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Civil Society at the Annual Meeting 2020

The current state of the world is a by-product of existing socioeconomic and political structures that have not delivered for all equally. The past decades’ capitalist and multilateral model of cooperation – while offering opportunities for growth and human development – has proven insufficient and incapable of delivering solutions at the required speed and scale to safeguard the environment and people. Income inequality has been on the rise in nearly every country in the world since the 1980s, nature has been put at the service of economic industrialisation and development, and technology, while creating opportunities for empowerment, has further widened divides between the haves and have-nots as well as posed new threats to individual rights.

These pressing issues cannot be solved by governments, the private sector or civil society individually, but represent a complex and unique set of systemic challenges that requires different sectors to undertake together. More than ever, a multistakeholder approach is necessary. When time is ticking and the cost of inaction is reaching disproportionate amounts, cross-sectoral collaboration nearly becomes a social obligation. And in the era of social activism and with the urgency of delivering in the “Decade of Action”, it is imperative for civil society organisations to drive significant change for the people and with people.

The World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2020 represented a good opportunity for reflection and action for the civil society sector. Under the theme “Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World”, the meeting put front and centre the need for a better kind of capitalism – stakeholder capitalism – to be able to tackle today’s environmental and social challenges in a more effective way.

On the occasion of its 50th anniversary, the Forum released the Davos Manifesto 2020, calling upon every organisation to engage all its stakeholders and create value for everyone to benefit from.

Collaboration means bringing all parties to the table, with their different perspectives, views and values.

It requires leadership from the more committed voices to smooth differences in order to unite behind a vision for the future and search for a common ground: policy-makers with citizens, companies with consumers, organisations with employees, the 1% with the 99%.

In this context, the expertise of civil society organisations to work with a variety of communities, populations and constituencies around the world and to identify, advocate and implement innovative solutions to today’s most pressing challenges becomes indispensable.

This year’s Annual Meeting saw civil society in action – activating partnerships, advocating for brave solutions, organising into movements of actions and new collaborations. It also saw how diverse and nuanced the civil society sector is, with more established organisations across geographies and missions complemented in their messaging and actions by activists, protesters and citizens taking the streets and raising their voice collectively and relentlessly for positive and constructive change. In this sense, it was an Annual Meeting of divergence and convergence, of constructive conversations and inspired action for delivering lasting change.

The following is an overview of civil society contributions to the Davos agenda for a cohesive and sustainable world. It gives an idea on how critical it is for all actors of society to come together and share a responsibility for change, and the important role that civil society plays in bringing these actors together, pushing the agenda and fundamentally building a more inclusive world.
IN NUMBERS

1/3
Annual Meeting 2020 participants came from broad Civil Society sector

50+
Leaders from NGOs, labour unions and faith-based organisations

10
Young changemakers fighting for Climate and Social Justice

124
speaking roles for civil society in the Annual Meeting programme
INVESTING IN THE DIGITAL FUTURE OF NONPROFITS

Organised by The Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF)

Digital transformation may be an overused and polarizing term, but there is no denying that there is still much work for civil society to do around digital to be ready for current and future challenges. There are a lot of conversations happening around data ethics and digital transformation, but the connective tissue across these conversations is more so on how civil society and donors can make the organisational change needed to respond to these changes of rather new applications of emerging technologies. Not every nonprofit needs to use artificial intelligence for good, but every nonprofit needs to figure out what good will look like in a world where artificial intelligence is more widely used. However, for civil society to be successful in reaching this level of change, industry, philanthropy and government must also make fundamental changes in the kind of technology partnerships that persist today.

“Digital transformation is an opportunity to bring civil society together for stronger and more strategic interventions, while working with industry, government and other stakeholders to ensure this is done responsibly and effectively.”

Lauren Woodman, former CEO, NetHope, USA

“It’s a watershed moment for companies and foundations to support the digital transformation of the social sector – not just in starting a project but investing in more structural infrastructure and talent.”

Jake Porway, Founder & Executive Director, DataKind, USA
Sadhguru, Founder, Isha Foundation, India
leading the Morning Meditation session
How do we leverage a million NGOs for the SDGs? Where are the opportunities to bring together the diversity and breadth of local civil society actors around the world to address the SDGs?

With its network of 1.2 million NGOs, TechSoup is building its research capacity to provide data on what and how NGOs are working on the SDGs at a national level. TechSoup can act as a technical mechanism to connect with local civil society, provide capacity building and accelerate communities of practice among civil society communities and organisations.

Technology for good has several opportunities, but also long-standing challenges of unequal partnership with communities and organisations in the Global South. Technology for good should not be a way to ignore much-needed conversations that communities need to be having on data about them and the implications of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Creating areas of interdependence among civil society to help increase collaboration and learning from each other – communities practice on how to handle the digital transition and leverage technology well for people.
TECHNOLOGY GOVERNANCE: GLOBAL PRIORITIES

That technology has brought many positive transformations to modern life is not a controversial assertion, but it is hardly surprising that at this moment, on the brink of another wave of massive technological transformation already being acutely felt, suspicion of technology and the ability to govern it are on the rise. Cybercrime, data leaks, election interference, radicalisation and pervasive surveillance are but a few of the issues that have eroded a once widespread optimism in technology.

The panellists of the session agreed that in a world of growing cynicism, the core issue is building trust around the governance of technology. Genevieve Bell, Distinguished Professor and Director of the 3A Institute, Australian National University, Australia, called for a sober assessment of the actual need for some of the emerging technologies, noting that the massive energy consumption of internet data centres – server farms – is already dangerously unsustainable. Her call was met with emphatic agreement by Brad Smith, President, Microsoft, USA, who said: “Sustainability is the great cause that requires us all to pull together.”

A multistakeholder approach, involving not only industry and government but, just as importantly, civic and civil society, is necessary to address the many issues surrounding tech governance.

SAFEGUARDING DIGITAL SPACES

Digital businesses are struggling to fight harmful content, from the spread of hate speech to threats to children’s safety. How can stakeholders come together to create safe and trusted digital environments while maintaining an open internet?

Testing the immunity of platforms, such as Google, Facebook and Twitter, suggests a fundamental challenge to the legal structure on which some of the world’s most profitable technology companies are built. The European Commission is preparing legislation that would hold platforms more accountable for content that endangers children. But fundamental legal changes are unlikely to happen quickly or without resistance. And even if they take place, regulators would need to agree across jurisdictions.

While structural change might be the long-term goal for making children safer online, the world still faces a short-term crisis. Interim solutions to curb online abuses could involve new technologies. Microsoft, for example, developed technology that can compare online images to a database of those already considered to be sexually abusive of children. Better education for parents could also help increase awareness of online abuse. Such education would have to be sensitive to the risks of shaming parents. Given how quickly data-harvesting practices are changing, this is one area in which many agree government intervention must lead.
The world has reached a critical juncture with the climate crisis. Current economic growth models are broken and require an overhaul in order to move towards a more sustainable planet. A “just transition” seeks to address the question of workers’ lives in a sustainable future landscape. The World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2020 brought together a multistakeholder group to identify areas to promote an equitable and fair transformation for all.

Conversations in the session highlighted that a just transition is not a fixed set of rules, but a vision and a process based on dialogue and an agenda shared by workers, industry and governments that need to be negotiated and implemented in their geographical, political, cultural and social contexts. In this respect, working with companies with long supply chains become fundamental, while remaining attentive to smaller companies which cannot afford to take on the responsibilities associated with a transitionary business model, such as training, upskilling or reskilling the workforce, anticipated retirement, transition labs, etc.

More pressure should be put on institutional investors, including pension funds, to steer companies’ transition pathways to leverage the $37 trillion of workers’ capital in the economy. The EU Just Transition Fund would be a game-changer in this space. While open to improvements, it is a good mechanism to support local communities in coal-heavy regions across Europe away from fossil fuels, particularly if a procurement framework is included. It should be coupled by common strategic agreements with companies in the spirit of building a dialogue and common vision with social partners.

“There are no jobs on a dead planet.”
Sharan Burrow, General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), Belgium

This conversation provided input for the new platform initiative launched by the World Economic Forum called Mission Possible. This is a coalition of public-private partners convened by the Forum working on the industry transition to set heavy industry and mobility sectors on the pathway towards zero net emissions by 2050.
As you talk to consumers, a word that stuck with me...is that consumers find this all a little bit `creepy.` ... And why is it creepy? It’s because there is a world that is hidden here. It is hidden in terms of the data that goes abroad, you don’t know that it has gone abroad, you don’t know where it is going... The business model seems to depend on that lack of transparency sometimes.”

A recent Consumers International survey in Australia, Canada, France, Japan, the US and the UK showed that 63% consumers think connected devices are “creepy” in the way they collect data about people and not knowing where it is going. New models of sharing, aggregating and licensing data in commons or trust structures, can make sure the value of one’s information stays with the consumer.
MOBILISING ACTION FOR INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

From climate change to increasing inequality and declining civic rights, in 2019 people took to the streets in record numbers to challenge the global status quo. Protests in Beirut, Hong Kong, Santiago, Paris and Khartoum have highlighted growing frustrations at the social level and underscored a stronger and more empowered civil society. While some of these protests have resulted in tangible outcomes, others have yet to directly result in meaningful change.

This session brought together activists, workers’ representatives, climate strikers, traditional civil society actors and business representatives to create a communication line and much-needed dialogue between actors who might eventually share the same ultimate vision of social and environmental well-being, but pursue it with different roles, venues and approaches.

CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

- Activism has become the next frontier of stakeholder engagement.
- Activism is a nuanced phenomenon that includes a variety of actors involved: citizens and youth, but also employees, workers and consumers.
- A consciousness shift is needed at the corporate level to engage differently and more meaningfully. It starts with leadership commitment, followed by top-down infiltration in corporate culture.
- The climate crisis changes everything for activism; it is an existential crisis that forces activists to temporarily pursue a different strategy. There is a need to reframe protests from grievances to social mobilisation.
- People do not necessarily join movements for specific grievances, but for how it makes them feel, a sense of identity and purpose. Protests will need to be interpreted beyond specific grievances, but as a social phenomenon, a manifestation of general societal anxiety.

“There are corporate leaders that want to build bridges. There are activists who want to build bridges. Governments will follow suit.”

Brian Gallagher, President and CEO, United Way Worldwide, USA

CIVIL SOCIETY MULTILATERAL SESSION

PEOPLE MOBILISATION

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"The dominant storyline of activism is over."

After the Occupy protest movement was crushed, one of its prime movers, professional activist Micah White, took time out to reflect on the future. "Activism is a force that can mobilise millions of people quickly, as we proved with Occupy, which spread to 85 countries in a few weeks," said White, whose presence at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos raised eyebrows and that he has described as “probably reputational suicide”. He decided to collaborate with some “elites” on the issue of combating climate change, using his activism insight in a united front to influence governments. He said effective protest can take different forms, such as the project to plant a trillion trees as a counter to deforestation in many countries.

"It’s easy to build an exclusionary narrative. It’s hard to build an inclusive one."

Kenneth Roth, Executive Director, Human Rights Watch, USA
PREPARING FOR PEAK GLOBALIZATION

Tariffs, a tech cold war, isolationism – globalization seems to be in retreat around the world, making it more critical than ever for governments and the private sector to reverse the trend if the world hopes to see solutions to such complex challenges as climate change and inequality.

“The multilateral world is in crisis,” said Michael Froman, Vice-Chairman and President, Strategic Growth, Mastercard, USA, adding that the world is going backwards, away from globalization, regional standards and regional rules. “We see protectionism rising. That makes it very hard to have global labour standards, or global environmental standards.”

Charles Li, Chief Executive, Hong Kong Exchanges & Clearing, Hong Kong SAR, China, used an analogy to describe globalization: the bones represent the countries, muscles are supply chains (having grown and developed where most needed) and blood is capital. “Now we are moving into a higher level. Nerve connectivity. Technology,” he said. That’s where trust is breaking down, having an impact on all other parts of the body, he said.

“It is about trust. That’s the key word,” agreed Sharan Burrow, General-Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation, Belgium. She argues that it is difficult to achieve any broad-based goals without trust, but the stakes are so high that we need to act. “It’s about the human race,” she said. “We don’t have a choice here.”
Christy Hoffman, General Secretary, UNI Global Union, Switzerland, speaking during the Accounting for Human Capital session
CIVIL SOCIETY MULTILATERAL SESSION

ALIGNING SHARED VALUES IN STAKEHOLDER CAPITALISM

Using the Forum’s Manifesto 2020 and the stakeholder capitalism model as a base for discussion, this session aimed to bring religious leaders and civil society organisations together with business leaders to support them in shaping the shared values they wish to embody as they continue to deliver societal good through innovative business models. This conversation served as an opportunity to connect business leaders with leading actors in the faith and civil society spaces, to discuss the convergence of shared values in a pluralistic and globalized world.

FEATURED THOUGHTS

Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson,
Cardinal, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development of the Vatican City State

The universal purpose of business is being rethought now as companies are invited to think also about stakeholders. The Vatican has been promoting this for a long time. Businesses must produce "good" goods, at the benefit of their stakeholders.

John Ehara,
Partner, Unison Capital, Japan

Businesses should think of the long-term value, people and reputation and should motivate people in the right framework. Humility and wanting to learn from others is necessary. With an open attitude you can enlighten yourself and enlighten the community.
"Humanity has a quest for peace. Common good must come at the top of our priorities."

Bhai Sahib Dr. Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia, Chairman, Nishkam Group of Charitable Organisations, UK
84% of the global population identifies with a religious group. With eroding social cohesion and near climate breakdown, how can the power of faith foster a cohesive and sustainable world?

When all seems lost, faith tends to bring us together. Faith feeds the soul when there is a famine of values, which can reduce our collective humanity down to numbers, profits and losses. In this year’s Davos discussions on faith, the core of the matter was not the economy but our collective soul and our capacity to care for “the other”.

Caring for “the other” is a common virtue of faith communities. As Kezevino Aram, Director, Shanti Ashram, India, said, when the HIV crisis struck the world – no matter the location of sick people who were forced to cope with the stigma of AIDS – there was often one uniting aspect of the first responders to the crisis: they came from faith communities. For Aram, “what emerged was a model of partnership” between medical, government and faith communities – and what really came out from the experience was the “ethics of caring”.

In the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, these ethics are not based on new technologies but on principles that ensure that human dignity is shared. According to Aram, this idea draws on thousands of years of shared experience from faith communities around the world.

Azza Karam, Secretary-General-elect, Religions for Peace, USA, said that faith allows us “to look for inspiration and guidance that is selfless”. In doing so, faith – and religion – can inspire us to live differently, with “compassion, mercy and love”, a totally different language from that of “profit.”
Faith in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Congruence with technology, business, and government

Dinner

Dana Humaid, Chief Executive, Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities, United Arab Emirates
Press Conference: Religious leaders’ role in safeguarding communities

Pinchas Goldschmidt, Chief Rabbi and President, Conference of European Rabbis, Russian Federation
Press Conference: Religious leaders’ role in safeguarding communities

His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch, Turkey; Special Address by His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome
People and Planet
Advancing human rights in a cohesive and sustainable world

SESSIONS IN FOCUS

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE OCEAN

The session Human Rights and the Ocean, hosted by Conservation International, focused on highlighting how slavery at sea is not just a human rights issue, but needs to be recognised and integrated across the supply chain and reach consumers’ choices. Speakers and participants highlighted that solutions exist to improve monitoring and conditions of workers at sea, and collaboration between private and public sector is key to implement solutions and enforce regulation.

ENSURING GENDER PARITY IN THE OCEAN

The Council of Women World Leaders, with the support of Friends of Ocean Action, hosted a session on Ensuring Gender Parity in the Ocean. This session valued a new approach in diversifying the way we use knowledge around gender issues and around ocean issues. This new approach helped highlight that through the integration of these agendas, important areas such as resilience to risks and climate change, human rights and health can emerge. A need to bridge gaps in data availability, finance, access to governance and the need for visibility and public awareness around the issue were mentioned as critical to solve.

M. Sanjayan, CEO, Conservation International, USA speaking at the Revitalizing Environmental Communications
01 Autumn Peltier, Chief Water Commissioner of the Anishinabek Nation, Canada
Forging a Sustainable Path towards a Common Future

02 Jennifer Morgan, Executive Director, Greenpeace International, Netherlands
Financing the Net-Zero Economy

03 Valter Sanches, General Secretary, IndustriAll Global Union, Switzerland
Calling for Climate Justice

04 Greta Thunberg, Climate and Environmental Activist, Sweden
Averting a Climate Apocalypse
WHAT'S AT STAKE: TROPICAL FORESTS

The equivalent of more than 30 football fields of tropical forests is lost every minute – a key habitat for wildlife and carbon sink. What would it take to revitalise the lungs of our planet, while accommodating the development needs of forest-rich nations?

The threat has escalated within our lifetime. In 1971 as a college student the Amazon was completely "undisturbed," recalled Carlos Afonso Nobre, Director, Research, Brazilian Academy of Sciences, Brazil. "It was and remains the biological heart of our planet, home to millions of species, and removing a few billion tons of carbon each year. Yet while protected, 17% of the forest has been cleared. In South East Asia, more than half of the tropical forests are lost, and continue shrinking rapidly."

Among frontier stakeholders are indigenous people. "Deforestation and burning is not only about the loss of a commodity, it is about us and our lives," said Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, President, Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad (AFPAT), Chad. "We take our food and medicine from forests. So if people here say 'our home is burning,' it's not anecdote. It's real."

Finally, sustainable sourcing comes through collective action. Urban consumers and protesters of brands cannot pretend that any one business – or for that matter NGOs, donors, and governments – can, or will, solve deforestation individually.

Such a joint venture to ensure forest health may be massive. But it is neither new, nor unique to the private sector. "We can't talk about our love of God if you rubbish or abuse God's handiwork, his creation," said Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development of the Vatican City State.
01 Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, President, Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad (AFPAT), Chad
What’s at Stake: Tropical Forests

03 Ajay Vir Jakhar, Chairman, Bharat Krishak Samaj, India
New Agenda on Food: Launching a Decade of Action

05 Pierre Habbard, General Secretary, Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) to the OECD, France
Humans behind Machines

07 David Miliband, President, International Rescue Committee, USA
The Human Cost of an Age of Impunity

02 Seth F. Berkley, Chief Executive Officer, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, Switzerland
Gavi at 20: Lessons Learned

04 Jayasree K. Iyer, Executive Director, Access to Medicine Foundation, Netherlands
Building Resilient Health Systems

06 Luca Visentini, General Secretary, European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Belgium
Human-Centred Factories

08 Delia Ferreira Rubio, Chair, Transparency International, Germany
Latin America: Responding to New Expectations
"In the context of the 4IR, we make devices for people with disabilities, but we don't recognise that disability itself can inform the design process. We need to start looking at disability as a methodology and not just an identity category."
Selected Blogs

The world is failing miserably on access to education. Here’s how to change course
David Edwards, General Secretary, Education International

Why 2020 is the year to reset humanity’s relationship with nature
Marco Lambertini, Director-General, WWF International; Dominic Waughray, Managing Director, World Economic Forum

We all have a stake in global health security
Seth Berkley, CEO, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance

Faith leaders: an untapped resource in protecting communities
Dana Humaid, Chief Executive, Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities

Financing fossil fuels risks a repeat of the 2008 crash. Here’s why
Jennifer Morgan, Executive Director, Greenpeace International

The cobalt mining industry is a human rights failure - here’s what needs to be done
Anna Pienaar, Global Vice-President, Corporate and Government Affairs, International Justice Mission (IJM)

Can agroforestry save India’s rivers and the farms that depend on them?
Sadhguru, Founder, Isha Foundation

The next wave of consumer advocacy
Helena Laurenti, Director-General, Consumers International; Liz Coll, Head of Digital Change, Consumers International

Why I’m going to Davos - and why I’m hoping my peers don’t find out
Micah White, Co-Creator, Occupy Wall Street

Civil society can make sure no one is left stranded by the skills gap
Christopher Worman, Vice-President, Alliances and Programme Development, TechSoup; Hector Mujica, Regional Manager, Google.org; Melissa Huerta, Senior Program Officer, Mozilla Foundation
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<td>World Wide Web Foundation</td>
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<td>Agnes Matildaa Kalibata</td>
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