyond but made up of local and the national civic action. Global civil society is formed by local and national actors who, in self-organizing at the global level, seek to realize a global understanding of justice objectives.

This brings us to infrastructure for global civil society action for justice. This paper understands infrastructure as the set of institutions that create the conditions in which efficient and effective citizen organization for justice can flourish – often referred to as ‘enabling conditions’.

To put these definitional points all together, this paper is concerned with global civil society infrastructure that enables civic action for justice at local, national and global levels.

Our review of global civil society infrastructure institutions uses five categories:

- the legal and regulatory framework (or, if you will, the formal dimensions of the interface between the state and civil society);
- the resource base;
- the knowledge base (including access to information, technology and wider issues of ‘the information society’);
- human and organizational capacity; and
- accountability.

1 This paper builds from an article by the author first published in Alliance magazine in March 2004, “What we take for granted: a sorry tale” (www.allavida.org/alliance/).
From local to global and back again

*Global* level action is partly understood as an aggregation and integration of local and national civil society organizations. We begin by advancing three points about local and national civil society action and expression.

First, the specific forms of local and national infrastructure vary tremendously according to unique contexts. Culture and history fundamentally alter the framing conditions for civil society. Generalizations that posit ‘stages of development’ may be barking up the wrong tree. There is no discernible linear path that societies follow to realize justice, and we should not expect to find the global level result as an outcome of a linear historical pathway. It is far more likely to be a compromise arrived at through the negotiation of diversity. One the other hand, there are universals – many of which speak to process more than content – that underlie diverse contexts. For example, all societies have evolved mechanisms to hold power holders to account and all societies have an understanding of universal human rights. These universals are the building blocks for global infrastructure.

Second and closely related, genuine infrastructure emerges indigenously. Effective global infrastructure is most likely to emerge from below. External drivers can influence and shape, but they are highly unlikely to be effective sustainers of civic energy unless they are harnessed to internal dynamics. For instance, it is possible to create opportunities for civil society to be formally represented in global multilateral institutional settings – even say the UN General Assembly – but absent some genuine legitimization of civil society representatives from below, the outcome will tend to diminish rather than enable civic justice. Experience of national development of civil society in the past 60 years teaches us to be extremely careful about the models that we use when we create infrastructure, particularly those models coming from the affluent West.

Third, we are not alone. Global civil society is part of a wider “global society”, if one may call it that, made up of governments and global business. Much of our struggle for justice outcomes is with these two sectors of global society. Our infrastructure must help us to bring forth justice from engagements with state and business. There is an implicit and emerging notion of multi-sector governance at local, national and global levels in which state, business and civil society are actively testing out new roles and responsibilities. Everywhere one looks, one sees mechanisms of ‘governance’ are changing under the influence of the twin accountability principles of inclusiveness and responsiveness. It seems clear that global civil society organizations (CSOs) are playing a role in shaping this new governance. The ‘specialist’ organizations that comprise civil society infrastructure are meant to be the leading instruments for this influence.

Taking these points together and looking particularly at global civil society, it is useful to take an approach that considers the relevance of different national dimensions of civil society infrastructure for global civil society infrastructure. As we move through the five categories of civil society infrastructure we will take this from-national-to-global approach.
The legal and regulatory framework

Law can enable civil society in four ways. It should protect free association; allow for the formalization of organizations in law; create legitimacy through a framework for proper accountability; and provide for privileges for organizations conferring public benefit through their work. Such benefits range from tax breaks to preferential access to public sector contracts to rights of participation in government (as the 1991 Local Government Code in the Philippines does for civil society organization participation in local government).

Any survey of national laws and practices suggests that in general the state does not fulfill these four functions adequately, but rather tends toward control and manipulation. From the point of view of this paper, it is perhaps most useful to turn the point around and ask: ‘Where the state is not enabling civil society, what is local civil society infrastructure doing to encourage it to do so?’

There is ample evidence that when CSOs do get their act together and run a professional campaign on the legal and regulatory framework, the pay-off is significant. South Africans did it in the early 1990s in parallel with the negotiations for a new democratic dispensation. The Filipinos did it in the late 1990s in response to a threat from government to withdraw some of their tax benefits, when they created a new self-regulatory mechanism known now as the Philippine Council for NGO Certification.

There are a number of well-documented positive legal review exercises in progress among the Western liberal modernizers, including Australia, Canada, England & Wales, Scotland, Ireland, New Zealand and Germany. As this list indicates, there has been a particular tendency within Commonwealth countries to review and renew third sector-government relationships. In addition to formal legal and policy reviews, several countries have made relationship-building a formal objective and established processes to realize it.

But the list of countries taking these issues seriously today is starkly short. The Pakistanis are giving it a go, and have established a system for certification of management standards modeled on the Philippine Council for NGO Certification. The whole engagement with the state in Pakistan around legal framework – and explicitly the larger interface between state and civil society – has been a controversial and contested affair. The Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy, which has championed enabling reforms, has run into deeply held suspicions among some high-profile civil society groups to the very idea of an effective self-regulation regime. Those holding this view – a vocal and powerful minority – would rather have a lowest common denominator voluntary ‘code of conduct’ than an independent certification programme. They argue that any formal system will

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necessarily disempower more informal civil society groupings and social movements while channeling resources to well-established “professional” NGOs.

This Pakistani debate highlights the tension between two very different modes of civil action. One mode might be described as the legal and bureaucratic mode, which seeks to establish order (stability) or co-optation (by providing a safety valve to release the pressure for change). It usually takes the forms of service delivery and formal representation. The other mode of civic action is spontaneous, responsive, and informal. Its purpose is to challenge, to give voice to those whose views are not adequately taken into consideration in formal systems, to change the framing conditions – laws, policies, prevailing practices. It typically takes the form of advocacy or other forms of political expression.

We will return to this tension between modes of civil action in the discussion below. But what does this analysis of the national legal and regulatory context say for global civil society infrastructure?

One conclusion is that open systems are more likely to generate legitimacy than closed ones. By open, we mean that the processes by which the systems are created and maintained are and remain inclusive. Decisions are reached democratically. While remaining open and inclusive brings significant logistical and process design challenges, when it comes to civil society regulation, accreditation and related activities, there may simply be no other way to establish legitimacy.

Historically, we may have underestimated the need to invest in appropriate open system design processes. It is interesting to note that the Philippine Council for NGO Certification is about to embark on a broad national multistakeholder policy dialogue that looks “beyond management standards certification”. Philippine Council for NGO Certification is asking fundamental questions about its relevance, questions that can only be answered through an open design process that aligns it with people’s values and needs for civil society infrastructure.

The required investment here has both a time and a financial implication. We can relatively easily dedicate time to global regulatory infrastructure design and creation, but the financial demands remain more difficult to meet. It is my strong view that at the national level, it remains the basic responsibility of government to finance – but not necessarily administer – an enabling regulatory framework. The Philippines government needs to ensure that PCNC has the resources it requires to renew its mandate and extent its remit to all civil society organizations that would like to utilize it.

What regulatory infrastructure do we need at the global level for justice purposes? One argument would be that in the absence of global government, there is neither the need nor the means for a global regulatory framework. Of the four functions of law at the national level – free association, formalization, legitimacy and privileges – only the legitimacy function would seem to make a claim for validation at the global level. Absent a legal
authority at this level, we require other mechanisms of accountability to confer legitimacy.

In the absence of global government, two functions for international civic justice come to mind. First, there is the perennial need for the accumulation and sharing of knowledge from diverse national experiences. Second, there is the need to explore and map the contours of emerging global governance from a civic justice perspective. These are discussed below, under “accountability”.

A sufficient and sustainable resource base

The second enabling condition for civil society would be a sufficient and sustainable resource base. I say ‘would be’ as there are few countries where there is anything like a sustainable resource base. The norm in the developing world is a heavy dependence on foreign aid.

The justice imperative seems to me here to point toward greater self-reliance. Where is the wave of change that will ground national civil society in a self-sustaining citizen resource base? How can global infrastructure support local self-reliance?

There are ripples in all countries. Anyone in India knows the story of CRY and its greeting cards fundraising scheme. Or the Sattar Edhi Foundation in Pakistan, which became a large national social welfare service provider entirely with funding from citizens, rich and poor. But where are the imitators? Where are the other innovators? How can we enable local civic energy to transform into financially sustainable social organizations?

One view is that “proper” competition can drive innovation in social investing. Ashoka’s own Citizen Base awards competitions are a case in point. Ashoka uses open award competitions to stimulate civil society organization creativity in local resource mobilization. Award winners receive money to invest into their innovative strategies as well as becoming part of a larger global network of innovative resourcing strategies. This network provides award winners the opportunity to exchange ideas, learn of new ideas used around the world, and tackle common problems in local resource mobilization together. Ashoka also provides award winners training and access to the media to promote their idea and organization. In the four years since the awards were launched, over 1200 proposals for innovative strategies in resource mobilization have been submitted with a total of 70 Award winners in 6 countries – Brazil, Thailand, India, South Africa, Argentina, and Bangladesh.\(^3\)

Competition-based models suggest Business, of course. How is the business sector impacting on civil society and particularly on civic justice? There seem to be two main ways, one through “partnership”, often under the rubric of corporate social responsibility (CSR), and the other by example.

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\(^3\) For more information on Ashoka’s Citizen Base Initiative, see www.citizenbase.org.
The growing practice of corporate social responsibility is bringing corporate resources – in kind, financial, institutional – to civil society organizations. The trend in CSR is towards a deeper alignment of corporate giving with core business strategy. This is turn challenges business leaders to find the “partnership” dimension of the resources on offer. Civil society organizations have an opportunity to strike agreements where a corporate partnership fits with their purposes and supports their theories of change. The risk for civil society lies in entering partnerships that do not have the necessary fit. Given the complexity of this kind of partnership formation, this is one of the areas where we can expect to see the emergence of intermediary institutions specializing in broking these resourcing partnerships. Perhaps there is a role here for global civil society infrastructure to support civil society capability to do this dance with the devil.

Business also represents an implicit example to many civil society organizations, many of which are setting up what are commonly called “social enterprises” – mission-driven businesses that increase the financial sustainability and social change impact of civil society organizations. The argument is that in many cases, civil society organizations can create income earning businesses that contribute to mission, and also unlock a new set of resources that enable the organization to operate more generally in a more sustainable and strategic way.

This approach draws lessons from the for-profit capital market, which includes a rich variety of financing sources (e.g., banks, venture capital and private equity funds, etc.) and financing instruments (e.g., bonds, equity, loans, etc.) for capitalizing the various stages of enterprise development (i.e., start-up, expansion and continued growth). Meanwhile, despite the tremendous diversity within the nonprofit sector, the nonprofit capital market relies predominantly on one single financing instrument -- the grant/donation -- for providing capital to organizations of various sizes, types, and stages of development.

A leader in the promotion of social enterprise in the developing world, NESsT, argues that the nonprofit capital market faces a number of key limitations, including the limited availability and application of comparable, standardized performance measurement metrics and systems.4

Results measurement is a growing point of concern and controversy. When individuals with backgrounds in business – and especially commercial finance – turn their attention to solving important social problems (as they are doing in increasing numbers) they compare the characteristics of the “social finance market” with the financial capital markets. When they do they are struck by how undeveloped it is. Many of them are identifying a developmental agenda for social finance that is based on the historical

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4 For more information about NESsT, see www.nesst.org. For a current snapshot of the current debates and many of the main players in the social enterprise and related “social investment” scene, see the material on this year’s Skoll Forum, organized by the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at the Said Business School at Oxford University at www.skollfoundation.org/skollcentre/skoll_forum.asp or at www.sbs.ox.ac.uk/skoll/forum.
development of capital markets, such as stock exchanges, venture capital and private equity.  

There is little doubt that what is often referred to as the typical lack of transparency of the results of social change work inhibits the mobilization of support for that work. We can measure the activities and even the outputs easily enough – so many training workshops were held, an advocacy campaign took place, individuals were counseled, wells were dug, and so on – but we cannot readily see the impact of those activities on those whose lives are meant to be improved. The more removed we are from a localized impact, the more global the activities, the more acute this problem becomes. In what ways did last year’s Make Poverty History campaign make poverty history? If one takes the problem of acute poverty from the point of view of someone who would like to invest time and money to solve it, how is that person going to decide among the different approaches to tackling the problem, let alone chose among the millions – literally – of organizations that would like to use her investments to “make a difference”? Alternatively, if one is opposed to some justice-based campaign or initiative, then the absence of clear standards of performance or accountability makes it easy to raise questions about efficacy and legitimacy.

Whether one takes the positive view – we need to be able to show our impact to win support – or the negative one – we need bulwarks against legitimacy attacks – this is a problem that civil society leaders need to solve. As the growth of NGO rating initiatives in the United States and elsewhere demonstrates, if we in civil society do not solve it then others will do so for us.

We are correct to resist the ongoing pressure to reduce social change to “what can be counted”. Einstein was right, what can easily be counted is not necessarily what counts. But at the same time, there is much that can and should be counted more carefully in the ordinary course of performance management. More and more in the future, organizations that do this will be rewarded by donors and social investors, creating strong incentives for other organizations to do likewise.

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5 This was a theme expanded on by several of the speaks at this year’s Skoll Forum, notably in the opening plenary by Sir Ronald Cohen (Chair, UK Government Task Force on Social Investment and Founder, Apax Partners) and the closing panel that featured the world’s two leading “people’s bankers”, Muhammad Yunus (Founder, Grameen Bank) and Ron Grzywinski (Co-Founder, ShoreBank Corporation). See www.skollfoundation.org/skollcentre/skoll_forum.asp.
6 The rapid emergence of inadequate rating initiatives in the United States, for example, is well analyzed in “The Rating Game,” (Social Innovation Quarterly, Summer 2005). The number of published reports and articles from donor agencies spotlighting the need for, as one recent World Bank report puts it, “a certification system that distinguishes reliable NGOs from fly-by-night entities” are multiplying exponentially. Presentations a this year’s this year’s Skoll Forum at Oxford University, which focused on “social investment”, also reflected this growing wave of market-oriented solutions, such as reporting and rating systems. For more information see www.skollfoundation.org/skollcentre/skoll_forum.asp. Finally, for a concise and compelling critique of the current pressures to force civil society’s round pegs into square shapes, see the essay “A Tale of Three Cities” by Bruce Sievers posted on the Rockefeller Philanthropic Advisors website at http://www.rockpa.org/Linkages.aspx.
Arguably, then, there is a role for global civil society infrastructure organizations to provide a bottom-up, practitioner-based approach that honors justice principles. What would such an alternative look like? I would like to share six propositions towards such an alternative in the spirit of open debate.

First, I believe that it must be based on a broad consensus about a framework to get the right balance between “what can be counted” and “what counts”. This consensus must include the perspectives of three critical constituencies – the people who are meant to benefit from social change, the organizations working to bring about social change, and the people investing and donating for social change.

Second, such an inclusive framework should recognize the fact that development performance derives from many actors in an ecosystem. People and institutions outside an organization are fundamental to its success. It is significant how organizations striving for justice interact with different sorts of individuals and institutions in order to advance their work and change the lives of people. Any organization’s performance, among other things, needs to be understood in its context. With respect to justice outcomes, the relevant context involves how an organization influences and is influenced by other actors.

Third, development performance depends on learning at the individual, organizational and societal levels. Different actors that either impact or are impacted by an organization have different conceptions of what constitutes “good development”. There are different ways of defining “success” for an organization. The voices that define the success of a development intervention are critical to the understanding of an organization’s successful performance towards social change. An organization’s contribution to development, and societal learning, emanates from its capacity to learn through the voices of the people with and for whom it works.

Fourth, development performance depends upon accountability redressing power inequalities among stakeholders. While learning is a crucial aspect for a development organization, the learning process does not generate social change by itself. Power is not distributed equally between organizations and their stakeholders. This is especially true of organizations addressing justice issues.

An organization can develop sophisticated learning skills and learn from the voice of the people it serves and operate strategically within its ecosystem, yet have a poor record of enabling those stakeholders to hold the organization to account. In other words, it may be good at “consultation”, but not be good at “empowerment”.

Organizations perform best when they are held to account by those they work with and for, especially by those most affected. Social justice takes place when power imbalances are redressed through mutually accountable relationships.

Fifth, development performance depends, importantly, on operational integrity. This recognizes that the way an agreed set of activities and goals is implemented (indeed the
integrity with which commitments are honoured) is a key driver for a sustained quality of relationships and performance in development.

Importantly, operational integrity aims to reflect the health of the operating modes and culture of an organization. This covers the values, structures, agreements, and frameworks by which the various parts of the organization interact to ensure integrity of process and outcome. In other words, operational integrity relates to the way in which organizations align their budgeting allocations and spending patterns with their principles, values, and commitments. It ensures that they are effectively transparent.

Finally, if one must work toward creating comparators across civil society organizations – and I take it as both necessary and useful that we do so, although I recognize this is a controversial point of view – then let us compare the organizational capabilities that align with proposition two through five – collaboration, learning, accountability and integrity.\(^7\)

**Information and knowledge**

Which brings us to the third enabling condition category, information and knowledge. As Srilatha Batliwala has noted, there is a primary role for infrastructure organizations to create coherence and visibility where civil society is “young, small or weak” and where it is “not well recognized by government” or society at large.\(^8\) The strategies most often used to do this are through empirical research and the construction of directories, now most often in the form of online databases. The Johns Hopkins University Comparative Nonprofit Sector Study is taking the first empirical bite at this problem by comparing descriptive empirical data across a significant number of countries (now more than 42), but this is just a start.\(^9\) There is a growing scholarly literature analyzing global civil society organizations, networks and movements.

The CIVICUS Civil Society Index offers a practitioner-based diagnostic tool that creates a national multi-stakeholder health profile that can be compared across countries. It has not yet been applied to global civil society.

The Internet has created new opportunities, with the best known Internet-based example coming from the United States, where GuideStar uses freedom of information laws to publish the annual tax reports of every nonprofit organization. GuideStar founder Buzz

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\(^7\) These propositions derive from the work of Keystone, a civil society accountability initiative launched almost two years ago of which I am part. For more information about Keystone, including how to measure capabilities, see [www.keystonereporting.org](http://www.keystonereporting.org).

\(^8\) Srilatha Batliwala, “Do we need a global infrastructure?”, Alliance magazine, March 2004 ([www.allavida.org/alliance/](http://www.allavida.org/alliance/)).

\(^9\) For more detail – including comparative findings from 38 countries – see the Johns Hopkins CNP website at [www.jhu.edu/cnp/](http://www.jhu.edu/cnp/). As this paper was being written it was announced that the CNP has moved to the brand new Alexis Institute for Civil Society affiliated with a major US nonprofit sector infrastructure organization, The Foundation Center.
Schmidt is now sharing its experience internationally through his new project, Civil Society Systems.\textsuperscript{10}

As Srilatha Batliwala has written, visibility is the doorway to voice. But here, the step from national bodies speaking for civil society organizations as a whole to the global level is particularly challenging. Whereas issues like representivity and legitimacy are difficult enough at the national level, the complexity at the global level is exponential. Due to the success of some civil society led global justice campaigns, there has been a strong backlash from government and private sector about the “self-appointed” campaigners. All of this combines to underscore the need to develop innovative new ways for global civil society organizations, networks and movements to demonstrate their legitimacy, accountability, and transparency.

For the last three years an annual workshop of leaders of international advocacy NGOs and networks has been discussing the problems of their legitimacy and accountability, particularly in the highly politicized contexts of transnational policy advocacy and governance. A task force, composed of the chief executives of Amnesty International, Greenpeace International, Oxfam International, and Save the Children International among others, has been working for the last two years to develop a "Charter of Accountability" for international NGOs. They seek to construct a Charter that is consistent with the wide range of national and issue-focused codes of conduct that have been emerging in recent years but that also speaks to the special challenges facing international civil society actors. In June 2006 the Charter will be publicly announced as a basis for the accountability for its signatories. CIVICUS has agreed to be the secretariat for the Charter, and the task force is now working with the Global Reporting Initiative to further develop standards and procedures for its implementation.

The Internet is certain to figure prominently in new tools to give voice to civil society, and here there are two closely related kinds of issues. On the one hand, we have the framing conditions of the Internet, as set by global policy processes epitomized in the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). And on the other we have issues of capacity and readiness – is civil society able and willing to utilize the Internet?

A small group of committed civil society actors participated actively in the WSIS multi-stakeholder process. In the end, most felt that the forum was dominated by governments and to a lesser extent business. Civil society organizations did not endorse the official outcomes but adopted their own Declaration expressing an alternative vision and plan. The civil society groups that were most successful exerted influence earlier in the process – at national policy formation. And in the end civil society was able to win some ground. A fair number of civil society proposals made it into the final text of the Summit, including references to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, gender equality, and free and open source software. New voices were heard and responded to, such as those of people with disabilities and the free software movement.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} For more details, see www.civilsocietysystems.org.
\textsuperscript{11} For more information on civil society and the WSIS, see the work of the Association for Progressive Communications at www.apc.org.
But the major observation about information and communications technologies (ICTs) and social change has to be that this is an as yet unrealized opportunity. Connectivity is increasingly affordable. There is ample space for innovation to bridge the digital divide. The constraint seems to be in ensuring that CSOs have the will, the skills and technology to consume and produce information, to influence mainstream media and therefore society at large. The fact is that, despite the high visibility ‘successes’ of CSOs in recent years around the globalization phenomenon, global civil society seems to have settled into a consumer role as the Establishment produces entertainments such as the Making Poverty History campaign of 2005. In other words, our connectivity has exceeded our capacity to make use of the technology or access to power that this connectivity has provided.

Here is how Simon Zadek put it in his online diary from the 2005 World Economic Forum in Davos: ‘But civil society in truth remains largely absent from the conversation, at least here in Davos. They are at the table, but seem to have become specialized in dealing the “minor keys” that do make a difference but in no way challenge the underlying game plan. What on earth has happened to our civil champions, sparkling but nevertheless unfocused and divided in Mumbai [at the World Social Forum], and silent – almost in attendance – in Davos.’

Somehow, what we ‘know’ as CSOs engaged directly in social justice work on the ground is not connecting up so as to force the ‘major actors’ out there to make significant structural changes in the organization of power and opportunity. This is partly due to gaps in our knowledge of others as well as of our own sector. It is more probably due to a need to sharpen our analyses and theories of change. In any case, we don’t seem to have infrastructure organizations that are effectively closing these gaps.

In this regard it is interesting to note that the Big Ideas that seem to be gaining ground at present derive mainly from the application of market principles. There power analysis implicit in the current wave of market-oriented approaches to social change is one that is less concerned with challenging existing structures of power than in working away at them from below by enabling choice at the bottom. Differently from other social movements, it is a movement that is typically led and managed by middle class professionals who “come from” the established order. This may partly explain why the apparent public face of social justice struggle these days is more about rock stars and grand gestures of aid – a Big Fix from above – than it is about organization and Challenging Power from below.

**Capacity**

This brings us to the fourth enabling condition, capacity. Civil society infrastructure is responsible for addressing capacity gaps. If the millions of pages of donor reports and evaluations and the entire published literature of the development field are anything to go
by, it is making a lousy job of it. Have you ever seen an evaluation in which ‘lack of
capacity’ wasn’t an issue? A credible workplan that did not address capacity needs? No.

So the issue here, it seems to me, is why, for heaven’s sake why, given the overwhelming
consensus about the need, don’t we have anything even remotely close to a reasonable
institutional response to it?

It is a tenet of the new philanthropists (also known as venture philanthropists) that old
philanthropy failed to address the need to build strong organizations. No one needs to tell
business to invest in itself. No one invests in business by only funding one “project” – say
a line of tooth brushes – as opposed to investing in the entire company. I see very little
evidence, however, that this welcome insight is finding much traction in the aid system
or, for that matter, among venture philanthropists themselves. The reason for this may be
the lack of transparency of results in social change work, discussed above.

But this is not only – maybe not even primarily – a donor problem.

The providers of ‘capacity building’ have yet to make us sit up and take notice. Who can
point to an exemplary system for providing independent assessment of capacity built? Or
a recognized professional qualification with currency in the job market? Some South
Africans are in the process of registering a statutory qualification in development
management with the South African Qualifications Authority.13 This would be the
world’s first statutorily recognized qualification in development. And not a moment too
soon!

When we move from the local to the global, what is the appropriate role of civil society
infrastructure here? How bottom-up can we make it? How do we avoid the negative
consequences of professionalization and bureaucratization even as we strengthen our
capacity? We may need some process innovation here to help us to realize new and
meaningful infrastructure.

Accountability

The fifth and final enabling category – accountability – nominates an answer to the
important question: Capacity for what? It also suggests a way to move from information
to Voice and to redress the pitfalls of professionalization. If justice – and in particular the
transformation of nature and structures of power – is your objective, then accountability
offers itself as the key.

Simon Zadek, chief executive of AccountAbility points to a wave of accountability
innovation around the world that seeks to overcome accountability lapses.14

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13 The effort is being led by the Sustainability Institute in association with Keystone. For more information see www.sustainabilityinstitute.net.
“The innovators of the new accountability wave are a diverse crowd. Their number includes pro-democracy activists in Shanghai, corporate social responsibility managers at Shell and BT, grassroots movements such as the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, and the new wave of infant global governance institutions such as the Forest Stewardship Council, the World Commission on Dams, and the International Criminal Court.

Although part of a broad, organic whole, these initiatives differ widely in stated aims and ways of addressing them. Some are inter-governmental institutions, whilst others are required to produce a healthy bottom line. Some are built to deliver public good by enabling private gain; many seek the empowerment of specific interests and local communities through multilateral conventions; others want to reinvigorate national institutions or ensure that their line of business has a future.

What binds them, and what binds us to them, is their commitment to return power to the many…They are commonly concerned with reshaping the institutions and systems of power that govern our lives.”

Civil society organizations have a leading role to play in the current wave of accountability innovation, beginning with their own accountability practices. The social innovation of civil society organizations is to put the beneficiary at the centre of their mission – not their donors, not the institutions with whom they are ever more frequently collaborating, not governments. Civil society organizations should be accountable to their declared beneficiaries – not least in order to guard against the danger of undercutting national and customary structures of accountability.

Some civil society organizations have already adopted that principle. The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, for example, has developed principles and accountability mechanisms oriented around humanitarian NGOs’ responsibility to the people that they serve in failed states, those whom conflict has left totally vulnerable. It is honored in the new International Accountability Charter for international NGOs. Coalitions in 40 countries are developing codes of ethics for NGOs at the national level. Such norms may help to ensure that non-state advocacy, humanitarian and charitable organisations embed the needs and demands of those they seek to serve into their organisational structures.

Significant innovations in accountability are required to address the peculiarities of civil society organisation and practice. Advocacy underpins much of NGOs’ ability to leverage change, yet it can too easily be neutralised by complete transparency. A sense of responsibility to highly-dispersed communities of intended beneficiaries requires innovations to achieve accountability whilst avoiding costly and ineffective procedural approaches to stakeholder engagement.

In developing practical ways for civil society organizations to be accountable to beneficiaries, Keystone has found it important that civil society organizations articulate
the underlying logic of their activities – the theory behind the change that they wish to make – so that beneficiaries and other stakeholders can feed back in ways that shape strategy. Keystone argues that accountability should be constructed to optimize learning – among beneficiaries, in the organization, among donors and governments, and in society at large. By requiring publication in annual reports what beneficiaries say about how well an organization has honored its agreed commitments, for example, one adds a public review dimension to civil society organization accountability to beneficiaries.\textsuperscript{15}

We need a variety of innovations to respond to different aspects of civil society roles in an increasingly interdependent society. At the global level, where there is no authorizing legal regulatory framework, the obvious challenge is to create a set of standards for performance and accountability that can provide a defense against legitimacy challenges and ensure that global actors are genuinely accountable to the people who are meant to benefit from the policies or activities. Given the nature of global level activity, it is likely that effective solutions here will be inclusive of diverse stakeholders, including business and government.

Efforts to create standards face formidable challenges: gaining purchase and legitimacy from local and national civil society organizations; arriving at standards validated by the majority; balancing local specificity with universal norms – all the while avoiding charges of being funder-driven or oriented.\textsuperscript{16}

**Global dilemmas and civil society’s long march**

How can our global civil society infrastructure organizations enable action for justice? A race across five categories – legal, resource base, information, capacity and accountability – has thrown up a host of issues, challenges and ideas. By way of conclusion, perhaps it would be helpful to try to discern the key drivers and trends. I see four.

Infrastructure organizations will always wrestle with the tension between two contrasting modes of action – the legal and bureaucratic mode and the, for want of a better term, “direct action” or expressive mode. More thought needs to be given to how this tension plays out in our infrastructure organizations. More attention needs to be brought to the common “civil society” qualities underlying both modes that may not be present when the other two sectors of society take up similar activities.

In the absence of global government, global civil society infrastructure should devote most energy to aggregating and sharing experience and knowledge across local and national loci. But there is also by exploring and mapping the contours of emerging global governance from a civic justice perspective.

\textsuperscript{15}For more on the practical ways of realizing downward accountability to beneficiaries, see www.keystonereporting.org.

\textsuperscript{16}This set of challenges was articulated by Srilatha Batliwala, in her article “Do we need a global infrastructure?”, in Alliance magazine, March 2004 (www.allavida.org/alliance/).
Civil society – in fact all of human society – is being challenged to be more accountable for visible results for the poor. There is no escaping this; nor should there be. Justice demands that we should lead and not follow on matters of accountability. And to an important extent we have done so. Arguably, the main social innovation of civil society is to put the beneficiary at the centre of mission – not donors, not “partners”, not governments. Accountability to beneficiaries lies at the heart of the unwritten civil society constitution. There is an important opportunity for civil society organizations to take the offensive and respond to the generalized call for a clearer demonstration of results to demonstrations of effective accountability practice.

If it is a time for accountability innovations for justice, then the Internet offers us a powerful accountability and organizing tool. It can be open, transparent and inclusive – think of Google Earth (www.earth.google.com), the open source software movement, wikis (www.wikipedia.org) or Amazon ratings. Stakeholder dialogue-based models of accountability address questions of power and allow us to, in Gandhi’s eternal phrase, be the change we wish to make.

The CIVICUS space

Our discussions of these and related questions not covered in this paper can help to lay the foundations for global civil society infrastructure organizations and services that will be responsive to civic justice. What we need is a global, multi-stakeholder process – even if modest in scale and participation – that will grapple with the goals, role, location, and governance of global infrastructure facilities and services.

This paper has found no ready answers to the complex questions of civic justice. It is hoped that it has articulated some areas that can help us to take up the opportunity created by CIVICUS for the needed debates and ongoing dialogue process.