

Scaling the Summit: but is there more to Global Civil Society –
Intergovernmental Organisation engagement?

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Abstract

This thesis explores the current nature of the relationship between global civil society and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), focusing particularly on the role of summit events and technology. Civil society has become increasingly important since the 1990s and is credited with advancing global agendas on many fronts, including human rights, health, and climate change. The influence of civil society on global institutions has become more established through formal engagement processes. However, questions remain as to how sustainable such engagement is and how susceptible to political or institutional change. The research coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced changes to the conduct of international diplomacy and helped reveal important trends in how civil society operates at the global level.

Using participant observation of the summit event of the Open Government Partnership, an intergovernmental body which by design fully incorporates dialogue with civil society, and interviews with actors from civil society, government and IGO perspectives, the research offers a rich analysis of civil society-governmental interactions and relationships. It finds that global civil society has evolved significantly. In a marked departure from academic findings of the 2010s, it is no longer dominated by relatively few international non-governmental organisations, and technology has enabled it to become flatter in structure, with more opportunities for national or local actors to break through into international conversations. Summit events are no longer seen as critical one-off opportunities to impact decision-making, but rather serve as just one type of focus within year-round engagement. Nevertheless, global gatherings remain important for movement-building and the human dimension to international relations between governmental and civil society actors is likely to become more poignant as much routine engagement shifts online. The thesis offers an analysis of the different purposes of summit events which moves beyond the classic influencing/decision-making focus to encompass networking, learning and inspiring.

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List of Abbreviations

COP	Conference of Parties
CoST	The Infrastructure Transparency Initiative
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
GPSDD	Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data
IAP2	International Association for Public Participation
IGO	Intergovernmental Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
IRM	Independent Review Mechanism
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OGP	Open Government Partnership
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
UN	United Nations
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction

In the mid 2000s ('06, '07 and '08) Scotland hosted the CIVICUS World Assembly for three years in a row. A massive, repeated gathering of thousands of civil society activists and their public and private sector partners from over a hundred countries meeting to discuss and try and influence global agendas. It began a fascination with how people and organisations could connect to global conversations and impact the decisions being made at the highest governmental levels at the United Nations (UN), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other Intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), and ultimately gave rise to this PhD research.

During that same period there was significant academic interest in the size and shape of global civil society, and its actual and potential purpose as a reforming and democratising force in the global sphere. Attractive theoretically, this latter begged the question of how this was to be realised and spawned various strands of enquiry into how global civil society functions, especially in relation to IGOs. This PhD research was designed to build on and significantly update that research agenda, which had waned somewhat by the late 2010s, and take it to a new level of specificity. This involved explicit research foci on summit events and the role of technology, and a methodology that would reveal the practical and human dimension of these global level relationships. The research fieldwork coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic which forced changes to the conduct of international diplomacy, and accentuated these key aspects of meetings, technological innovation, and personal interactions, and as such enabled real time capture of emerging and accelerating trends.

The research questions were:

- ⇒ How does Global Civil Society operate in relation to Intergovernmental organisations?
 - How does Global Civil Society engage with high level meetings or summit events?
 - How does Global Civil Society use technology to support its work in relation to government at the global level?

The method chosen for the study was a blend of participant observation of a major summit event, and interviews with actors from both global civil society and global governmental organisations. This capitalised on the researcher's position as a member of the global steering committee of the Open Government Partnership, providing access to all aspects of the summit event and enabling insights into a forum of civil society-government engagement which purports to model collaboration and co-operation. This was in deliberate, direct contrast to participant observations undertaken in the early 2010s of civil society in protest mode, when seeking to affect global agendas from an 'outsider' rather than 'insider' position. The insider perspective offered in this thesis is a novel contribution to knowledge of a growing dimension of international relations.

Chapter one of the thesis reviews the literature on the forms and norms of global civil society, its increasingly institutionalised relationship with IGOs, and highlights the concept of a spectrum of engagement by which to gauge the nature of such relationships. It goes on to cover previous studies of global events and explores the thread of academic interest in technology's potential to enhance the public sphere.

Chapter two describes the methodology designed to explore these different aspects, its advantages, limitations, and the need to adapt presented by the pandemic.

In presenting the results of the research the third chapter opens with an overview of the external drivers to the global civil society-IGO relationship, both of a political and practical nature, and an assessment of the current state of the relationship, revealing a significant shift towards more, and closer engagement. It assesses the factors contributing to this, not least of which is marked changes in the size and shape of global civil society itself.

Chapter three begins the effort to be more specific about how engagement happens, with a spotlight on summit events. Different actors' reasons to be part of such events, and the rapidly changing nature of them, provides timely insight at a point of (pandemic-stimulated) flux in practice. A typology of the purposes of summits is offered, to help with thinking about future design, which moves beyond the classic influencing/decision-making focus to encompass networking, learning and inspiring.

The last results chapter presents findings about the use of technology by global civil society, and how this is contributing to its engagement with IGOs. General improvements in information-sharing, communications and efficiency were predictable, but the research also revealed important consequences for the infrastructure of global civil society, with the dominance of large international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) receding in the face of opportunities for activists to engage with each other directly, and indeed for new, otherwise domestically focused individuals and organisations, to break through into global conversations. Unconventional leaders, especially from the global South have emerged to lead a largely optimistic agenda around open data and optimising the Sustainable Development Goals framework.

The final chapter of the thesis in drawing these strands together offers an analysis of the current state of global civil society-IGO relationships, and the likely trends and challenges of the coming period. By combining previously separate threads of academic enquiry, and introducing first-hand experiences, it provides rich material in an important area of Global Social Policy and International Relations.

Chapter One: Literature Review

1.1 Global Civil Society

Academic discourse around the nature and role of civil society underwent a renaissance in the 1990s and early 2000s, bringing with it the propagation of the term 'global civil society'. The idea and practical manifestation of 'civil society' (otherwise referred to as the voluntary or third sector) in the domestic context had been of increasing interest to academics and policy makers since the 1980s. In many parts of the world as the state retreated from direct delivery of welfare, charities and other socially orientated non-profit organisations began to experience a period of growth as contracted or grant-funded service providers. Academia questioned these developments, focusing not only on whether services were better or not, or whether the principal objective from a government perspective was cost-cutting not improvement, but also whether such financial and policy ties subverted the sector's independence from the state and consequent ability to provide policy challenge or advocacy for marginalised groups (Salamon, 1989, Lewis, 2005, Osborne, 2009).

But it was the events of 1989, and the end of the cold war system of blocs that thrust civil society organisations centre-stage in terms of questions of governance. An initially underground, increasingly confident network of civil society organisations is in large part credited with the mostly peaceful overturn of the Soviet regime. This also enabled the creation of transnational networking between them and others and a real global dimension to civil society was observed (Kaldor, 2003, Keane, 2003).

This phenomenon was not bound by the conventionally acknowledged forms of civil society – legally constituted associations, charities, and social enterprises - but encompassed social movements and campaigns that embraced both the traditional and a wider, more fluid, network of organisations and people, expressing solidarity, sharing ideas, and seeking mutually reinforcing impact on global as well as national agendas.

A world-wide academic perspective on the comparative health of civil society and governments' attitudes towards it started to develop with, for example, the launch in 1991 of the Johns Hopkins University-based global research project (Comparative Non-profit sector Project, 'CNP') designed to systematically collate and compare data about the size, nature, structure and financing of civil society in, initially, 13 countries (now 45) (Center for Civil Society Studies, 2019). The International Centre for Non-profit Law focusing on regulatory environments for civil society was launched in 1992 (ICNL, 2021). Development of the 'CIVICUS Index' which combines comparing aspects of civil society and its operating environment in different countries followed in 1999 (CIVICUS, 2021c).

The journal *Voluntas* was founded in 1990 (International Society for Third-Sector Research, 2021b) and the branches of academic debate spread in 2001 as the LSE produced an academic 'yearbook' of global civil society, which ran to ten (almost)

annual editions and claimed to ‘debate, map, and measure the shifting contours of this contested phenomenon’ (Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit, 2019). In a further offshoot, 2005 saw the launch of the Journal of Civil Society (Taylor & Francis Online, 2019). The *Voluntas* publication is associated with the International Society for Third Sector Research (International Society for Third-Sector Research, 2021a) itself constituted in 1992. These remain the principal foci for academic debate about global civil society, and civil society internationally.

In practical terms transnational networks of civil society actors came to life. The global network body CIVICUS was founded in 1993, steadily gathering an associational membership not just of NGOs already operating internationally, but also of domestic third sector infrastructure (umbrella) bodies trying to see their own place in the wider world (CIVICUS, 2021e). The World Social Forum series begun in 2001 gave a new space for global non-state-centric debate and provided the stimulus for further networks around particular issues or agendas to spread.

Lipschutz was amongst the first academics to use the phrase ‘global civil society’ as a deliberate description of the phenomenon he and others were observing (Lipschutz, 1992). Tracking back on the concept historically he asserted that global civil society has become a challenge to the nation state as a political force, unknown since the medieval period. Cox reinforces this view of global civil society, using the Gramscian concept of relational forces to paint it as a revolutionary force towards a new world order (Cox, 1999).

Mary Kaldor, writing in 2003, likewise saw 1989 as a key milestone for global civil society in terms of both ideas and practice. She had observed a groundswell of thinking and activism on the eastern side of the wall that was already well on the way to reshaping not only the role of civil society in democracy, but the nature and demands citizens make of democracy itself (Kaldor, 2003). Contrary to the ‘triumph of western democracy’ as it was perceived by many or the ‘end of history’ as Fukuyama (1989) would have it, the year instead marked a paradigm shift from purely electoral democracy and reliance on governmental actors on the global stage, to a more participative, deliberative approach at all levels from local to global, with the organisations, structures and networks of civil society providing much of the space and focus for this dialogue to take place.

John Keane’s 2003 work ‘Global Civil Society?’ in effect reviewed the academic debate of the previous decade and framed an agenda that has influenced much of what has followed. In essence, he distinguished between forms and norms; approaches which seek to observe and describe global civil society, and those which assess or assign political or moral purpose to it. He sketched out what was known, and unknown, at the time about the shape of global civil society based on the data collected in the early stages of the various comparative projects, describing it as still ‘no more than a torn-edged daguerreotype’. He challenged the assumption adopted by many writers to date that global civil society is automatically a ‘good thing’ and concerned himself with the extent of ambiguity in the use of language. This latter he attempted to address by providing an ‘ideal type’ against which to interpret future developments. This endows global civil society with five aspects: it is non-

governmental, a form of society, is intrinsically civil (as in non-violent), pluralistic, and global. He of course unpacks each, raising questions and contradictions which subsequent researchers have tackled to a greater or lesser degree (Keane, 2003).

Early associate of the CNP project, and architect of the CIVICUS Index, and therefore leading light of the 'form' approach, Helmut Anheier (2002) started to apply the rigours of analysis of structure and financing of civil society developed for the project across nations, to the global level. He examined the rapid growth in numbers of civil society organisations operating at the global level (identifying some 13,309 in 1981 rising to 47,098 twenty years later (Anheier and Themudo, 2002) P.195) and provided analysis of their (changing) organisational forms and alignment with their principle mode of operation (expansion, retrenchment, campaigning, service delivery). By the 2005 Global Civil Society yearbook, of which he was an editor, he had developed this to a more holistic view of global civil society as an entity with infrastructure, giving due attention to the breadth and density of inter-organisational networks (Katz and Anheier, 2005). The conclusion of this work was that civil society as a functional global entity clearly existed but was hampered in terms of its impact by bias towards key hubs in the global North and correlated weakness of globally-active civil society in the developing world.

Smith and Wiest's (2005) work follows up on this question, examining the levels of participation in transnational civil society networks by activists in different parts of the world. They found that the positioning of the state in relation to global institutions and agendas was highly influential on levels of civil society participation, linked to reasons of resource and access, but that there were higher levels of global engagement by civil society activists in low-income countries than that might lead you to expect. In other words, activists were using transnational networks as a means to challenge their countries' positions in political and economic terms, rather than settle into a mirroring of it.

Meantime others had begun to identify the impact of transnational networks and policy transfer on states where civil society was under-developed at the domestic level. Ibrahim (1998) credits global civil society networks with stimulating the development of domestic civil society across the Middle East, and a consequent preventative role in holding back the spread of Islamic extremism. He points to a relatively stable transition towards political pluralism in countries such as Jordan, Kuwait, Yemen, Lebanon, and Morocco. In doing so he endorses the optimistic view of global civil society as a force for peace and presages Mary Kaldor's (2003) assertion that global civil society is an 'answer to war'.

As well as encouraging the development of civil society itself where previously weak, others have noted the benefits of domestic civil society connecting with global networks in order to have greater impact at home in relation to specific agendas. Keck and Sikkink (1999) coined the phrase 'boomerang effect' to describe the technique used by civil society organisations domestically, to good effect, for example, in relation to human rights campaigns. To disrupt stagnation in government-civil society relations they secured lobbying and attention from transnational networks, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and,

through them International Governmental Organisations (IGOs) and other countries' governments (Keck and Sikkink, 1999).

This approach is growing in importance in relation to the legal and political conditions for civil society itself. More recently referred to as the 'civic space' agenda, concern has been mounting that after a period of growth and the important catalytic events in former-Soviet countries in the early 1990s and the Arab Spring of the early 2010s, civil society nationally is experiencing a period of 'push-back' by governments, even ostensibly democratic ones, with global impact. Buyse (2018) has written of the apparent growing suspicion of, and the increasing number of pressures on, civil society in different parts of the world. From restrictions on funding, through the passing of anti-NGO laws, through to actual harassment and police brutality, the occasions of such he argues are that this can be seen as a wider anti-democratic wave. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has also foregrounded this issue with papers arguing for global attention to the issue and international pressure to address its national and local occurrence (Brechenmacher and Carothers, 2019).

A method identified by Keck and Sikkink to accentuate the boomerang effect is civil society engagement in globally significant events. Others also reference the importance of international gatherings to accelerate agendas and create the opportunity for civil society voices to influence the direction of travel (Clark et al., 1998, Krut, 1997). Pianta (2001) provides an analysis of the growth, in number, in size, and influence on the main event between 1988 and 2001 of such parallel summits. Indeed Jacobs (2016) credits the success of the historic Paris Climate Agreement to the civil society events run in parallel with the main, decision-making Conference of Parties (COP) summits and the consequent orchestrated engagement of civil society actors that led up to its eventual sign-off at COP21 in 2015.

Not everyone was so positive, however. As discourse about the role of global civil society multiplied, sceptical views about its real extent and sustainability, and its consequent significance in terms of developing geo-politics began to emerge in the early 2000s.

Robert Putnam (2000), while focused at the national level in his study of American social capital, stimulated a widespread debate about the general state of associational activity. He was pessimistic about the health of civil society, famously coining the idea of 'bowling alone' to describe an increasingly atomised society. His book, suitably entitled 'Bowling Alone', was subject to criticism for having a very partial and perhaps anachronistic view of the kinds of networks and activities that contribute to social capital (Boggs, 2001), but interestingly in the global context his earlier work (Putnam, 1995) had already been criticised for choosing to ignore the growth of transnational social movements (Smith, 1998).

Rather than its strength or health, Munck (despite himself assigning the 1992 Rio parallel summit as the 'birth' date of global civil society), questions whether it really is all that new. Accusing Lipshutz (1992), Kaldor (2003) et al of 'presentism', he points out that international labour movements and international women's campaigns can be dated back to at least the start of the 20th Century (Munck, 2002).

Bowden on the other hand, worried about the global epithet – arguing (rather thinly) that while there is no global equivalent of a state, there can be no global civil society to relate to it or be held in check by it (Bowden, 2006). From a similar standpoint, but with perhaps more substance, Anderson and Reiff wrote of the reaction to the September 11th attacks, and the subsequent ‘war on terror’ and invasion of Iraq as clear indicators of the revival of statism, and the diminution of globalism in general and of the role of global civil society in particular (Anderson and Rieff, 2004). There is a very evident tone of pessimism in their argument that, in effect, the bubble of change of the 1990s had burst, and it was time to get real about the world order. Mary Kaldor (2003) – notable proponent of the emergence of distinct global civil society - herself questions in the closing sections of her book whether global civil society has matured sufficiently to withstand this. She notes that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 the previously energised anti-capitalist movement rapidly ramped down its campaign activities, and that concerns grew that those also working on peace and human rights would be perceived or painted as apologists for terrorism. She offers a five-point agenda for civil society to consolidate its role and influence on global governance values, emphasises its immense potential but seems uncertain whether it will be fulfilled (Kaldor, 2003).

The answer for Jan Aart Scholte, writing in 2007, however, is an explicit yes, as he places civil society central to the accelerating debate about the shape and purpose of global governance. An optimist throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, he sees value in (concerted) civil society engagement in intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), his work focusing initially on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and broadening in scope to United Nations (UN) bodies, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). He reports clear impact on these IGOs’ policy framing and agendas, and lists progress on social issues (human rights, debt cancellation, environmental protection, gender equality, the convention to prohibit anti-personnel mines, the creation of the International Criminal Court, and more) that simply would not have happened had it not been stimulated by mobilised civil society (Scholte, 2007). He argues global civil society has become invaluable to IGOs as a balancing moral force, a source of frontline intelligence, information and policy expertise, a means of democratising IGOs’ processes through citizen education and dialogue, and as a provider of charismatic leadership to global agendas. In a largely up-beat prospectus for the role of global civil society, he does however express concern that the potential he perceives will not be realised.

He too is not without his critics, though, as is apparent in an organised series of counterpoints in the *Journal of Civil Society*. Martens (2008) questioned the sheer practicality of Scholte’s plea for more global civil society involvement in UN and other global platforms and highlights the problem of elitism as particular organisations or individuals are selected or self-select for key engagement roles. Lipschutz (2007), even more bluntly questions the very point of engaging with global institutions that from a structuralist point of view are part of the problem, not the solution. He portrays Scholte’s pragmatism as co-option, and in doing so reveals a debate that was felt very sharply in the 2000s in global civil society networks – whether to divert

inevitably constrained energy and resources towards agendas and processes that may ultimately prove counter-productive to the cause of social change.

These very practical 'how?' challenges to Scholte's idealism are good examples of another thread of academic enquiry – focusing on the conditions, strategies and resources required for global civil society to become an even more significant force. These questions have become more dominant in the period since the global financial crisis of 2007-9, as the motivation amongst activists to challenge the world order in the interests of equality and social justice have become more pronounced. Dufour (2016), for example, examined local social forums mirroring the world social forum series as a means to engage locally and domestically focused activists in global agendas. Harrebye (2011) looked in some detail at the different approaches to and modes of behaviour of activists in the context of global summits. Somers (2017) provides a good exposition of the global civil society campaign advocating the cancellation of the debts of developing countries, concluding that tactical engagement with governments and IGOs was key to success, but had to be balanced by due attention to tensions within civil society itself. Carroll and Sapinski (2015) address the latter in their critique of what they see as co-option of (elements of) global civil society by neo-liberalism, in a process of what they call 'NGO-isation'. In other words, a growing self-interest by a set of professionalised agencies effectively 'bought-in' to the status quo by grant aid and contracts. In what has been referred to as the 'capstone' of the CNP comparative research programme begun in 1991, Salamon and associates develop a social origins theory to explain why and how civil society has developed in different contexts. In essence they say the state of civil society in different countries is path dependent, but is an important aspect of development worldwide (Salamon et al., 2017).

The impact of legislative approaches to regulating associational activity had a long-standing community of interest in the form of charity lawyers clustered around the International Centre for Non-profit Law (ICNL, 2021), where attention had turned to questions of the appropriate legal form for non-profits that operate across national boundaries, in much the same way as the for-profit world. A debate about the appropriate roles for governments in terms of the political and operational environment for civil society had evolved into the civic space agenda, and by 2016 had a key new tool in the form of the CIVICUS Monitor and watch list, drawing data from multiple sources to identify potential set-backs to or direct attacks on civil society (CIVICUS, 2021b).

Perhaps most significantly was a growing body of thinking around the role of technology in galvanising global civil society. A 2002 compilation of case studies edited by Hajnal, himself focusing on major improvements in Oxfam International's co-ordination of development, emergency response and advocacy work, had provided evidence of the ways information and communications technology (ICT) was beginning to improve NGOs' operations and services delivery, and crucially their ability to campaign by the mass sharing of information (Hajnal, 2002).

Manuel Castells is the foremost proponent of the idea of an ongoing structural transformation of the means of association and deliberation. What distinguishes his

work is an ability to think about the possibilities presented by the fast-moving world of technology to disrupt classical assumptions and practices, as they relate, not just in operational terms as others had done, but to democracy. He argues that a new public sphere built around the internet, where disparate voices, languages and cultures can engage in a meaningful dialogue can produce a new governance consensus. He portrays a style of 'public diplomacy' that also gives a new enhanced purpose to global summits and events as media moments to stimulate world-wide public engagement, well beyond the conference venue or protest site (Castells, 2004, 2008). Dahlgren (2015) more recently has picked up the idea of the internet as 'civic space', and in counterpoint to Castells' optimism highlighted the online dimension of wider concerns of a crackdown on civil society's ability to function.

Post financial crisis Michael Edwards (2011) revisited the forms and norms distinction delineated by Keane, and explicitly promoted 'deliberation' (drawing on such as Kaldor (2003) and Scholte (2007)) as a third key dimension to civil society in the new global governance context. In doing so he casts civil society centre stage to revived debates about the health of democracy itself. Writers such as Dahl (1999), Norris (2011), and Dalton (2004) exemplify the body of opinion and concern that a system based on periodic elections and reliance on parliaments and governments increasingly distant from peoples' day to day experiences and interests, was in crisis; the so-called 'democratic deficit'.

In answer a number of thinkers - such as Gaventa (2006), Escobar (2017), Fung (2003), and Nabatchi (2010) have developed ideas around 'deepening democracy' through participative, deliberative approaches. All of these, to a greater or lesser extent rely on pre-existing associations between citizens and can be aligned with the developing narrative around civil society. Edwards' work elevates these themes to the global level and argues that by relating to global institutions as if they were in a global governance role, civil society representatives de facto enhance the IGOs' legitimacy. By lobbying for and providing a means (engagement with and through civil society networks and organisations) by which transparency, participation and accountability in those institutions is increased, they are also (up to a point) democratising them. This revives the earlier optimism of such as Scholte (2001) as to the reforming and legitimising role of global civil society in relation to global governance.

Feenstra (2017) takes up these themes of global civil society as a democratising agent and deliberative space. He cites examples of public protests, ostensibly about different specific issues in very different domestic contexts, but nevertheless carrying similarities of organisation and approach and often sharing, or inspired by, others' core message. He deploys the term 'glocalization' to describe an increasingly pervasive engagement in the public sphere that not only transcends national boundaries, but also operates independently of any level of governance, local, national, or global. His focus on the means by which global civil society affects global agendas, gives updated answers to the earlier 'how?' questions of such as Martens (2008) and Lipschutz (2007).

This optimistic perspective is moderated by those who express concerns about the shape, make-up and practices of civil society organisations and networks themselves effectively excluding some communities. Chandhoke (2002), in discussing the limits of global civil society suggests that some of the behaviours of global civil society organisations, while claiming to speak for the rights of many, may inadvertently emulate or compound pre-existing institutional exclusionary practices. She further drew out the importance for global civil society actors, however well-meaning their intentions, not to overlook the need for consultation with the widest possible constituency (Chandhoke, 2005). Yet this concern is balanced by accounts of a general trend towards greater inclusivity and connection across and between civil society organisations and less formal communities of interest, and the consequent implications for voice and mandate, a feature of such as Gabay's 2012 study of the Global Call for Action Against Poverty (GCAP), the international civil society coalition launched at the Porte Allegre World Social Forum in 2005.

1.1.1 Section Summary

In summary, global civil society, first observed and written about in the early 1990s, has attracted a growing body of academic interest over the last thirty years. The 1990s and early 2000s were notable for attempts to describe the phenomenon, its size, shape, and infrastructure, while its role as a reforming and legitimising force in relation to global governance has been the subject of debate throughout. Early optimism about its significance in this sense was impacted by the 'war on terror' and global financial crisis in the 2000s but has revived in relation to debates about the global democratic deficit, and the novel context of the internet as a public space. More practically focused strands of enquiry have sought to address exactly how global civil society lives up to its potential and the following sections look at these in more detail.

1.2 Relations with IGOs

Edwards' proposition, that in engaging with IGOs global civil society provides the means for greater accountability of those institutions, begs a number of questions. How do IGOs open themselves up? Why and how do civil society networks and organisations make it their business to take up this role (and how would it be resourced)? How far does or should the process of engagement extend? As civil society itself is not immune from charges of elitism and failings of representativeness, is it playing the role of democratising agent a (counter-productive) half-measure?

The first two of these three points is taken up by Steffek (2013) in his analysis of the GCS-IGO relationship. He argues that there is a 'push-pull' dynamic, which drives GCS to engage, and IGOs up to a point, to welcome them. He further distinguishes this by considering each phase of the policy cycle; agenda-setting, through policy design, implementation, and evaluation.

For IGOs functional reasons to 'pull' GCS in, include forecasting and intelligence on arising issues (a role Steffek particularly associated with the UN ECOSOC), access to expertise (environmental science networks are identified as influential), delivery in the implementation phase through grants aided or contracted programmes (a notable World Bank approach), and support with monitoring and compliance through external 'eyes and ears'. More generally, engaging civil society can be seen as a response to pressure for greater accountability.

Reasons for civil society to 'push' in, according to Steffek (2013), are dependent on their mission and modus operandi. Advocacy organisations seeking to set agendas and reform policy have a clear interest in influencing relevant IGOs, while frontline service delivery organisations, or those engaged in research have an interest in attracting programmatic support and resources. Of course, both dimensions exist within civil society, specific networks, and even within individual organisations, so the distinction is perhaps more helpful when considering how the relative importance of each affects the civil society approach to IGOs in any given circumstance.

In her book 'The `Third Force', Ann Florini (2012) discusses the tactics available to civil society to influence transnational norms and institutions and has a different characterisation of the choices facing civil society. Drawing on a number of case studies including the campaigns around banning of landmines, anti-corruption measures and nuclear non-proliferation, she summarises the options for civil society as 'direct' – that is challenging or persuading policy-makers head on to change their minds, or 'indirect' – that is generating public mood or concern about what an institution should be doing. Mario Pianta's study (2005) of GCS-IGO relationships resulted in a similar but further refined approach, identifying four (not mutually exclusive) approaches, being the 'protest model' where CSOs reject an IGO in its entirety and call for comprehensive change, the 'pressure model' which is essentially lobbying within the permitted parameters, the 'proposal model' which more pro-actively suggests changes both in structures and process and policies, and the 'model of alternative practices', which bypasses formal intergovernmental structures and builds distinct civil society momentum (with perhaps indirect affects as per Florini).

Likewise, the 'push-pull' varies according to policy topic and as a result of each IGOs' age, development, and culture. The UN Security Council for instance has remained very closed to civil society, despite a growing understanding of human security as opposed to national security. The World Health Organisation (WHO), at the other extreme, has publicly asserted it simply could not do its work without extensive engagement with civil society, and that that engagement has 'profoundly affected' the concept of public health it works to and the shape of its programmes. Previous WHO head Margaret Chan used her final speech in the role to highlight the accountability role of civil society calling it "society's conscience" (World Health Organisation, 2017). In examining four critical WHO programmes relating to tobacco, breastmilk, international health regulations and food standards Lee (2016) concludes that civil society has been the most significant driving force behind global health governance. Nevertheless, the WHO, like every UN institution remains one based on

nation-state membership, and Lee, like Steffek (2013), also remarks on the fact that, at the point of decision, the door remains firmly closed.

So, what routes to engagement are there for civil society with IGOs? In formal terms amongst the longest standing is the opportunity to register with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for consultative status. This status dates back to 1946, but has grown in significance more recently, with over 4000 organisations now registered. Consultative status confers the right to attend UN international events and meetings, make written and oral submissions to those meetings, organise side events at them, and gives accreditation to enter UN premises, to physically network and lobby UN personnel and government representatives. Physical opportunities to engage are now numerous with events having become much more outward looking in recent years, supported by an outreach department, which in turn avails itself of the communicative and networking power of thousands of civil society organisations worldwide with whom it has formal partnership agreement (United Nations Department of Global Communications, 2019).

In addressing the question of the extent of engagement, the International Association of Public Participation (International Association for Public Participation, 2021a) provides a useful tool to look at how far an institution has (chosen to) open itself up. This is a spectrum which runs from 'inform' – the basic level of transparency, through 'consult', 'involve', 'collaborate' and 'empower', this latter being where citizens decide, and the institution delivers. The Association is quick to point out that it is a spectrum of levels, not steps, and that different levels of engagement are appropriate for different institutions and different purposes, but it does also provide for a 'broad brush' assessment of where an organisation's general policy approach and culture sits. Applying this broad brush to ECOSOC, language and mechanisms would suggest it sits around the 'consult' level (United Nations Department of Global Communications, 2019).

The much younger UN institution UN Women might be characterised as 'consult' edging towards the 'involve' level, in that it has established an overarching and wider network at regional and country level of civil society advisory groups to systematise its engagement with what it considers "one of UN Women's most important constituencies" (UN Women, 2019). It has also actively developed a social media strategy, involving celebrities and online campaigns, to support interaction with civil society groups and the public at large, in some ways mimicking a civil society approach to publicising issues and framing an agenda.

Other IGOs have, up to a point, adopted similar, if less far-reaching models of formal engagement with civil society. The IMF and World Bank Group share a Spring policy forum event designed to engage with civil society, and routinely consult on their policy development via an online platform. However, the language used to describe their engagement with civil society is more reserved than that of UN Women, WHO or ECOSOC, in that it emphasises transparency and accountability and 'listening' rather than partnership, collaboration or dialogue. Though, of itself, this is considered progress by Scholte in his deep examination into the relationship between the IMF and civil society in the 1990s (Scholte, 1998); where previously the IMF had been a

very opaque organisation, it was beginning to see the benefits of being more open, and Scholte credits this development with shifting the IMF's attitude to poor countries' multilateral debt burdens at that time.

While these formal structures and mechanisms are no doubt important, they clearly have their limitations. To optimise the opportunities they represent, civil society has adopted a range of informal approaches they deploy alongside, or sometimes instead of formal interactions. One such method is cultivating professional relationships with official personnel of the institutions, to influence the thinking behind and preparation of formal documents before they reach government member representatives. In discussing this, Steffek (2013) notes that it can be the case this is done with the eager co-operation of the IGO secretariat.

Hannah, Scott and Wilkinson (2017) however argue that the opposite is true in relation to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). While noting that institutional-civil society interaction has developed in that case as with others - very few outside demonstrations accompany WTO ministerial gatherings any longer, and certainly not of the order or nature of Seattle in 1999 or Gleneagles, Scotland in 2005 – their study shows that the secretariat of the organisation has been slow to embrace the benefits of a comprehensive relationship with civil society networks. While a formal mechanism exists, centred on an annual policy forum event involving around 1500 participants, in large part it continues to rely on a one-directional public relations management approach, sitting squarely at the 'inform' end of the IAP2 spectrum.

In contrast, the OECD's organisational culture has embraced engagement with civil society. Its view of 'civil society' has evolved from a specific focus on business and trade union networks to encompass a more easily recognisable one embracing NGOs, think tanks, academia and citizens' networks. It too has an annual policy forum event, but more significantly, in the region of 250 specialised committees, working groups and expert groups operating at any one time, which involve civil society variously, from informal liaison through to observer status on, or sometimes full membership of committees (suggesting a level of collaboration) (OECD, 2019). However, argue Sellar and Lingard (2013), this very complexity can limit civil society access to those willing or able to commit significant resources, or suppress strategic or meaningful engagement by an overly-technocratic approach.

Research and data are an increasingly important part of civil society engagement with IGOs. As well as helping frame issues and agendas at the front end of the policy cycle, providing ongoing intelligence and monitoring on implementation can help reassert the importance of issues and draw attention to where progress is lacking. This is proving a particularly important area of growth in the context of the sustainable development goals framework (SDG) (United Nations, 2021). The overarching review of progress towards the goals is carried out, annually, under the auspices of ECOSOC, and every four years under the auspices of the UN General Assembly. The production of individual country reviews that feed into these, and the events themselves give civil society new opportunities to challenge received wisdom and official accounts, offer alternative, citizen-generated data, and reframe agendas domestically and globally (Adams and Judd, 2016).

Of course, any of these tactics and activities require resources. Aside from the potential conflicts of interest between advocacy and service delivery, civil society engagement is skewed by the capacity to develop professional position statements, and field people into meetings, with all the travel and time costs this involves. Critics of the tendency – often termed ‘NGO-isation’ - this has had to confer advantage on wealthier, often northern-based, NGOs include Choudry (2010) and Carroll and Sapinski (2015). Taking a network analysis approach the latter found a particularly influential role for foundations and philanthropists in determining the flow of policy ideas transnationally. However, they also begin to question the ‘NGO-isation’ narrative, concluding that while these advocacy-delivery resources trade-off issues exist for CSOs, there is also self-critical awareness of them throughout global civil society networks. Alvarez (2009) in her study of the feminist movement in Latin America had already suggested that in that part of the world at least civil society had begun to move beyond the operations and practices associated with NGO-isation, and was finding ways to address, or simply work around these dilemmas. More recently Roy (2015) found a similar process at play in India and argues for a greater appreciation of the complexity and plurality of civil society. Indeed, while a scan of the ECOSOC civil society consultative status register might suggest an eclectic mix of organisations directly signed up, it also encompasses a range of associations, networks and federations of regional or national organisations, suggesting, questions of these organisations’ own effectiveness and inclusiveness aside, a wider reach than at first may be apparent.

1.2.1 Section Summary

Thus, overall, global civil society relationships with IGOs have been the subject of both descriptive research and theoretical analysis by academics and increasing amounts of IGOs’ (especially online) literature about their own practices. The use of data in shared research agendas as an aspect of the relationship has provided a key focus of interest, in the context of wider technological changes explored further in the next section.

1.3 Technology

Internet technology has transformed the ability of civil society to communicate globally, in turn, having a dramatic effect on how it relates to global institutions. Indeed, the rapid development of global civil society in recent years, and its portrayal as a democratising force at the global level would not be plausible were it not for the speed and sophistication of communication that the internet facilitates.

Manuel Castells (2004) was the first to comprehensively set out a prospectus for the nature and scale of change for global civic dialogue that was being and could be wrought by such technology. Moving beyond the more obvious organisational and logistical benefits for existing global CSOs and networks, he predicted the growth of an online civic sphere where issues and agendas could be debated and progressed

in an inclusive fashion, and a change in behaviour by, and increased accountability of IGOs in response. How far this prospectus has been fulfilled, and the issues associated has opened up a lively academic debate.

Shirky (2011) takes a very optimistic view, arguing that internet freedom will incrementally work to challenge authoritarian regimes, and enable activists to network outwith their national circumstances. For him it is less a matter of overcoming censorship of information emanating from more open societies, as has been a feature of Western, particularly US policy thinking about technology, and more a case of promoting debate, dialogue, and the creation of uncontrolled (online) civic space. He points out that online networking obviates the need for formal, perhaps resource intensive organisations, and in doing so counters some of the problems identified in the 'NGO-isation' narrative, and creates a more fluid, adaptable, inclusive version of global civil society. Here the only gatekeeper is access to the internet.

Fuchs (2014) picks up the theme of space for dialogue and outlines a typology to describe the processes of networking and mobilisation in civil society enabled by technology: the three 'C's. 'Cognition' is the preliminary awareness raising stage, 'communication' is the necessary interaction between parties, and 'co-operation' is the evolution of genuine, non-territorially bound public space, where civil society can develop priorities and thinking, and in doing so inform and involve global institutions. However, he goes further than Shirky (2011) in flagging concerns about ownership and governance of the key internet platforms. He looks in great depth at a range of particular technology corporations, and whether they can support the vision of a civic or public sphere. He concludes that political intervention is likely to be necessary.

In this he echoes Mackinnon (2011) who as a result of her detailed study of the use of the internet in China warns of possible abuse of online civic space, not just by the profit-making companies, but in extremis by governments, creating a new risk to civil society activists through online surveillance. Likewise Morozov's 2011 work, 'The Net Delusion', prompts a more sceptical view of the internet as automatically a benefit to engagement or democracy (Morozov, 2011), and at a more mundane level, he revives his earlier argument (2009) that online activism can actually reduce rather than enable people's engagement in civil society by giving them the illusion of doing something – such as by signing a petition or retweeting a message – but with little or no impact; an idea known as 'slactivism'.

Conversely, Glasius and Pleyers in their study of the wave of public protests that happened throughout the world in 2011, highlight how the use of common images and messages on social media created a global 'moment', a version of online movement building where even a 'like', or a forwarding-on of the message, makes a contribution. They also believe the causes of the protests had an underlying commonality, being peoples' economic dislocation as a consequence of globalisation, ironically in this context, due in part to technology and automation (Glasius and Pleyers, 2013).

In this they offer a cross-over into the literature around technology and the growth in populism. Here social media is used to create awareness of a common grievance, but rather than take Fuch's (2014) steps from cognition to communication and co-operation, a simplistic, one dimensional solution is offered. Moffit (2016), Bonikowski (2018) and Schroeder (2018), all identify pro-active use of social media as an essential pre-requisite and accelerant of the rise of populists. Rather than public forum or debating chamber, Moffit assigns online space the role of stage in a grand performance by the likes of Orban (Hungary), Erdogan (Turkey) or Estrada (Philippines). Bonikowski notes that *twitter* is at its best when conversational, but US President Trump used it as a declamatory tool to circumvent traditional channels and the mainstream media, as, Schroeder (2018) notes, do the Sweden Democrats and Modi in India.

Nevertheless, despite these concerns about governance and alternative uses, social media platforms are increasingly widely used by civil society networks. Shirky (2011) ascribes *whatsapp* group text messaging a role in promoting freedom of assembly, and conversely controls on the use of them (such as in Egypt) a direct contravention of that right. Gerbaudo (2012) in his ethnography of social uprisings in Egypt, Spain and the Occupy movement in the US all in 2011, goes further and describes a more integrated use of different social media for different purposes to provide an overall 'choreography' of the creation and communication of the protests. In doing so he challenges Morozov's 'slacktivism', and also Shirky's optimistic view of web spontaneity, emphasising the 'soft leadership' of some activists, providing the 'behind-the-scenes' online organisation to the physical events.

Another ethnographer working with the Occupy movement in the US in 2011, Jeffrey Juris (2012), reinforces these observations, and remarks on the full range of uses of social media from basic logistical information (congregating where and when), the protection of individual protesters by filming incidents of threatened violence, through the development of policy debate (though falling short of policy formulation), to the evolution of a life for the movement, both online and in a physically dispersed manner 'post-eviction'. While these examples sit firmly and deliberately 'outside' intergovernmental processes, both Gerbaudo and Juris effectively echo the link Manuel Castells drew, from a more theoretical standpoint, between the online and the offline in the context of a wider public sphere (Castells, 2004). So, too, do they illustrate how social media can amplify the power of the indirect approaches to influence public opinion and formal policy processes identified by both Fiorini (2012) and Pianta (2005).

As regards direct engagement, of course email, social media and so on has enabled faster and more sophisticated communication, and enabled CSOs to be ever slicker in their lobbying materials. Yet perhaps as significant is the use of open and shared data platforms, where civil society – and especially networks of engaged academics - can access and interrogate official IGO data, and sometimes contribute their own. This provides a whole new dimension to the global civil society-IGO relationship that is becoming more systematised within the SDGs framework. The UN department responsible for co-ordinating implementation of the goals has set up a web-based knowledge platform, including a database of all UN activities considered to contribute

to implementation. It is also providing a home for all the material being collated by individual countries undertaking voluntary reviews of their own progress towards the goals, and there is considerable activity in civil society networks encouraging direct CS engagement with these national processes. As Webster and Ravnborg (2016) explain, the data capture process to support monitoring of SDG implementation is explicitly designed to extend beyond governments and incorporate data on and generated by civil society.

1.3.1 Section Summary

There is significant academic interest in the internet as a space for civil society potentially to thrive and as a stronger bridge between the 'outside' and 'inside' tracks of global civil society-IGO relations, but also concerns about new forms of restrictions on association that may accompany it. As a shared knowledge space for research and data it is also creating a new dimension to the online public sphere being well utilised by civil society.

To crystallise this engagement at key points it is increasingly becoming the practice to work towards the dates of summit events, which provide a spotlight under which data, dialogue, and the wider policy context is examined. The next section reviews the literature on these key moments.

1.4 Summit Events

Intergovernmental organisations have long operated through meetings and gatherings to provide a focus for policy development and decision-making. Global summits – those designed to be a pinnacle of such processes – conventionally involve very senior representation from a significant number of governments worldwide, alongside senior personnel of the host IGO, and often those of others in an observer or supporting capacity also. As such they attract significant interest from the media and, to the extent that they may direct or influence domestic affairs, significant national political interest also. They are inevitably wrapped round with some pomp and ceremony, and additionally provide the opportunity for bilateral or small group meetings of powerful actors.

The role of such events, however, has expanded and changed in recent years, and become an important aspect of and opportunity for the relationship with global civil society. Castells (2004) saw them as catalysts of dialogue and exchange between the governmental and public sphere, with technology providing the means for exposing or extending the conversation beyond the venue. Deliberate, long-term, scheduling of the events provides the opportunity for planning and co-ordination, not just by government officials, but by civil society networks seeking to get the best possible exposure for their research, campaign or policy position. Foremost examples of such events are the Beijing conference on women in 1995 and subsequent follow-up events, the Conference of Parties (COP) series on climate change initiated by the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and including notably Copenhagen in 2009 and Paris in 2015. The Millennium Summit which agreed the Millennium Development Goals and was shadowed by a UN sanctioned and hosted civil society Forum event in 2000 and the more comprehensive Sustainable Development Summit fifteen years later are all significant.

However other less high-profile summits such as the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons Review events in 1995 and 1996 which progressed the banning of landmines (Price, 1998) the UN conference series on financing for development (McArthur, 2015), the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (Eckhardt et al., 2016), and more recently gatherings on IT governance (Zalnieriute, 2019) are considered important from a civil society perspective, and have attracted specific academic interest.

The notion of global summits being defining moments, not just in relation to the policy area or agenda, but in terms of global civil society itself, is explored by Pianta (2005). He offers a typology based on an extensive study of UN summits and the attitudes of civil society participants in them in the 1990s and early 2000s – a period of significant global civil society development. He argues the ‘opening door’ effect of such global events, introduces, or significantly extends an activist’s or organisation’s awareness of global issues, networks, and commonalities, which can, indeed, be very powerful.

The second and third effects he describes – the ‘deepening effort’ and the ‘launching pad’ are the stages CSOs go through, stimulated and assisted by the summit events

to develop knowledge and expertise, and then move on to making connections, joining forces and seeking external impact (typically after repeat attendance at international gatherings). A further critical stage is 'the broadening vision' where individual CSOs with specific interests begin to see their issues in a bigger context of international power relationships and seek common cause with others working on ostensibly different issues, as a result. He cites the major UN climate conferences in Rio and Copenhagen as occasions when wider civil society networks came together to reinforce impact. He also mentions the Millennium Forum, and it would be relevant to add the series of events leading to the launch of the SDGs as a more recent example of this.

The notion of a bridge in relations between IGOs and civil society is brought into sharp focus in relation to global summit events by Harrybe (2011). He ascribes a mediating or translation role to the activists present, between the 'cacophony' of wider civil society and public interests, and the government delegates (and financiers and media corporations). Writing with particular reference to the COP15 global climate change conference in Copenhagen he explores the different roles activists play in increasing the resonance of such events and their ultimate impact in terms of the success of the agenda and formal decisions made. As well as the 'radical' and 'confrontational' type activist working outside the formal event in the indirect or protest mode, and the 'professional' activist walking the floors of the venue prosecuting arguments that they also persistently pursue between such happenings, he introduces some new types particular to the event scenario. These include the 'creative activist' who raises issues using non-conventional, artistic or cultural means, and the 'occasional activist' who while not sufficiently motivated to engage year-round will willingly show up to swell numbers at a point when and a place where the eyes of the world are watching. He adds the 'everyday maker', who (perhaps more specific to the environmental agenda than generally) live their beliefs and provide exemplars to the conference discourse.

To an extent the approach any individual or group of civil society activists will take to a summit, will depend on access. Where the meetings are closed, they are left with no option but to protest outside. Where, on the other hand, accreditation is available to some or all of the programme, those inclined to lobbying or collaboration will apply for entry. The 1990s saw an opening up of an important 'middle ground' between these two extremes, with the organisation of fringe events on site, or whole 'parallel summits' held alongside or in the days prior to the main IGO event. Pianta mapped these out these different-style engagements in 2004, at which point his analysis suggested 10% of such civil society events at global level were integrated into the official event, with around a quarter engaged in active dialogue. More than half were fora for criticism and 10% in 'strong conflict'. His research encompasses global civil society events which stand apart from official IGO summits, such as the World Social Forum or independent co-ordinated days of action, which he viewed as a significant evolution and flexing of muscles of global civil society at that point (Pianta et al., 2004).

The 'spotlight' of a global summit can be used to great effect by civil society to accentuate particular campaigns at domestic level, either showcasing progress in

some parts of the world to incentivise it in others, or more crudely deploying the embarrassment factor where a particular government may have fallen behind or breached international standards. Arguably, this is the key purpose behind some events consciously created as a collective media moment to highlight the state of an agenda or wider international relations, as opposed to any more formulaic business or decision-making purpose. The recent addition to the global summit genre (in the sense of involving heads of state or very senior governmental representatives), the Paris Peace Forum, has been described as exactly that; a deliberate harnessing of a moment, using onsite and online methods, to reassert multi-lateralism and participative democracy, without any connection to formal IGO processes. Indeed, it attempted to make a virtue of a flat structure, with big corporations such as Microsoft, philanthropists such as the Open Society Foundation, and small grassroots organisations given equal access and billing (at least from the end of the opening ceremony onwards) (Riis Anderson, 2018). The downside to this approach of capturing the moment and the media eye, is that it can be transitory. The Peace Forum is the result of an initiative of one world leader and an invitation by him to others and their civil society and business counterparts which was taken up across the board (with the notable exception of the US President in 2018). It welcomed very senior IGO participants and such as the Vice President of China in 2019, but it is questionable whether, without a more conventional foundational structure or agreed objective, it can sustain this profile or level of involvement over time.

The Paris Peace Forum is said to be inspired by the now long-standing World Economic Forum, run annually at Davos. Initially dominated by large corporate and financial interests, over time the WEF has sought to engage a wider range of stakeholders, even to the point of inviting Oxfam's Winnie Byanyima to co-chair in 2015 (Byanyima, 2014). Nevertheless, actual participation in Davos is well beyond the means of much of civil society, and wider debate on the issues being discussed is more of a media and online activity than a physical one (Greenpeace International, 2018).

An earlier development prompted by Davos, and likewise organised apart from inter-governmental organisations and processes, was the World Social Forum, which was designed to offer, not just civil society comment on the perspectives being aired at the World Economic Forum, but a comprehensive alternative to it. Using the tagline 'another world is possible' the World Social Forum was launched in 2001, but already by 2004 was suffering from a conceptual dilemma, as to whether the gathering was the meeting of a network of social movements which could coalesce around particular policy positions, or whether its sole purpose was to provide a space for activists to debate and express themselves (Patomaki and Teivainen, 2004). This fault line has continued throughout its history, and twenty years and sixteen events later, the future of the event series is uncertain, with the latter purpose largely overtaken by social media and other internet-based platforms (Brunelli, 2021). Its impact on global civil society, and its place in advancing global agendas is however undoubted, and helped spawn a movement of intersectional civil society networking, connecting global conversations to regional, national, and local levels (Dufour, 2016).

Also offering an alternative to IGO-centred global gatherings are those orchestrated by CIVICUS. The global network of civil society organisations which launched in 1993 has become well known especially for its signature programmes, the CIVICUS Index which assesses the ongoing state of civil society around the world (CIVICUS, 2021c), and the CIVICUS Monitor (CIVICUS, 2021b) which observes and reports on civic space. It has organised sixteen ‘world assemblies’ since 1995, with agendas more focused than the world social forum series, in that they foreground the conditions that make the existence of civil society and citizen action possible. More recently the assembly model has evolved into one more dispersed physically, but still connected online, as the International Civil Society Week (CIVICUS, 2021d).

1.4.1 Section Summary

The role of summit events as fora for global civil society-IGO engagement has been explored by writers interested in both how the engagement happens in these settings, and in the specific policy-related results generated. The next section focuses on a case where these aspects come together, where improved quality of civil society-government engagement is the intended outcome.

1.5 Open Government Partnership and Summit

In the context where most IGO summits (even where they have parallel events or civil society involvement) are inevitably government-centric, and CIVICUS assemblies and World Social Fora are civil society focused but consequently lack impact on government/IGO actors or processes (and such as Davos remain beyond the reach of global civil society at large), in 2013 a global summit took place in London which was deliberately designed to break the pattern.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) hosted its first global summit with an invitation to ‘global reformers of all backgrounds’ to come together on an equal footing to discuss ways to improve participation in governance and the accountability and transparency of governments. There was overt promotion to government and civil society alike (and some reach-out to the business community). As such it can be seen as a forerunner to the Paris Peace Forum, but unlike this later development which has no formally agreed basis, the OGP Summit is a meeting of a formally constituted arrangement between countries, the result of a motion to a high-level meeting of the United Nations in 2011 (Clinton, 2011).

The Open Government Partnership was formally established in 2011, with eight founding members (OGP, 2021a). Its membership has now grown to 78 Nation-state members (and following a pilot arrangement) 76 sub-national entities; critically to join OGP national governments must demonstrate they are in partnership with civil society and as such, and unlike other IGOs, the ‘Partnership’ is deemed to be both between countries *and* between governments and civil society. This partnership is reflected in all levels of the governance structure of OGP and in the design and

make-up of its summit events. Using the kinds of characterisations developed by such as Fiorini (2012), Steffek (2013) and Pianta (2005) discussed earlier, OGP can be seen to be deliberately creating the space and opportunity for close working and the development of trust, not simply influencing or lobbying. On the IAP2 spectrum (International Association for Public Participation, 2021a) of ‘inform’, ‘consult’, ‘involve’, ‘collaborate’, ‘empower’ it would be placed firmly at the collaborate and (in aspiration at least) empower end of the spectrum, and as such goes further than even the most progressive of IGOs.

To date there have been five OGP summits: London (2013), Mexico City (2015), Paris (2016), Tbilisi (2018) and Ottawa (2019) (OGP, 2021f). In its early days the open government movement was dominated by interest in technology to transform governance processes, and the earlier events attracted people responsible for e-government projects and civil society advocates for open data and transparency. Over time, however, the open government agenda has broadened to more fully embrace the potential of openness and participation to transform public services and address wider public policy challenges such as poverty and inequality. Consequently, the agenda of events and the delegate base attending them has also broadened and now draws interest from across a range of policy communities (Bellantoni, 2016). Some commentators (Tisne, 2015) refer to this kind of structure or space created to accommodate a cross-cutting community of interest as a ‘global platform’ or ‘multi-stakeholder forum’, and see OGP as a model for work on more specific agendas such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, itself now a host of an influential summit series, or more recently the beneficial ownership and open contracting movement (OGP, 2021d). There is a live debate about whether and if so how well this model serves the pressing agenda around governance of the digital space (Zalnieriute, 2019). The deliberate involvement of non-government actors in such platforms is also attracting interest as a way of reviving multilateralism (Lee, 2019). Or indeed as a way of surpassing State-based multi-lateralism, as long-standing proponent of global civil society, Scholte, perceives it in his report on the burgeoning of ‘multi-stakeholderism’ across policy areas, in which he argues for more strategic research into the phenomenon. He makes a distinction between ‘ancillary’ multi-stakeholder fora, i.e., those which grow out of pre-existing institutions (and so could include IGO consultation fora or parallel summits), and ‘executive’ ones deliberately designed to have peer engagement from the outset.

This intentional multi-stakeholder forum model, and the summit events associated with it that are designed to reach out to and bring together participants from across sectors on an equal basis are a novel departure in global civil society-government relations within the last decade, and as such merit further examination in and of themselves, and as a backdrop to the changing state of such relations. OGP’s *raison d’être* is to advance participation accountability and transparency, and this, along with its focus on cross-sectoral convening and harnessing technology place it front and centre to the questions this PhD research aims to address. This is also why it is integral to the design of the research methodology detailed in the next chapter.

Chapter Two: Methodology

2.1 Outline of Research

The research described in this thesis was designed to address the question of how civil society and governmental bodies relate at the global level, with particular foci on high level meetings or summits, and the use of technology. The research questions therefore were:

- ⇒ How does Global Civil Society operate in relation to Intergovernmental organisations?
 - How does Global Civil Society engage with high level meetings or summit events?
 - How does Global Civil Society use technology to support its work in relation to government at the global level?

As discussed in the previous chapter, the global open government movement is an exemplar of close relations, designed to promote civil society/government partnership, and as such provides a novel context for the examination of these issues.

This chapter firstly revisits the choice of the Open Government Partnership as a field of research and goes on to describe the overall - mixed methods, though predominantly qualitative - research approach taken to unpack the research topics in this context. It then discusses each element of the methodology in turn; data collection through participant observation and interviews; examination of event evaluation and social media tracking data; and then the approach to analysis of this material. It considers the ethics of the approach taken, and the importance of reflecting on the positionality of the researcher. It acknowledges the unique context of the research given its timing straddling the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic and how the methodology was adapted to account for this. Finally, it seeks to recognise the limitations of the research approach.

2.2 The Open Government Partnership as a Field of Research

A field of research for ethnographic observation is often taken to mean a physical setting or geographical community. Balsiger and Lambelet (2014) in their discussion of participant observation of social movements move beyond this to embrace the idea of a multi-sited field embracing meetings, events, movement memberships and online fora, to which participants were connected. This is the interpretation in mind in the selection of the Open Government Partnership as a field of study.

The Open Government Partnership, instigated by a motion to a high-level meeting of the United Nations, was founded in 2011 by eight countries (UK, USA, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, Philippines, Norway, South Africa) and launched at a meeting of the UN General Assembly (OGP, 2021a). Its objectives are to advance participation in, and the accountability and transparency of, governance at all levels, with the

ultimate aim of improving the outcomes of policy across the public sphere. This enabling of other agendas has been explicitly recognised in the context of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, with former New Zealand Prime Minister and UN Development Programme Director, Helen Clark, claiming shortly after the launch of the global goals that open government approaches had “already equipped its members with some of the key elements of what it will take to deliver on the 2030 Agenda” (Clark, 2015).

Now numbering over 150 national and sub-national partnerships as members (78 countries, 76 ‘local’ level), the OGP is a genuinely global platform of engagement designed to give equal recognition to actors from both government and civil society. With plans to extend its ‘local’ reach further in the near future it provides a framework to give space for joint working on the development of solutions to public policy challenges (OGP, 2021e). Its entire modus operandi is supposed to model collaborative behaviour across sectors.

Drawing on the idea of instigating a ‘race to the top’, OGP requires participating countries and sub-national entities to commit to biennial National Action Plans (NAPs), which contain explicit – co-designed - commitments to implement reforms which open up policy and governance processes. The quality and ambition of these commitments along with progress towards their implementation are overseen by an Independent Reporting Mechanism, which publishes assessments of each member’s efforts and success (OGP, 2021b). Ambition and action are shared and celebrated, not least during periodic global summit meetings. While e-government type NAP commitments were prevalent in the early days, arguably limiting its attraction to those with significant technology skills or interest, this had broadened significantly over time. A searchable open data base of commitments, past and current, is maintained on the OGP website and provides evidence that the platform now encompasses interests across public policy including health, education, and infrastructure (OGP, 2021g). A deliberate thematic approach by the Global Committee and Support Unit in recent years has accelerated connection with and uptake of the OGP methodology by officials and activists in such as gender equality and justice reform (OGP, 2021c).

The OGP platform itself is structured to reinforce the peer engagement of government and civil society. Its global steering committee is constituted with equal representation of governmental and civil society representatives (eleven each), co-chaired on a rolling basis by a government minister and a civil society leader, and the Support Unit (secretariat organisation) has focused resources on supporting civil society, alongside more conventional resources for the appointed ‘points of contact’ in governments. Members (government and civil society partnerships in countries and localities) are required to demonstrate the involvement of civil society in the development of plans and increasingly encouraged to establish ‘Multi-Stakeholder Fora’: steering groups mirroring the global governance arrangements at national and local level.

OGP’s own operating practices are also expected to provide an exemplar for open and collaborative working. The use of technology to extend transparency and

inclusion has been a strong theme from the start, with innovation in convening techniques evident both online and offline. In formalising the role of civil society and embedding it in its structures and practices in this way, the OGP creates a high watermark in the trend towards recognition and engagement of civil society by IGOs and other global bodies. As the Open Government movement has developed, the summit events have become more frequent (from an original biennial cycle) and arguably more central to its work. More than just an opportunity for exchanging information, networking and showcasing good practice, summits are seen as 'action-forcing' moments – intended both to stimulate progress at a member level, but also to drive thematic agendas globally (OGP, 2021f). How this actually happens through the interaction of civil society activists and government and IGO representatives is at the heart of this research.

It is in this context that the Open Government Partnership was selected as the field of research: because its 'platform' extends and connects across a wide range of policy interests and pre-existing policy communities. It was also selected precisely because it purports to be an exemplar of collaborative practice and its summit a flagship event of a novel IGO, designed to embody the new kind of working and civil society engagement described by advocates for participative democracy at a global level.

In designing a methodological approach, it made sense to take advantage of the researcher's own position as one of the eleven civil society members of the global Open Government Partnership Steering Committee. Appointed on the strength of a background in civil society leadership in Scotland - one of the sub-national pioneer members of OGP - this provided the opportunity to act as participant observer of the global summit in Ottawa, Canada, May 2019, and network opportunities to secure access to relevant actors, for subsequent interview. Access to event registration and evaluation data offered a modest additional, quantitative, dimension.

2.3 Overall Approach: Mixed Methods

A mixed methods research approach was chosen for this project, for both pragmatic and outcome-focused reasons. Broadly defined mixed methods refers to an approach which combines two or more methods of data collection or types of data (quantitative and qualitative) and seeks to integrate findings. Debate persists on a precise definition (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007), and as to the optimum combination of approaches, but common themes in the debate are pragmatism and yield: the idea that tailoring research using a range of components will produce better or entirely novel insights. As Morgan argues it creates the ability to move between theory and data, allows consideration of objectivity and subjectivity to come to the fore (intersubjectivity) and enables the transfer of ideas between settings (Morgan, 2007).

For this research a mixed methods approach, primarily qualitative with some quantitative aspects, was chosen because no single method would provide the ability to see the topic from micro to macro level. It was anticipated that mixing methods

would facilitate inductive exploration of issues arising at each stage, producing a deeper understanding of the nature of relationships and their impact.

Data was collected via observation of the summit (and associated social media), qualitative interviews with a carefully selected sample of delegates and those using the wider platform designed to ensure inclusion of those working in a wide array of policy areas and supported by quantitative data obtained via the summit's evaluation survey. As such the design combines what Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, refer to as *between-* and *within-* paradigm methods i.e. using a mix of different qualitative approaches, as well as some quantitative approaches (Johnson et al., 2007). The advantage of this mixing, they argue, is that it allows for induction (discovery of patterns), deduction (testing of theories and hypotheses) and abduction (uncovering the optimum meaning and analysis).

In an earlier paper Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) had argued one of the merits of mixed methods was enabling an interaction between data collected in different ways, and the ability to iterate ideas and questions, even to go back and reexamine. Creswell et al (2003) in their work on advanced mixed methods research designs, consider the importance of the relative timing of the different stages or types of data collection, and whether they are designed to provide a concurrent triangulation of data, or to prime the next stage of enquiry.

In this case the participant observation data and social media tracking data collection were concurrent, with the main body of interviews flowing from that (during Autumn 2019). Evaluation data was collected by the summit hosts in the months following the event and became available in February 2020, some nine months after the event itself, but in time to inform the final interviews and data analysis. The final phase of interviews was undertaken in June 2020, with the purpose of addressing gaps in the initial sample, and also (with an updated topic guide) to probe for any new data emerging as a result of the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020.

2.4 Participant Observation

Participant observation as a research method has evolved from roots in the ethnographic approaches of anthropology and sociology, to be more specifically applied in the recent past to a variety of social and political contexts, and across academic disciplines (McCurdy and Uldam, 2014). It is an approach increasingly used to understand what is going on in the development of civil society networks and social movements (Balsiger and Lambelet, 2014). Like ethnographic research more generally it relies on the objective observation of the subjects in their own environment by the researcher rather than the views of the subjects themselves, influenced as they may be by survey or interview structure, focus group setting or unfamiliar participants, and as such often produces rich data. Though as Hammersley (2018) points out, these same characteristics can make it prone to academic arrogance and smother rather than amplify the voice or perspective of the subjects. It can also suffer from being too specific to one circumstance and producing data from which it is hard to generalise. He does however argue that in

combination with other forms of enquiry these weaknesses can be addressed, and indeed he and others advocate the benefit of triangulation with other qualitative (e.g. interview), or quantitative data, as in this case (Atkinson et al., 2019, Balsiger and Lambelet, 2014).

McCurdy and Uldam in their review (2014) of participant observation of social movements discuss more precisely the advantages and disadvantages of the approach in this setting, and offer a reflexive construct designed to help researchers think clearly about their own position in relation to the subject, and the implications of this for the research and those being researched. An axis of overt-covert is bisected with one of insider-outsider, creating a four-quadrant framework. In this case the participant observation was designed to be firmly in the overt/insider quadrant, with the role being openly acknowledged while positively leveraging the researcher's deep involvement in the open government community.

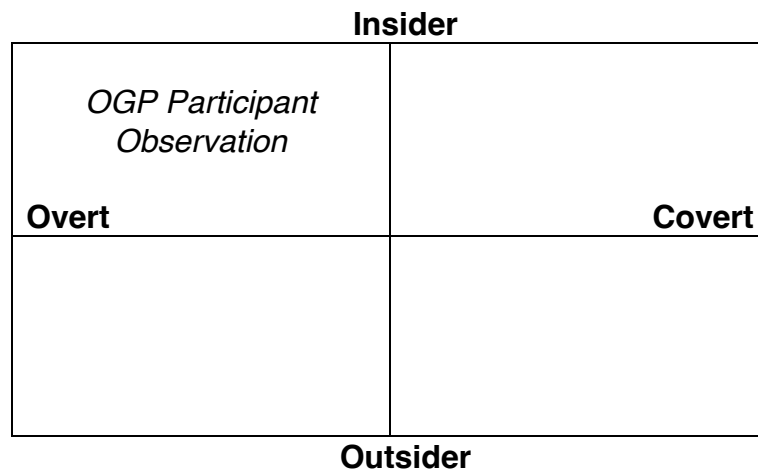


Figure One: Position of OGP summit participant observation
Adapted from (McCurdy and Uldam, 2014)

In his 2019 provocation paper, Richard Freeman argues that politics and policy in practice revolve around the micro level of spoken and written interactions (Freeman, 2019). Drawing on the work of political theorist Hannah Arendt and sociologist Erving Goffman, he emphasises the human aspect of how politics and policy-making is conducted, the relationships and exchanges that drive it and, critically, the context in which these interactions happen. This brings to the fore the importance of events, such as the OGP summit, which provide the forum and stimulus to policy-influencing interactions which may not otherwise have taken place at all, or at least in the same way. It was in this vein and given the opportunity for close-up observation of all aspects of the OGP Summit provided by membership of the global steering committee, that it was resolved to undertake a formal data collection exercise engaging over the entire week as a participant-observer.

Freeman (2019) further argues that gatherings carry meaning in and of themselves. Demonstrations and protests obviously so by bringing a plurality of people together in common voice, but also conventions and conferences; the fact that two thousand people from more than fifty different countries and a variety of different backgrounds and levels of seniority are willing to travel, sometimes expensively and for many hours, to the same venue for several days at a time is, in essence, a form of political expression.

The gathering then, also, according to Freeman (2019) provides a context for observable encounters and meetings. The former, he contends, can be unplanned (a chance running-in to in the coffee queue) or appointed (scheduled on the fringe of the programmed event) but given the context of a formal gathering, not coincidental. In either case an encounter provides the opportunity for politics to happen as perspectives are exchanged.

The meeting, a more conventional, explicitly purposeful interaction, with acknowledged participants (and often associated attendants), and usually a written record, is the more widely recognised method of 'doing politics'. Meetings provide a formal opportunity to make sense of agendas, deliberate, develop understanding and consensus, and potentially make decisions or accords. Meetings don't happen in isolation, they follow previous interaction, and attempt to make sense of the current situation by collating perspectives cultivated elsewhere. They are constituted of talk and text, and inevitably lead to further interactions, immediately or sometime later, whether bespoke to the agenda, or by connecting to other agendas. As such Freeman (2019) essentially calls for more attention to be given to the meeting itself, the nature of participants, its format, and how any output is generated, as opposed to the topic or content of the meeting. He suggests the need for a method of acknowledging the connection between different modes and instances of interaction (akin to the literary theory of intertext) in order to give a fresh perspective on the political process.

Juris (2012) and Gerbaudo's (2012) respective studies of the 2011 social uprisings, which both look at how activists influence global agendas through the creation of momentous events and use of technology, are relevant examples of participant observation of the protest end of the spectrum of civil society-IGO engagement. An early effort to use the approach to understand more formalised engagement was Little's study of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit (Little, 1995). He considered the aspects of the approach pertinent to the setting of what he termed 'transnational mega-events'. He contrasts a journalistic approach to reporting the instrumental progress of the event with a more anthropological one focused more on ritual and behaviour. Interestingly he discusses technology both as a subject of research as it was used by and influenced the behaviours of the delegates, and as a research tool, in that it enabled him to draw on contemporaneous first-hand reports of aspects of the event he was physically unable to attend. This included for him the parallel civil society event that ran alongside the Rio summit, which while recognised by the UN was organised by a coalition of NGOs.

Arguing that despite the growing significance of major international summits, relatively little is understood about how they 'actually unfold', Etienne Ollion's (2010) study of the 2007 G8 looks closely at the relationship between journalists ostensibly covering the event, and civil society activists seeking to influence their coverage, and thereby the behaviour of governmental negotiators. In a narrative reminiscent of Keck and Sikkink's (1999) 'boomerang effect' he describes a relatively sophisticated approach by NGOs to apply pressure in one place in order that it rebounds elsewhere, a process that is amplified by the intensity and spotlight of the summit (Ollion, 2010).

This research aimed to build on the use of participant observation in protest settings and early forays into the formal summit context. The Open Government Summit design encompassed the opportunity for many different forms of interaction, from the very formal protocol-driven Ministerial Steering Committee meeting, through set-piece plenary sessions with a keynote speech or a formal panel, to much more creative workshop-style sessions. Every formal programmed session was provided with language interpretation facilities. Other spaces in the physical venue and in the programme timings were made available for participants to self-organise, and beyond that were the advertised fringe or social events, and other very informal social gatherings. The micro-level focus on human interaction argued for by Freeman (2019) would suggest that none of these formats was necessarily more important than another, and as such each merited scrutiny (Labaree, 2002), though, of course where they involved someone with a high level of agency, such as a government politician, senior official, or in the case of civil society, high profile leader of one of the larger NGOs, it could be assumed they might ultimately have greater ramifications. The attendee list however revealed an impressive range and density of people very senior in their own contexts, so no simple assumptions could be made about which sessions would attract whom, and therefore all contexts were potentially impactful.

While OGP summits are routinely preceded by parallel civil society and government gatherings, the main event is fully integrated, and as such presents a distinctive subject, at the co-operative/collaborative end of the spectrum of civil society-IGO engagement. Unlike those studied in this way before, where IGO/government representatives are to some degree segregated, and there is an obviously unbalanced power relationship between formal delegates and other attendees, an OGP summit is intended to provide the environment for full and open engagement between IGO and civil society participants on an equal footing.

Unlike a relatively spontaneous street protest, a summit event is extensively planned and programmed, making it possible also for thorough planning of the participant observation. Previewing the agenda on the conference website enabled registration at a good cross-section of all the key elements (ceremonies, plenaries, workshops and social aspects). This spread was to help identify whether the setting modified behaviours and if so, how. The pre-summit civil society day and an associated academic conference at Carleton University (2019) were also included in the observation exercise. As a member of the global Steering Committee, the high-level aspects of the event were also available for observation, both through participation in

the working level and ministerial meetings, and through insights into (off-programme) government-OGP bilaterals.

The schedule was extremely demanding, necessitating staying focused on observing and note-taking, whilst participating appropriately and contributing effectively, but highly productive. The requirement to think constantly about what was happening, rather than simply passively experience it, was intense, intellectually challenging, but worthwhile. It cast light on the role and nature of such events, and participants' behaviours in that context. Ellen Isaacs in her TED talk advocating observation for design (2013) called this process the discovery of the 'hidden obvious'. It is the isolation of patterns of behaviour that subjects may not have even acknowledged themselves, but yet may have meaningful impacts on the achievement, or not, of their stated goals. As a research method it has the advantage of evolving and acquiring a deep understanding of how things are the way they are, and, up to a point, what causes people to behave or react the way they do. The identification of patterns or themes, however, doesn't happen automatically. As many writers on ethnography and participant observation fieldwork point out (Sangasubana, 2011, Balsiger and Lambelet, 2014) it is important to structure the observation, take notes in real time where possible and soon afterwards where not. Some (Balsiger and Lambelet, 2014) specifically recommend the use of templates for note-taking to increase standardisation and the subsequent ease of analysis. Others (McCurdy and Uldam, 2014) emphasise the importance of reflection and further note-taking after the fact to benefit from evolving thought processes.

In this case a template was used to prompt a complete scrutiny of every occasion or setting it was planned to observe during each day of the summit, and for a more reflective 'wrap-up' note at the end of each day to encompass the less formal or more transitory situations experienced. Written notes and photographs were collated using a journal application (*OneNote*) accessible via laptop, tablet and phone. This enabled not only efficiency and security of note-taking, but also organising the material 'on the go' to assist with subsequent analysis. Each record was organised (using the template headings) to capture administrative information (date, venue etc.), a description of the activity or gathering, and live notes from it. The template included, for instance, a reminder to consider the room set-up, the numbers and types of people present, and as far as possible an assessment of the level of their engagement in proceedings. In relation to the latter, use of mobile devices, phones, tablets, laptops could be deceptive – sometimes indicating very full engagement – note-taking and live commentary on social media attention – in others at least partial distraction online with other conversations or platforms. Being logged into OGP whatsapp groups and following relevant twitter hashtags (also prompted by the template) live enabled some insight into which was predominant in each case. The content headlines of each session were noted, paying as much attention to the questions and comments as formal presentations. Notable powerpoint slides were photographed as much as an aide memoire to the nature of the session, as a more conventional participant record of the content. In the case of workshops or so-called 'fishbowl' sessions which ostensibly are only loosely planned and rely on participants' spontaneous contributions, it was worth thinking about and noting whether these were authentic or of a more choreographed nature.

Fieldwork notes principally took the form of typed, abbreviated notes, photographs of room settings, powerpoint slides and flip charts and links to or copies of social media posts. All delegates at the event had through the registration process given permission to be photographed and filmed, but with ethical considerations in mind care was taken to limit photos taken for the purpose of research notes to subjects where no person could be identified. However, as discussed elsewhere, the event was deliberately and extensively photographed and filmed by the hosts and social media by participants was encouraged, making it possible to cross-refer written research notes with other resources online, as an aide memoire, and for further analysis.

The notes were tagged according to an initially simple system using the *onenote* application's standard tags, but quickly evolved to label reflections, both live and later in the day, and, importantly emerging questions, issues or themes. These latter provided the basis for questions and prompts in the interview phase of the research. Additionally, it was anticipated that the tags applied to material in the field would assist with data coding more formally after the event, and indeed did subsequently facilitate incorporation with interview data.

2.5 Social Media Tracking

Given both the research project's overarching interest in the use of technology, and the OGP Summit hosts encouragement of a social media dimension to the event, particular attention was given during and immediately after the event to summit related traffic on the twitter platform and was encompassed in observation data. Twitter was chosen as it is widely acknowledged as the platform of choice for policy professionals and is becoming a topic of research and debate in its own right. Indeed, a literature review in 2014 already identified 115 studies of the role and impact of twitter in the public sphere (Jungherr, 2014). A clear pattern emerging from this review was that twitter is used by people who are interested in public affairs and are likely to be politically active. Monitoring and posting on twitter was seen by these people as a means not just to stay current, but also to influence unfolding political events and policy agendas. It also identified a key research interest in twitter's role as a 'back channel' for people to comment publicly on formal events such as debates and conferences they are witnessing, potentially impacting the main 'face' of such events. While very heavily used in the United States and the United Kingdom, twitter is not just an English-language or western phenomenon, with 2019 statistics showing it is also very well used for example, in Japan, Russia, Brazil and India (Statista, 2021), meaning there was less danger of inadvertent cultural or language bias in the choice.

Explicitly acknowledging this modern dimension to events, and wishing to understand it better, in the run-up to and during the Ottawa summit, the Canadian Government hosts experimented with an online 'sentiment tracker'. Using a software approach developed originally as a means to detect national security threats (Ling, 2017) a comprehensive trawl of twitter using all relevant hashtags was made. A

website displayed realtime analysis of certain words and terms and associated positive and negative words and sentiments. An overview was played back to the audience in a short presentation in the final plenary (Chidester, 2019).

An unpublished final summary report (Marchand, 2019) of the analysis has been made available by the hosts and provided a means of triangulating this dimension of the observational data and experience with a comprehensive overview of twitter activity relating to the event. The report is based on more than 30,000 tweets that were posted over a five-week period before, during, and after the summit. Its analysis of the frequency of usage of key words and associated sentiment gives an insight into the development of debate over the period, which topics most interested delegates and online followers, and it also provides confirmation that twitter activity relating to the summit was genuinely global with a breakdown of activity by continent. Activity naturally rises significantly in North America during the summit week itself, but is sustained everywhere else, pointing to far flung online engagement far beyond the venue.

2.6 Evaluation Data

As is now standard practice at conferences the summit hosts undertook a post-event online survey to evaluate the event and gain feedback from participants. This was open throughout the summer and autumn, and OGP provided access to the results data in early 2020. With a 10% response rate data cannot be said with confidence to be representative, but nevertheless responses to questions relating to increased awareness, understanding, collaboration and networking, along with the free-form comments, contribute some relevant insight into perceived benefits of the event, and of stand-out concerns. Usefully these responses can be unpacked by delegates' association with civil society or government, and their home country. Like the social media tracking data, the evaluation data helped contextualise and could be compared with insights from the participant observation exercise. OGP Executives, seeking further insight into the success or otherwise of the event, also commissioned an interview-based piece of evaluation research, which was in the field during autumn 2019, with summary results becoming available at the February 2020 OGP Global Steering Committee meeting.

2.7 Interviews – Sample Selection

In his 2013 book 'Sampling and Choosing Cases for Qualitative Research' Nick Emmel distinguishes the traditional approaches to qualitative sampling: empirical, purposeful and purposive (Emmel, 2013). On this categorisation the approach taken to the choice of cases to interview was clearly purposive, in that it was driven by the nature of the research questions. However, the approach taken also draws heavily on the idea, advocated by Emmel, that ideas should influence sample choices, that an interplay between theory and the real world creates better insights. He asserts

that a researcher cannot stand totally objectively and must be regarded as a determining actor in the process and its outcomes (Edwards, 2014).

With this idea in mind, and given the unique position of the researcher, it was possible to devise an approach to sampling which deliberately built on the participant observation stage of the research, effectively priming the interview stage as per Creswell (2003).

The approach taken to selecting and contacting individuals for interview was purposive, in that it clearly aimed to examine the global civil society – IGO relationship by probing the perspectives of individuals from both sides of that relationship, but also sought to ensure those questioned came from as full a range of standpoints as possible.

With the aim therefore, of investigating aspects of the research questions and issues emerging from the participant observation with a range of civil society representatives and government/IGO counterparts active at the global level, interviewees were identified from either the delegate body at the Ottawa summit, or through wider OGP networks. Using this connection with the OGP platform as a touchstone – a single characteristic that placed all interviewees within the field of research - a purposive approach was designed to ensure a good spread of background policy interests, geography, and current role.

Vexingly, the original intention to identify potential interviewees in advance, and the means to make systematic contact with them at the venue, was in practice prevented by a failure of the conference app. However, a networking/snowballing element added to the sampling strategy through the event week did enable initial contact with a gamut of delegates, who expressed willingness to be recontacted.

An initial twenty interviews were undertaken in Autumn 2019. In order to ensure the comprehensive spread of interests, the seventeen sustainable development goals were used to frame a review of the interests of this initial twenty. In early 2020 a further wave of interviews was being planned in order to address under-representation, when the onset of the pandemic with its associated impact on the subject of the research gave an extra impetus to proceed. A top-up sample to approach, drawn from Ottawa summit delegate list and other OGP networks, was determined in Spring 2020. While the original research plan considered the sample selection in the binary terms of either civil society or governmental, other, more nuanced distinctions of actors' roles had begun to emerge as an issue, such as the role of funders especially from the foundation/philanthropy arm of civil society, and the second wave of interviewing also sought to reflect this.

This resulted in a further ten interviews and provided better coverage across the SDG policy areas. It also boosted the overall number of government and IGO interviewees, and those from funders. Additionally, whilst it is difficult to be precise in relation to individuals and global organisations, the sample review sought to ensure a good overall north-south balance of voices. Interestingly, some interviewees were able to draw on career experience from 'the other side of the fence', with six current

civil society interviewees expressly referencing that they previously worked for governmental organisations, or vice versa, and many operated at both national and global level. The following table breaks down the number of interviewees with these various characteristics:

	Civil society (current or previous role)	Governmental (current or previous role)
National level	12	7
Global level	15	6
Funder	4	1
North	15	6
South	11	2

Table One: Breakdown of spread of interviewee perspectives

(NB multiple characteristics skew totals; total number of individuals interviewed = 30)

2.8 Interviews – Approach

Interviews were undertaken in two waves, October – December 2019 and June-July 2020. The majority of interviewees in the first wave attended the Ottawa summit, and indeed were approached during the event. In these cases, the background to and purpose of the research was explained in person and written consent obtained. These contacts were followed up in early autumn and appointments for online conversations obtained. While some of the final ten interviewees had also attended Ottawa, they were all (re)approached directly by social media or email.

The majority of interviews were undertaken using the Skype communications platform, which has the advantage of an in-built recording function. Some however had to be undertaken on other similar platforms where that was the interviewee’s preferred method (e.g., BlueJeans or Zoom) and the recording accessed subsequently. In two instances the interview was undertaken by telephone with a digital voice memo recording. Each recording was transcribed using the NVivo transcription function, reviewed and checked manually, with inevitably the voice memos proving most in need of manual correction.

A semi-structured, conversational approach was taken to the interviews, appropriate to the professional nature of the people involved. Aware of the time pressures on such people, an estimate of forty minutes interview time was offered, with an in-practice cap of an hour. As Blee and Taylor (2002) comment semi-structured interviewing is commonly used in research into social movements and is particularly helpful in gaining insight into individuals’ perspectives and motivations, giving latitude to uncover previous experience and hear their thoughts, ideas, and perspectives articulated in their own words. The challenge, however, was to manage the conversation in such a way as to cover all the main strands of enquiry in the limited time available.

A semi-structured interviewing approach was appropriate, moreover, because it enabled a standardisation of *meaning* as opposed to language. In their useful methodology discussion paper Barriball and While (1994) point out that where interviewees have a variety of first languages, using precise wording in interviews or surveys ostensibly to standardise the exercise, can be counter-productive, it being preferable to use flexible language and reference points to ensure genuine comparability of responses. In a field such as open government there is a professional jargon which can act as a glossary of reference points, but it is also the case that similar technical words or phrases have different nuances or stem from very different contexts, so the space in the interview process to ensure both interviewer and interviewee were talking about the same thing was important.

Going further, the discursive approach not only allowed the interviewer and interviewee to ensure they were 'on the same page', but also the opportunity to probe and develop particular points as they arose. A final 'wrap-up' prompt was designed to elicit from interviewees whether all issues in their mind relevant to the overarching research question had been discussed. Occasionally this unearthed a new issue not mentioned previously, but more often provoked a further 'unpacking' of an aspect of the foregoing discussion, and in that sense resulted in more complete data. Blee and Taylor (2002) highlight this 'open-ended' nature of a semi-structured interview as an important means of uncovering important themes or dynamics which are otherwise undocumented or unresearched. They also identify as an advantage the ability in semi-structured interviews to take a longitudinal view on the questions at hand, delving not just into how respondents see the current state of play, but any changes they have perceived over time. They see this as important to the study of social movements, allowing the 'rhythms' of participation and motivation to become apparent in general terms. For this study, with its foci on technology and structural fora, and in light of the profound disruption wrought by the pandemic, it was key.

Each conversation began with a reminder of the purpose of the research and the terms to which interviewees had consented, for confirmation. The opening prompt was an invitation to explain their current role in relation to civil society-government relations at the global level, and any relevant career background.

Each interview in the first set of interviews then broadly followed the same pattern, structured around the following issues:

- ⇒ The (changing) nature of civil society-governmental relations over time
- ⇒ The role of global summits and events with reference to civil society governmental relations
- ⇒ The impact of technology advances on civil society-governmental relations
- ⇒ The potential of data-sharing and e.g., the global goals (SDG) framework
- ⇒ Threats and opportunities around civil society-governmental relations, and views on key actors

These issues were discussed with reference to relevant academic literature, and, where relevant to observations of the Ottawa summit.

The final set of interviews conducted in June 2020, also covered these main themes, but it was necessary to acknowledge explicitly the changes wrought – at least temporarily – by the COVID 19 pandemic. An additional question was added to invite views on likely practice post-lockdown, and potential opportunities or risks arising.

In general, all interviewees proved interested and enthusiastic participants in the research process. Barriball and While (1994) highlight the challenge of accounting for ‘good’ and ‘poor’ responses from interviewees, the latter being characterised by evasion or limited responses to prompts through lack of motivation to contribute. Happily, this was not a feature of the vast majority of interviews undertaken for this project, with very many respondents expressing enthusiasm for the topic and interest in its eventual findings. However, there were evident limiting factors in some cases. One was simply time available, and a sense that some responses were rushed and not as fully developed as they might have been as a result. The second was particularly the case for government and IGO respondents who on occasion became guarded on some controversial issues. However, reassured that their comments would not be attributed or in any way stated as an institutional view or policy position, they typically did develop their thoughts, suitably caveated. Indeed, the ability to probe was helpful in distilling personal perspectives, influenced as they could be by context and career history, from those that may be interpreted as more widely held organisational positions. This was particularly the case amongst the sub-set of interviewees (see above) whose career trajectory had taken them between civil society and governmental settings or in roles spanning multi-level contexts.

This willingness to open up demonstrated a very welcome level of trust in the interviewer and the research process, which was undoubtedly linked to previous (albeit fleeting in some cases) acquaintance and recognition as being part of civil society and/or the ‘opengov’ community. Blee and Taylor (2002) discuss the pros and cons of an interviewer as an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ in a manner that mirrors the literature on ethnography and participant observation (Uldam and McCurdy, 2013, Labaree, 2002). While important potential downsides of being ‘one of us’ are unacknowledged assumptions and lack of objectivity, the upside of access to and genuinely open discussions with interviewees was, at least in this case, invaluable. It also provided a level of efficiency to the interview process, in that the interviewer was already familiar with the landscape and indeed with what Blee and Taylor (2002) refer to as the ‘ephemeral developments’ that might be contextually relevant but not be otherwise documented.

Moreover, the fact that all interviewees had a direct association with the Open Government Partnership, and in the majority of cases had personally attended the Ottawa Summit, provided a very tangible link between the interview phase of the research and the participant observation. More than a sampling device, it also served as a touchstone for shared understanding in the interviews themselves. The ability to call on real examples in a shared recent past, and test interviewees’

experience of and reaction to them, strengthened the opportunity to compare and contrast. This arguably mitigates to a degree the downsides to the less strict nature of a semi-structured, as opposed to structured interview approach.

2.9 NVivo Coding and Analysis

Once interviews were completed and accurately transcribed, they were coded using NVivo software. Top-level codes were based on the main interview themes/questions, with some sub-divisions, developed inductively and also cross-referenced with the tagging applied in the field to the participant observation data.

This approach enabled the dominant themes – both anticipated and unexpected - of the research to surface, providing the main structure of the subsequent narrative argument. More detailed analysis and write-up was also considerably assisted by the ability to manage quotations and other data.

2.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethics in social research is about balancing a search for knowledge and insight with respect for human rights and dignity (Bulmer, 2001, Mertens and Ginsberg, 2009). The context in which we live and work is undergoing constant change and therefore getting this balance right requires ongoing consideration. This is especially the case as technology now impinges on all aspects of life, and the potential of social media as a form of observation, must be weighed against the appropriate limits of that (Murthy, 2008).

The overarching thinking behind this research design objective was as follows: being open about the work is more ethical than a secretive observation, though being covert has arguably the advantage of revealing uncircumscribed behaviour (Uldam and McCurdy, 2013). The latter in an already contrived situation of a big event where people were well aware they were being overlooked by their peers was largely a redundant consideration, while alongside the ethical inclination, the very purpose of the event – to promote transparency and accountability – weighed heavily in favour of an overt approach and would certainly be more acceptable to the hosts. On this basis, the hosts/OGP Co-Chairs for 2019 – Nathaniel Heller (of NGO Results 4 Development) and the Government of Canada (lead department the Treasury Board) - were asked for, and gave, specific permission to proceed. They endorsed explanatory posts about the research on the official summit website and associated literature and on OGP's own corporate website (OGP, 2019). Nevertheless, it would be disingenuous to suggest that all summit participants were aware of the researcher's role or would have recognised her or been more than ephemerally interested even if they did. As a result, it would be fair to say the observation was technically overt, but in practice discreet and unobtrusive.

With the mixed methods approach proposed there were a number of ethical considerations relating to each specific aspect. The researcher has been a member of the open government civil society community and has been active at a global level since 2015, gaining familiarity with the networks, organisations and many individuals involved. In relation to the participant observation, being elected as a civil society member of the platform's governing body (steering committee) in 2018 has provided the opportunity for an additional level of insight to the movement's workings. In considering a participant observation approach to the Ottawa summit, consideration was given to the perceptions and potential misconceptions of the researcher's role and any potential vulnerabilities of other committee members and the wider delegate body. The design of the methodology was based on the presumption that all delegates to the conference are acting in a formal capacity, either as a recognised volunteer representative or civil society organisation employee on the civil society side, or government bureaucrat, IGO official or elected politician on the government side. As such none were likely to be vulnerable, and all were expecting and will have given permission via the registration process to be observed at some level, given that the entire programmed event was to be recorded in some way, including via livestreamed coverage. Likewise, formal Steering Group meetings are all on the record and transparency (as one would expect given OGP's purpose) is paramount. It is the case, however, that delegates may have felt constrained in a professional sense by the circumstances of the event, for example civil service personnel will have been acting according to policy and standards of their government role, and civil society representatives may have felt unable to fully voice views about, for example, funding arrangements for risk of jeopardising them. This is normal and unlikely to have been affected by the observation in the context of the formal sessions. It is acknowledged, however, that planned observation of the less formal aspects of the summit could be misconstrued, and every effort was made to be open about the approach, to mitigate the need for undue discretion.

Both the statements about the research carried on the summit's bespoke event website and OGP's own corporate website (OGP, 2019) provided contact details for anyone concerned about the approach. No such contacts were received, during or after the event.

In relation to the interview stage of the research, all selected interviewees were provided with an information sheet about the purpose of the research (soft copy by email, with hard copy offered in person) and the approach being taken. They were asked for explicit permission to proceed and a signature on a formal ethics committee-approved consent form (see Appendix One). On the occasions where a physical signature was not feasible (especially the case for the phase two interviews following the onset of the global pandemic and suspension of face-to-face gatherings) a direct email stating consent was secured. In all cases subjects were reminded of the terms of the interview at the outset of the conversation and their reiteration/confirmation of consent recorded. The consent terms made clear that participants could withdraw their data up to a point six months hence. Some interviewees expressed their interest in the outcomes of the research and were advised of plans to produce and share a summary in due course.

In relation to the evaluation data used to triangulate the participant observation notes and interview transcripts, access to the summit evaluation data was strictly managed and subject to OGP's own data policy, and the researcher's own data handling policy statement was developed to accord with that, to academic institutional standards, and is stated in the project's (ethics committee-approved) data handling policy (see Appendix Two). This also covers notes collated during the participant observation fieldwork, and to recordings and transcriptions of interviews.

2.11 Timing and Positionality

The research described in this thesis was designed to address the question of how civil society and governmental bodies relate at the global level, with particular foci on high level meetings or summits, and the use of technology. Early work on the project began in 2018 during a time when big summit events, amplified by mainstream and social media, were a common feature of the international relations landscape, and the Ottawa Open Government Summit the latest in a series of events on broadly the same pattern. The landscape radically altered, however, in Spring 2020 with the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic, and the consequent abrupt cancellation of the vast majority of planned gatherings where civil society-government relations at the global level would have been expected to play out. It was a period also marked by a rapid acceleration in the use of technology for global – virtual - gatherings. These changes are clearly of direct relevance to the research questions, and, as such, are discussed throughout the findings and analysis sections of this thesis, but they also had direct impacts on the conduct of the research itself.

Falling between the first and second phases of interviews, the pandemic and associated lockdowns in many countries, created problems for securing access to (newly identified) interviewees which had previously been obtained in person at various events, including the Ottawa Summit itself. These were overcome through the use of social media messaging to make contact and email to secure consent.

More substantively, thought had to be given to the timing of the second phase of interviews, and whether a lengthy gap to allow for some resettling of arrangements to occur, the so-called 'new normal' to establish itself, would add value. On reflection it was decided to proceed in late Spring/early summer when the at least pro tem working arrangements had been in place for some months and interviewees would be in a position to comment on their efficacy and impact. As such the information sheet issued to interviewees prior to the appointment was updated by cover email to ensure topicality, and the interview prompt revised to ensure capture of updated thinking.

As well as issues of timing the nature of this research required careful, and ongoing, consideration of the position of the researcher in relation to the field of study. Going beyond the ethical it was important to be aware of the implications for the efficacy of the research method itself.

In relation to the insider-outside question (Uldam and McCurdy, 2013), while the overall positioning is clearly that of insider – with all the advantages of access that comes with that – the reality is more nuanced. While an open government activist for some years at the sub-national and national level and occasional attendee at previous global events, this was the first occasion as a full member of the governing Steering Committee, not yet attuned to the processes and protocols of that scenario, not well known by longer standing members, nor widely recognised as a global-level actor. Given the critical theme in the background literature around a relatively closed circle of INGO and IGO ‘usual suspects’ in the field of civil society-government relations at global level (Choudry, 2010, Carroll and Sapinski, 2015) this conferred, potentially, more of an outsider perspective than might otherwise be appreciated. A similar ‘wheels within wheels’ consideration is that given the joint civil society-governmental nature of the open government community but with a researcher with an explicit background in civil society network leadership, access to, and reception by both key aspects of the group might not be even. However, such distinctions can also be overplayed – heterogeneity of any group diminishes the more micro-level the scrutiny, but the fact that all, one way or another had been compelled to attend this summit at this time creates a commonality and research yardstick. McCurdy and Uldam (2014) acknowledge in any case that participant-observer positioning can change over time through the very fact of participation, and for the exercise to be fully realised this entailed further points of reflection after the observation and during analysis.

Such periodic reflection touched of necessity on the potential in-built assumptions the researcher brought to the exercise, in this case clearly greater knowledge of civil society than government, but also of the peculiar context of UK multi-level governance, the understanding of which may or may not usefully translate to the global level or other regional or domestic circumstances. As Labaree (2002) points out such experiential ‘baggage’ is not necessarily a hindrance to the researcher. He suggests that it can usefully provide short-cuts to understanding, but there are also potential academic blindspots or biases to be accounted for, which require a conscious introspection and consideration of motivation and positioning.

2.12 Limitations

In considering the limitations of this research, the positionality of the researcher, as discussed above, cannot be ignored. Overcoming problems of access more frequently associated with social research was the most significant advantage of the methodological approach; the researcher’s role in the open government community and especially her position on the global committee gave unrivalled access to the field, which was only enhanced by the positive reaction of the two co-chairs of the platform at that point, who were generally well-disposed to research and specifically the learning opportunities for OGP potentially presented by this project. However, the danger of being led by the familiar was a potential limitation, which required vigilance. While deep involvement in the field of research undoubtedly brings many advantages, both practical and intellectual, mitigation of researcher bias remained an issue throughout the analysis stage of the work.

This was also true of the potential bias of interviewees. Careful thought, as part of the coding and analysis process was given to the cultural and institutional backgrounds of interviewees in driving their responses.

While access to the field has been one of the key strengths of this project, the reliance on others for delivery of the quantitative aspects was a risk. The failure of the Summit app meant the planned systematic approach to identifying potential interviewees was weakened and had to be strengthened retrospectively. The social media tracking 'live' data was taken offline by the private company that generated it shortly after the event meaning direct interrogation of it was no longer possible, leaving behind reliance on notes taken during the event itself and the post event report written by an official for the Canadian Government. The post-event evaluation data from OGP was limited, predictably by response rates and necessarily by its principal focus on the logistical aspects of the event. As such the limit to which the quantitative data could be used was acknowledged and not unduly considered in analysis.

Further, given that the Open Government Partnership is, in the context of global government-civil society relations, an atypical case, the limits to which findings in this space can be generalised more widely must be recognised. While selected as a field of study precisely because it was at the extreme and largely unexplored end of the spectrum of engagement, in order to provide fresh insights, the very novelty of this restricts the ability to read across to other contexts (Mason, 2008) .

Beyond this, potential limitations include the complexity of the approach taken, both in terms of the timing of each stage and the interplay between the different blocks of data. Advocates of mixed methods approaches, such as Fetters et al (2013), argue that complex methods are required to make sense of complex processes, but recognise that adequate integration of the different components of the research is necessary to fully leverage the potential.

Finally, the unique circumstances of the pandemic occurring during the course of the fieldwork undoubtedly created challenges for the work both practically and substantively. Access to university resources had to be re-established online, and issues of timing and access reviewed. Conversely the disruption to the very issues under investigation caused by the global shutdown arguably contributed a clearer spotlight on them.

Chapter Three: Global Civil Society – Intergovernmental Organisation Relations

The results of this research are presented in the next three chapters: an initial set of general findings, and two more specific pieces focusing on summit events and technology. Drawing on thirty interviews with civil society and government and IGO actors at the global level, and participant observation notes and evaluation material of the OGP summit 2019 Ottawa Summit, they provide an assessment of the current state of the global civil society-government relationship, especially in light of the 2020/21 Covid-19 pandemic.

The initial chapter begins by summarising perceived external drivers to the relationship and analysing the current nature of it in that context. The role of each of the main categories of institutional actor is then examined in turn, with a consideration of the relatively recent appetite for multi-stakeholder fora which brings those actors together. It concludes with some insights into the human dimension of the relationship and the role that individuals can play.

To aid understanding, quotations from interviews are presented throughout identifying whether they come from a civil society or governmental perspective, and whether from a global or national level organisation (INGO/IGO, NGO/Gov). Where in some cases interviewees had experience of more than one viewpoint this is highlighted.

3.1 Political and Structural Context

In examining the relationship between governmental bodies and civil society at the global level, it became apparent that context, at domestic and global level was very pertinent, and could influence not just the success, but the existence of engagement. Over a third of interviewees, unprompted, raised external drivers which they saw as impacting on it. Political contextual issues raised were to do with commitment to multi-lateralism, the rise of populism/authoritarianism, a perceived threat to democracy and an actual reduction of civic space. Contextual issues of a more practical nature, but nevertheless with political overtones, were around institutions and process, technology and the role of 'big tech', and, in light of the timing of the enquiry, the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns.

Interviewees from both government and civil society perspectives spoke in terms of the conditions for a successful global government-civil society relationship to be under threat at a strategic level caused by political attempts to undermine multi-lateralism. Engagement between nations was seen by all those who spoke about it as under stress, and not to be taken for granted.

“We are investing a lot to try to promote the value of multilateralism and make it work. But at the same time, need to be prepared for a very ugly world where

it is a lot more bilateral. And we need to protect ourselves even against people that you felt were your allies” [Gov-8]

This general point was extended by many to encompass a threat to civil society-government relations, a retreat from engagement not just between nations but between the structures and focal points of international governments’ co-operation, and other stakeholders.

“Look at the increase of authoritarian regimes and also the diminishing importance of this multilateral and international fora vis a vis the conversation among Governments for many years. We have, as you have seen, worked very strongly with these international organisations. And at these international fora. But when you have Trump throwing everything down or breaking any connection, or diminishing the importance of the United Nations, and this kind of things, we risk losing one of our partners or fields of work or activity” [INGO-7]

For some this dismantling of relationships and structural norms is paralleled domestically:

“So I you know, I think in the political context of today's world I am worried that some of the values and the notions we've taken for granted in the past, since the end of the Second World War, really, around multilateralism, cooperation both among countries but also within countries between civil society, trade unions, social movements and governments; the social contract basically between those who govern us and those that act where government can't, is breaking down” [INGO-9]

Others saw this disintegration of engagement as a natural fellow traveller of a distinct political shift right-wards on many key civil society concerns, for example health, and human rights. These two civil society voices used similar language to describe a perceived regression to ‘old school’ approaches:

“There are some countries that if anything, you could actually argue they have just doubled down in the last ten years. The actual policy situation in some countries has worsened and almost worsened in spite of everything else going on around the world. They've become even more entrenched in their belief in the war on drugs. I'm thinking Philippines, for example, which is probably the most well publicised case. Bangladesh, Russia. You know, countries like this, continuing what I guess you could call an old school approach” [15- INGO]

“So there is this reality, which is which is variously defined as closing civic space, proliferation of restrictions in law and policy on the work of civil society, persecution of human rights defenders and so on playing out...and in 2019 we're really at a crisis of multilateralism and..... you know, the de-legitimisation of institutions like the Human Rights Council with the election of gross and flagrant violator states to this 47 member council; it is a huge

challenge. Even the hard-fought agreements, whether on climate justice or on rights of migrant workers, on states being able to present their human rights records in a constructive manner and also engage with contrarian viewpoints, are being challenged in today's environment where the human rights discourse is becoming increasingly politicised. So, it's a big challenge, but I would say it's because there's a crisis in political leadership at the international level, which is which is extremely acute. So, it's a toxic mix of old school authoritarianism and rising right wing populism" [INGO-17]

For many interviewees, this 'old school' attitude correlated with a rejection of engagement with civil society, a connection succinctly summarized by one IGO voice:

"The conservative pushback we're seeing, I mean, is certainly on sexual reproductive health and rights and those kinds of topics. But the conservative pushback is also on pushing civil society out of the room" [IGO-18]

This suggests a very practical manifestation of the political driver, a deliberate shutting out of unwanted voices, a reversion to the position that predominated at global level twenty to thirty years ago with civil society activists necessarily in protest mode trying to influence the direction of policy from the outside.

Another way suggested that civil society is 'shut out' is more subtle. Rather than exclude, it is argued, the more powerful governments simply sideline the issues and agendas civil society would prioritise, even to the extent of creating new institutions:

"We may also be suffering from a challenge of the over multiplication of institutions. Civil society has long argued, why do you need G20? Why do you need G7 or G8 when you have a United Nations? You're taking conversations about economic policy for the world out of what is supposed to be the legitimate body for having conversations about the future of humanity, into a separate place" [INGO -17]

It also suggests a correlation between civil society and left-leaning political parties, which may have gained traction in recent years. As another IGO interviewee pointed out it has not necessarily been widely assumed in the past, especially in countries where a notion of the apolitical 'charity' holds sway in terms of culture and law, but could be an increasingly important factor in providing the conditions for global gov-civil society engagement to thrive:

"There is an assumption in some countries, mostly I would say, the Anglo-Saxon UK, US, Canada, etc, that civil society is neutral from a political perspective, especially NGOs. Or at least there can be such a thing as a neutral civil society organisation, maybe not all of them are. But there's an assumption that there is such a thing whereas this is completely disregarded and even denied.... especially in continental Europe, southern Europe or Latin America, where civil society can only play a role if it is aligned with a political vision The two things work together, politics and civil society... They could

only work because they were kind of supporting each other or using similar language and fighting similar battles. Now this is changing in a lot of countries, including a lot of continental European and southern European countries and Latin America, where civil society is trying to get out of this and try to be autonomous from politics. And when this happens, we see some politicians reacting negatively and trying to actually reduce the space for civil society, whereas others are, on the contrary, thinking that this is a good development, and they want to encourage it” [IGO-19]

Whether or not politically manipulated, undoubtedly institutional process is an issue for those attempting to sustain global civil society-government engagement, at a practical level. IGOs came in for criticism from both within and without as being unfit for modern purpose, making it harder than it need or ought to be for them to engage with stakeholders; advocates for such engagement stressing the valuable expertise such engagement brings

“That's why I feel that it's kind of crazy to then be in a room only with governments while we decide, whatever we decide, because I feel that there is a big part of the conversation that is missing. So, I think what it's actually showing us is how complex and multilayered the environment in which we work is, and how we should capture that better and I feel that our decision-making processes still really very much resemble 19th centuries processes and previous-era administration processes, whereas the way we think and understand the world, and interact are 21st century” [IGO-19].

Current attempted reforms in the European Union processes in relation to civil society were referenced (Corella et al., 2020), some perceiving them to be a reaction to right wing forces encompassed in Brexit, as a positive initiative designed to address these institutional drawbacks in one multi-lateral structure. Similarly, for those interviewed after Covid-19 had taken hold across the world, the ‘shock’ of the pandemic was thought to be a force which may hasten a rethink, not only about the practical nature of IGO/government engagement with civil society (discussed in later chapters), but about the intrinsic value of it:

“Nobody knows the answers anymore. I mean, maybe we never did, but we used to think we had the answer to the big problems in the world But these really complex systemic problems of inequality, environmental issues, the lack of trust, all of these fuzzy sounding things are really coming home to roost in a in a real way. And governments might pretend that they're in charge, that they're on top of things. But Covid-19 has shown that governments which pretended they were in charge and on top of things, have fallen down really flat on their faces. So, their [civil society's] opportunity is that it's a wide-open field. Nobody knows the answers, even if they pretend that they do have the answers. So, there is a demand for fresh thinking, alternative thinking, out-of-the-box thinking and alternatives in all of these sorts of things that to my mind are the natural space for civil society to occupy, to really grab, and to provide solutions.” [NGO – 24]

Finally, in terms of external drivers, interviewees variously referred to other actors; perhaps most significantly the role of funders, the media, and to a lesser extent the private sector. These are discussed in more detail later in this chapter, however it is worth highlighting that the arrival on the international scene of ‘big tech’, that is the handful of very significant global technology companies which dominate the ways in which the world now does business (including such as Facebook, Twitter, or the Chinese owned WeChat), was perceived as increasingly relevant to the global civil society-government relationship. With some prescience to a debate that would gain heat around the 2020 US Presidential election and subsequent inauguration, one IGO thought leader called attention to their role not just as an enabler, but as a power in their own right, with the ability to support or contrarily limit civil society:

“The technology platforms have assumed the role of sort of mini governments at the global level. I’m taking your questions to be more in the relationship between governments and civil society, but when it comes to the private sector, especially very large technology platforms...., the big technology platforms Facebook, Amazon, and the like, they have an ability that government also has” [IGO – 29].

3.2 Spectrum of Relationship

Drawing on the work of such as Steffek (2013), and Florini (2012), this research aimed to assess the state of the relationship between civil society and governmental bodies at the global level. Their work, in varying ways, described a spectrum, of very distant (where civil society is an ‘outsider’), to close collaboration and partnership (‘insider’). Given the Open Government Partnership’s claim to model collaboration, the participant observation of the OGP summit provided for immersion in ostensibly ‘insider’ working. The interviews were framed to allow insight into the state of the relationship more broadly, drawing on interviewees’ familiarity with a range of policy areas.

It is notable finding of this research that there has been a significant shift in the nature and positioning of global civil society-government engagement in the last decade. Without exception interviewees reported a progression along the spectrum, with a greater level of involvement of and collaboration with civil society in global governmental agendas and fora, or seen from the civil society perspective, a transition from always being the ‘outsider’ to (the possibility of) being more of an ‘insider’. At one level this was to be expected given the methodology: interviewees were identified via their connection with the open government movement, and therefore had made it their business to explore greater partnership. Nevertheless, the consistency of view from both civil society and governmental perspectives, and across the geographical spread, was marked. This quotation from an anti-corruption activist tells of the human dimension to this shift:

“Definitely amazing things are happening out there, I would say and certainly lots of lessons to be shared. We recently really set up some really great webinars and engagements with other follow-the-money activists who are

rooted in the open government space and for whom the conversations are no longer as heavily laden with fear as they were 10 years ago. I think that the other difference is that I would definitely say that there is a much stronger sense that, yes, you can open up really difficult conversations about corruption, about state capture in certain contexts, but without the same level of trepidation of maybe ten years ago or more. I couldn't say there aren't inherent risks still, but I think from that perspective, so many great changes” [NGO – 27]

However, this progress has not been won lightly and many interviewees spoke of a fragility of the current position, and of other changes that have been necessitated in terms of tactics and behaviours, the need to shore up credibility, and the trade-offs involved on both sides of the equation in making the shift.

3.2.1 Tactics and Behaviours

Certainly, the relationship between civil society and government at the global level has grown in complexity, and a greater level of sophistication in strategy and tactics is required by civil society in positioning itself in relation to governmental structures, at both an organizational and sectoral level. Some interviewees maintained it was possible for an individual civil society organisation to juggle multiple positions, perhaps on separate issues or at different times, being both protester/lobbyist, and partner at the same time, but others felt it was becoming increasingly difficult for a single organization to sustain multiple roles successfully:

“I think a lot of it is issue-dependent. I think a lot of it is politically contextual. I think one sees the manifestations of both. And sometimes of both manifestations and with some of the same organisations who play their strategy out in different venues and spaces depending on what they're seeking to accomplish in a particular thematic area”. [IGO-20]

“I think that it was easier to play dual roles around 10 years ago. It was easier for organisations to be, as we used to say, critical friends. It was easier to have a position where you could be a friend of governments and at the same time criticise them”. [INGO - 29]

Some of the larger INGOs are credited with being able to maintain a level of sophistication within themselves which includes a public persona which may differ from the totality of their practice, others have chosen to adopt a role that co-ordinates with other civil society actors, so that on any given issue a range of tactics are deployed.

“[My organisation] is very much situated as one of the organisations that is more about brokering and convening dialogue. And the tools that we use are not the naming and shaming or more confrontational, protest-oriented or social movement-oriented approaches. And the civil society partners that we work with as a result tend to model more of that, taking up the seat at the

table while letting others bang at the gates; while assuming that we need both. And oftentimes even directly coordinating as such. So, for example, we would work with [INGO] when they they're doing a particular big report, - naming and shaming - launch to a government. And then we will follow up to government with our civil society partners to say, wow, you guys totally got burned! Let us help you. And here's some ideas and some recommendations about what you can do about it. [INGO – 12]

This latter, sector-co-ordinated, approach can be hampered by competition for resources, and may be both subtle and informal or more explicitly planned but as opportunities to play an extensive 'insider' or collaborative role with governmental bodies grow, a wider range of tactics and specialisms are required:

“I think in campaigns that are well-orchestrated, you have those civil society groups that are inside, more of what we would say inside the system, in the negotiation rooms, talking and engaging with governments on highly technical issues, drafting language that may end up in conventions or legal texts and so on. And then you have again, in well-orchestrated campaigns, you also have those other organisations that are pushing the narrative in the public space, in the media, in effect, making it a household issue. Sharing, as a movement or a broad mobilisation, around a particular issue [INGO-9]

Whilst some civil society organisations, no doubt, continue to be adept at 'riding more than one horse', part of the reason for this 'hardening' of roles, into those that are (seen to be) collaborative and those that maintain an outsider position, is trust. From a government perspective while there are advantages to engaging with civil society, there are also risks, which prompts selectivity about with whom they engage. The data suggests civil society has increasingly sought to ameliorate these perceived risks and there is a growing awareness of the need to build and maintain working relationships:

“I'm getting the sense that International NGOs are starting to realise that they need to help the national NGO to mature. And that's a great thing. I find it a lot easier to deal with International NGOs because they are used to dealing with governments”. [Gov – 8]

“If you go in sort of with a laundry list of complaints and criticisms and frankly, doing some naming and shaming, I just would find it hard to pivot the next day to a very collaborative posture, and vice versa. If you go in and, you know, everybody thinks you are best friends, and you sort of completely railroad them at the table or in a speech or something; I mean, that comes with real costs and headaches” [INGO -11]

On a practical level this may simply involve a level of professional courtesy, such as removing shocks and surprises, even where the ostensible challenge will still go ahead:

“It works as long as those civil society organisations play by a kind of relatively informal set of rules, which are largely about sort of pre-warning government when they're going to complain about something and only complaining about something publicly after they feel like they have exhausted all avenues for complaining to the government and have not been heard. Allied to that, they are still capable of providing high quality intellectual inputs to the government policy making process” [NGO – 5]

“If anything, they want to know if something bad is going to happen or if they're going to, I don't know, get a specific op.ed, in a specific media outlet or such” [INGO -13]

Professional relationships, not just organisational approaches, are seen to be important in this context. Opportunities such as events to forge trusting professional (and personal) relationships are seen as one important method of demystifying organisational relationships:

“It also helps to bring actors into conversations where there are not high stakes. High stakes in the sense that the moment that you want to identify a policy outcome with a policy decision, it becomes high stakes for governments. Then, they immediately default into their bunkers and into their enclaves and say, oh, no, we are under threat, we are under siege. But if there are no high stakes in the sense that we are just talking, they will be more amenable, and we'll be open... So, if I've been meeting you regularly over something non-threatening, when I get to give you a [policy] conversation, you might actually be able to say maybe he's got a point, let me listen to him. So, [events] help in demystifying governments and creating platforms for conversations” [INGO – 16].

It is notable that the organisers of the OGP Ottawa summit sought to address this head on by scheduling a 'pre-day' for some five hundred civil society and government/IGO representatives to mix. Previous practice had been for each cohort to organise its own pre-meeting to co-ordinate approaches to the summit, but on this occasion a deliberate attempt was made to break down barriers. Participant observation noted that much of the table workshop conversation reported back in plenary centred on how government representatives could start work with civil society or improve their connections with it. Overcoming the intrinsic 'messiness' of civil society and finding sensible entry points was reportedly a widespread challenge for people more used to more institutional structures. There was no sense of a lack of will to engage, more a slight bewilderment at civil society's many faces.

3.2.2 Credibility

Underpinning all of these tactics and behaviours needs to be credibility. While arguments about participative democracy and the 'rightness' of engaging with civil society are an important conceptual back drop to the global government-civil society relationship, the interviews revealed a growing pragmatic dimension to this:

“When things aren't moving with the government, you want to be firm and speak truth to power; but on the other hand, really trying to make sure that the way that you are doing that maintains credibility and keeps that door open so that the dialogue actually continues. So, I think what we have found is with that increase in technical capacity and with an increase in nuanced understanding of the incentives and disincentives for governments to act on reform, has actually contributed to better dialogue” [INGO 12]

“We collaborate by really helping civil servants achieve their mandate while at the same time infusing that conversation with civil society values and approaches and methods and networks and all these kinds of things. So, it's a bit of a Trojan horse that can happen.” [NGO - 24]

Foremost amongst the advantages for government engaging with civil society is intelligence and expertise. Civil society has an undoubted reach into all but the most excluded communities, can see and relay the reality of situations and issues in a way to which no government could hope:

“This does directly reflect the feedback that we've had from member states as well; member states have repeatedly told us, and the UN have repeatedly told us what they want to hear. They want to hear more from NGOs on the ground. Because a lot of what we're trying to do here, without the civil society component and the stories we're able to bring, these debates can be very nebulous. You've got diplomats representing their governments, talking about issues that they're not specialists in. I mean, none of it is grounded in reality, and I see that the real value of bringing local NGOs to Vienna and having them talk about the work they do tell their stories, is it anchors all these policy debates in actual reality” [INGO -15]

Beyond this, some have, or are deliberately developing, technical expertise not held by governments, and all to some extent, have a communication reach which politicians and officials alike appreciate.

“There simply isn't capacity from the government side to even begin to put in place systems that will enable them to manage and deal with data and package data appropriately in order to make sense on the trajectory towards achievement of the SDGs. I think there's an opportunity for civil society to come into that space as a technical support and not so much as come in to persuade governments on [the SDGs as the] right things to do. They already are bought in, very heavily invested, into the SDGs agenda. So, then they're looking for support. And I think civil society, once we build that capacity to engage critically with the data that is available, will be in a better position to play a supportive role in this process”. [NGO - 4]

“I think there is an awakening of the importance of including civil society so that your message is better conveyed so that when you announce something, it's not a disaster. Working uphill to make sure that things go smoothly. But

that's just the end point. Going ahead and saying [to colleagues], well, actually, you should involve them from the get-go in defining the problem, in solving the problem. I think there's a lot of education to be done there.” [Gov - 8]

There was also a level of self-awareness amongst civil society voices about their own credibility. Firstly, in relation to civil society organisations' own propriety:

“I think oftentimes even INGOs ‘talk the walk’ about the importance of transparency and accountability, but oftentimes they themselves don't really ‘walk the talk’ in this regard. We should be looking into the already good practices that exist from this perspective, who does what in terms of sharing and disclosing their own data and their own information? Because if we do that as INGOs and as national CSOs, we have more chances to be credible and trustworthy and have more chances to partner with our government counterparts at a different level.”. [NGO - 2]

Secondly this self-awareness extended to the need to bring people along in the process of engagement. Tensions for civil society actors are not only government-facing. Credibility is important not just in the eyes of the government partner, but with the CSO's own civil society constituency. At the highest level, attacks on civic space, or egregious abuses in one area of government or policy can lead to demands on civil society representatives to withdraw from engagement in another. More subtly, a clear concern was the potential for CSO actors to be, or be seen to be, ‘bought off’ with grant funding or even with regard to specific individual activists by career opportunities. One interviewee had gone as far as enumerating his own version of the engagement spectrum, adding the crucial extra dimension of ‘co-option’ as a warning that working relationships with government had developed too far:

“I have four 'C's for it. There's the ‘confrontation’, which is historically the protest and all that, but it's still happening; you see protest happening at a global level. It might not necessarily be as a result of global civil society, it might be more home grown, or it might be more social movement. Then there's ‘cooperation’ and ‘collaboration’. That has been happening and is increased. But maybe the next phase that one has to think about is the ‘co-option’. Right? So, for me, those are the four 'C's that I see.” [INGO - 16]

3.2.3 Fragility

This need to sustain high levels of credibility is one aspect of a wider sense of the fragility of the point reached in development of the civil society-government relationship. To address this, alongside the evolving tactics adjustments to behaviour, and there has been an emphasis on establishing new norms, formalising codes of conduct, and where possible entrenching the role of civil society in governance procedures. However, even in relation to IGOs that are seen as more engaged, and where practice had advanced, there is a sense that progress along the spectrum of engagement is precarious:

“They occupy a kind of a tenuous position. They're board members, they sit face to face. They've developed over time as a delegation to the point where they've been gradually been allowed to introduce decisions, to negotiate decisions set to play a pretty significant role. But everyone is very aware at the end of the day there can be pushback and they might be asked to sit at the children's table, which does happen. And every couple of years, a more conservative member state will raise the question of whether they should actually be allowed to participate at the level that they are participating in” [IGO- 18]

“I don't want to sound like I'm too tin-hat conspiratorial or paranoid, it's in a good place and going really well at the moment, but there's this constant underlying kind of sense of they could rip that carpet away at any point. And if they did, if a couple of governments did say no more civil society at this meeting, how much would the other governments fight against that? I don't know, it's never been tested. Hopefully, we'll never have to find out. But I have doubts about how many governments would really like really expend diplomatic energy and capital on that” [INGO – 15]

At these times of challenge, it seems the role of the individual reformer inside the institutions, and the efforts at civil society trust-building with them can pay dividends:

“So, there are those states that certainly do not want civil society to be at the table. Yet, while I do think the situation might be slightly strained, I still think the situation is salvageable because there are many reform-minded committed public servants within these institutions. Certain processes and ways of working have been established” [IGO – 17]

It also remains the case that in relation to some institutions or agendas, such detailed engagement remains an aspiration not a reality with anecdotes about activists reduced to door-stepping the WTO secretariat office in Geneva to find out basic information, and a new inter-governmental initiative on media freedom without any civil society involvement at all, and a fatalistic response by activists in the field that in these cases they have to start at the very beginning explaining the merits of engagement.

Overall, the sense is that there has been a significant change in the positioning of civil society in relation to global governmental agendas and institutions over the last decade, and indeed an adjustment of institutional attitude by some institutions led by internal advocates of engagement. However, that sustaining these advances, and spreading the practice to other fields and institutions is a long haul, requiring specific strategy thinking, resource and commitment. Locking in what progress has been made, in the form of principles, processes and new norms continues to preoccupy many in the field:

“So, it was very easy for states to talk to, let's say World Vision as an example, or International Rescue Committee, because they might have been

seen through a humanitarian refugees' developmental lens, but it was difficult for them to have a group such as maybe CIVICUS that was speaking more from a civil liberties perspective and trying to connect civil liberties and development. But that has moved I think, over the years, to where there are now spaces for engagement that includes groups that historically might be seen as very confrontational. The SDGs is a good example. But beyond the SDGs in other settings like in Africa, as an example you've got Agenda 2063, which is the African Union's developmental road map that has allowed them to start engaging with global civil society. It's the presence of frameworks, in my view, that has created the space and these frameworks are your post-war ongoing instruments, your civil and political rights instrument or economic, social and cultural rights instruments, or your children's rights instruments. It's a mix of these instruments that have sort of allowed for that space to happen for collaboration and in cooperation." [INGO – 16]

3.3 Civil Society

So, it is apparent global civil society's engagement with global institutions has evolved over the last decade. This begs the questions of what has changed within civil society that has enabled that, and what are the consequential issues for and within civil society, globally and domestically. The answer to the first is that the data indicates that global civil society has grown in the last decade and become more diverse and inclusive of voices that would not previously have been heard in global debates. The answer to the second is that there is more interest in co-ordination, and evidence of efforts to address questions around the representativeness of global civil society.

3.3.1 Expansion

The stand-out finding of this aspect of the research is the general view that there is much *more* global civil society than there was a decade ago. More, in the sense that there are new globally orientated civil society organisations (even if very small and different in character compared to the established INGOs), many more nationally- or even locally- focussed CSOs becoming active in global networks or agendas, and much more activity and connectivity between them. While this data is based on interviewees' impressions and observations, rather than quantitative measures, it is notable that many used words such as 'vibrancy', 'density', 'intensity', when describing global civil society. Those familiar with CIVICUS, the global civil society network organisation pointed to its significant growth in membership (to some 8500 currently from around 1000 five years ago), as a proxy measure for this difference, though recruitment campaigning and admittance of individual members may devalue this as an indicator.

In this context of increased activity several interviewees – from both civil society and governmental perspectives – noted occasions of grassroots organisations cutting

through to become powerful voices on specific agendas, and through their direct experience of issues and expertise able to influence the course of global debates:

“There are opportunities now that there weren't before for genuinely grassroots civil society to become prominent on the global stage” [IGO -19]

“It's good that there are more voices at the global level than before and there's more connections between them.” [INGO – 30]

Indeed, some INGOs had identified enabling domestically focused NGOs to promote their good practice on the world stage as a deliberate strategy for pressing reform:

“We are going to work over the next four to five years, in depth, ten or twelve countries to prove the thesis; find those domestic partners who are able to support us, and we are able to support them, and develop those end-to-end case studies that will act as the demonstrator for a bunch of other reforms. That's a quite well trodden path, I think, now” [INGO – 5]

Others saw it as small NGOs filling a vacuum where agendas had moved past established INGOs' expertise, for example in technology governance:

“In that committee I've seen real organisations and people from countries not necessarily connected to any big INGOs, because there were no big guy INGOs present on those topics. This is a good example of how a completely unknown is way-ahead, given an opportunity to learn, but also to play a vocal role” [NGO – 2]

This is not to say that previous criticisms of established INGOs around their dominance of global civil society (Carroll and Sapinski, 2015, Choudry, 2010), and occupation of spaces for engagement with governmental bodies do not still stand, some interviewees described an ongoing 'faultline' between the local/national and global:

“The weakness in the relationship is between all that happens in the global level and what's happening in the field, I mean that all those conversations do not transfer and do not - how to say - trickle down to it. I visit and I work in several countries, and I find what civil society is doing at local level often is quite separated from the global conversation. Organisations that have access to the global level are few, and are those that have the resources to have knowledge of the agenda [NGO – 3]

Rather, that conscious efforts are being made to address the issues and that there is evidence to suggest access to global civil society spaces, and engagement with governmental bodies at this level has become more porous:

“There's a whole discourse on how INGOs need to change their behaviour, how they need to be more accountable, how they need to pass on greater sums of money to organisations on the ground and how they need to be more

inclusive in the way they work. Those are continuing conversations that are happening and evolutions that are happening at various levels” [INGO – 17]

There is also an evolving geo-political dimension to this. Echoing the longer-standing concerns of civil society in the global south that largely northern-based INGOs block their access to global debates and resources, making space for newly emerged NGOs in the global arena was a particular issue for interviewees familiar with more recent development of civil society in post-Soviet and Asia-Pacific countries:

“There's a very interesting evolution of this relationship between the newly emerged non-profit NGOs and those non-profit NGOs who are already existing. I think [the latter] still kept their place [with government], but they do not represent the voices. Whereas the newly emerged NGOs, they are representing the voices, but they are not recognised by the governments as such” [NGO - 28].

So, representativeness, broadly drawn, remains a key theme of concern, though previous charges of elitism amongst global civil society activists and organisations (Chandhoke, 2002, Martens, 2008), or the exclusivity associated with the idea of ‘NGO-isation’ (Choudry, 2010) appear to have been diluted both by the general increase in global civil society activism, and by intentional strategies to address them. Instead, there is a more granular debate about ensuring the right organisations and voices are enabled to represent civil society, and the means by which this is achieved.

Some of this has a very practical manifestation. Concerns about organisational capacity, resources in the form of time, travel and accommodation costs and the availability of visas, were clearly foremost in the minds of both INGO and IGO interviewees with a role in organising engagement opportunities.

“Quite often with these meetings, we're always banging on the door and asking for the space to open up. But sometimes we don't get confirmation that we can speak at it, civil society can speak, until maybe like a month or two before the meeting. So, by the time we've done a call for speakers, we've selected the speakers, sometimes by the time we've selected, it's too late for them to apply for a visa to come in person. So, we make sure that they can still have their voice heard. But remotely, rather than in person. It's not quite as effective, but it makes sure that it is more representative” [NGO – 15]

“It's really challenging [to manage] because it means people that are coming to Geneva - and it happens all the time - their per diem hasn't arrived yet, they don't have a credit card, and they actually don't have any way to check into a hotel. Right. Because they don't have any money. So, people are coming here and sitting on that delegation and they're not eating the entire week that they're in Geneva except for what's been provided free because they want to save their money, because they need it to keep their work going in their own home country. People get annoyed at that, you know.” [IGO – 18]

3.3.2 Personnel

Associated with this was a concern that a new version of the 'usual suspects' problem has emerged, with particular individuals from the global south being used by INGOs and IGOs as the voice of civil society, or interests such as youth.

"Often in global spaces it's only the bigger INGOs who are the only ones that can afford to fly people to these meetings and be there. And they can mean very well, but they're often still talking for other people instead of other people being able to speak on their own behalf. Or people are being pitched by big organisations to come in and represent all young women in Africa, for instance. I mean, it's often the same young woman over and over and over again who's completely exhausted. And then she turns 30 and then they have to find a new one." [INGO – 18]

"It's just a job. Like the job is being the civil society networker, like 'voice' in some way. And we did it. I mean, it's our fault. We've created this, like, 'business'; a business of the civil society representation from the south" [INGO – 12].

Edging towards tokenism, this phenomenon speaks to a wider issue about the personnel available to play representative roles on behalf of civil society in global arenas. It is clear there is still a level of exclusivity around these spaces, as one interviewee succinctly put it:

"But, you know, the people I meet in Kyrgyzstan have never been to the Paris Peace Forum" [INGO - 9]

Some interviewees mounted a defence against the charge of elitism, arguing that the job of operating in these arenas requires specific skills and knowledge

"I just think there's a certain amount of access and privilege and skill and social capital that's required to play at that level or at least operate and be somewhat effective.... So, I don't buy the argument that you can put just anybody in the chair and expect them to thrive" [INGO – 11]

"If you're a domestic NGO who works on your domestic issues, how are you supposed to go and have a meaningful conversation at a global level with a bunch of other organisations who are working across 50 or 100 different jurisdictions or are talking about global policy trends like that? There is simply a kind of impossibility of that relationship being particularly deep and meaningful because no one [domestic] organisation is thinking about 50 different countries' policy agendas on an issue and kind of aggregating up and thinking about global trends. They are thinking deeply local issues." [INGO – 5]

Others seemed to acknowledge the natural limitations to such an argument and touched on succession planning, and the need to extend the pool of practitioners – on both the civil society and governmental sides - in ways that are inclusive of the population, not just of organisational interests.

“I personally am always, always, looking for the young people. I always try to meet them. Always trying to be inclusive, bring up people. Think about the next generations. And it's really hard to do, actually, because sometimes you're invited to a conference and I go, oh, my colleague, [X] or [Y], or [Z] should go and they say, no we want you. Like, no, really, they need experience, too. I was very lucky when I was young. I started off doing this and my boss just sent me” [INGO -26]

“Think about equality issues relating to ageism, racism, diversity. I think that we are in a moment where we need a change in representation. Things need to look different. We've been on that journey, but maybe without enough battery pack. And I think now the battery pack is being demanded of us. And, I think both sides need to change, I mean, government and civil service tracks need to be much more aggressive in who is at the table” [INGO – 22]

This general theme of diversity was also pervasive during the Ottawa OGP Summit. While a focus on gender was designed in, as a core aspect of the programme in line with the then current ‘Break the Roles’ campaign, it was notable from participant observation that issues of race, disability, sexuality and age discrimination were also pervasive in both formal and informal settings. In general, it seemed that event-planners had done well to enable inclusivity and create an atmosphere of honesty and conducive to otherwise hesitant voices speaking out. Nevertheless, there were specific instances of physical access issues for wheelchair users and frustration about the efficacy of language interpretation services even in what was a very modern conference venue, which tempered complacency.

3.3.3 Infrastructure and Organisation

Of a more infrastructural nature, throughout the interviews there was a prevalent interest in civil society systems and processes for accountably securing representation – the organisational means by which representation and priorities emerge, a theme not prominent in foregoing literature. Civil society is by its very nature organic and ‘messy’, a word used with pride not discontent by several interviewees. Nevertheless, there seems to be a growing interest in forms of inter-organisational networking and co-operation, and platforms via which co-ordination can achieve greater impact.

CIVICUS remains the most prominent and generic civil society network body, and as has been noted its direct membership has blossomed in recent years. Where it previously targeted other network bodies or intermediaries as a means of connecting worldwide, it is now less reliant on them. However, its growth also highlights the

ongoing challenge of cohering the ‘messiness’ of civil society into articulable agendas and action. As one interviewee succinctly put it:

“CIVICUS: how do you – *any* - organisation respect or collect the demands or fulfil the expectations of eight thousand members?” [NGO – 3]

CIVICUS’ strategy on this has been to focus on the issues that are generic to civil society as a whole, such as the rights of association and expression, enabling regulation, funding, and equality. This has led to significant campaigning around civic space.

In terms of its own organisation it has sought to amplify civil society voices of the global south to balance the advocacy on northern-based INGOs, and its website proudly advertises that 63 per cent of its membership is from low or middle-income countries (CIVICUS, 2021a).

However, this focal point for civil society existential issues, does not seem to satisfy a demand for greater connectivity, stemming from national as well as global level, around particular agendas or policy areas.

There is evidence that co-operation and solidarity between civil society organisations - global and national - at times of crisis has become a more established practice, with several interviewees referencing particular instances of impact, and others revealing a level of standing preparedness.

“In case of security risk... we have a protocol that allows us to connect immediately or very soon with other NGOs in order to make international pressure more strong, in order to defend either the chapter or civil society organisations.....nowadays in Brazil we are having a problem with a friend organisation. One of the activists there has been killed by the police, we suspect. So, we are working together with them in order to generate international pressure towards the government of Brazil. I think we can and should improve that, but the channels are already open” [INGO – 7]”

Nevertheless, many felt there was scope for more co-operation on a sustained basis, but perhaps reflecting civil society’s general messiness, there was no demand for a particular institutional solution, rather a multiplicity of approaches that could lead to greater impact according to the circumstances:

“We don't have enough of those mechanisms that have been designed to facilitate the collaboration of civil society groups globally, like in crisis action, humanitarian conflict fields... As a way to, well, bring groups together in a behind the scenes way, sort of ‘white label’ capacity. So, things aren't branded crisis action... but they sort of make it happen behind the scenes. And I haven't seen that many more of those types of plans” [INGO – 29]

“I think the presence and the representation of different NGOs and INGOs very much departs from the nature of the fora, departs from the scope of the

fora, departs from the needs of the platforms in terms of the expertise and knowledge. Because sometimes you really need the voice, sometimes you really need the expertise and the knowledge rather than just the name of the country or, ticking the box that says, yes, we have this representation. So, I think this whole ecosystem of global platforms and initiatives where civil society has a role should be really carefully understood and analysed from the perspective of the goals and objectives they want to pursue.” [NGO – 2]

Several interviewees propounded on the efforts and approaches attempted to date, noted successes, but acknowledged its immaturity. Transparency International and Amnesty International were named as examples of federations of national ‘chapters’, a model designed specifically to bridge the divide between global and national action.

“Are we doing that homework? Are we doing that due diligence making sure that the perspective and the voice that we're bringing actually is not just the global perspective that we have, but is connected up or rooted somehow nationally? So, to that extent, I understand why Publish What You Pay or Transparency International and other chapter-based or coalition-based organisations do let themselves off the hook easier, because they can say ...we did a consultation with our partners and we're bringing that back” [INGO – 12]

This model was seen to be also effective during policy implementation phases. One interviewee used the example of the IMF developing a new assessment framework. The global secretariat of the civil society network engaged and gave advice on its content, but also fostered the idea that when used in country it involved engagement with the local chapters.

“I think that the combination of the global advocacy and research and the local connection with people is central” [INGO-7]

Broader-based but thematically aligned coalitions between organisations were seen to work well in relation to certain IGOs or agendas, though created issues around levels of homogeneity – that is a question of how far participating organisations policy positions or overall (sometimes religion-influenced) viewpoints needed to align – a problem found in areas such as drugs, sexual health and refugee work. However, interviewees that commented on this tended to err on the side of inclusion, even to the point of diluting their own positions:

“If anything, it has actually worked against groups like [my own], because I'm less likely to select [my own] to speak because of how that will be perceived as a conflict of interest. It's actually quite funny how it's kind of worked out that way. So, I really do hope that people see that we have tried to balance that out and we have achieved that.” [INGO-15]

So, federations of chapters rather than organisational headquarters and branches, and coalitions and alliances rather than intermediary bodies with memberships or subsidiaries, suggests a trend towards less hierarchical forms of global civil society organisation:

“Looking back, a big thing, the Jubilee 2000 stuff, that was much more controlled and much less open than what you have now, where you have co-operations between local organisations, national organisations, et cetera. The time of big international NGOs is over to a certain extent. And I think digitalisation has something to do with that because their role as intermediary is no longer as necessary as it was 30 years ago.” [INGO -30]

Many of these flatter more dynamic networks, are in practice anchored around inter-governmental processes, and arranged to articulate with inter-governmental processes such as the G7 and the G20, emphasising the criticality of this relationship. The civil society network in relation to the G20, which has adopted the name ‘C20’, is extremely broadly drawn, and tactical debates about which issues to address at any given point are lively:

“The C20 includes climate action, and access to information, and women, and anti-harassment, and children, poverty and sports, and everything. So the work of their shared base is to co-ordinate the participation of all these civil society issues and civil society organisations in making, for instance, the agenda for the essential meetings, or in drafting the documents that the civil society organisation will present to the governmental fora of the G 20” [INGO -7]

Associated with this the evidence suggests that the distinct role of civil society co-ordinator, enabling participation and the direct articulation of voices, as opposed to speaking on behalf of others, has emerged as an important feature of the global civil society landscape. In some cases, the co-ordinator has also taken on the formal mantel of ‘sherpa’ – a phrase used in diplomacy to describe a person or body who clears the way on inter-governmental agreements - in relation to IGO processes and events.

Hinting towards the evolution of even more immediacy in such contexts, civil society interviewees spoke of the use of social media to co-ordinate action, not just in campaigning mode, but actual live negotiation:

“For instance, on the board of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, the EITI, we have 10 civil society reps sitting on the board together with industry and governments and all the strategising during the actual meeting goes on through a whatsapp group. So, who is going to speak next? Because they're not sitting next to each other necessarily. It's a big table” [INGO-9]

3.3.4 Fakes and Uncivility

So, where previously global civil society was criticised for a tendency towards exclusivity, this research has shown that a combination of conscious efforts to be more inclusive, and the practical evolution of organisational structures supported by technology has meant this is now less of a concern than it was ten or twenty years ago. Rather, ironically, the prevalent concern was that civil society representation could be drawn too broadly and either inadvertently, or by malign design of others, come to involve both organisations not demonstrably independent of state or market, or fundamentally not 'civil' i.e., with values not based on human rights.

“While we understand that civil society is really outside the market, the state and the family. But... also emphasises the civil aspect of civil society. That is, groups that are engaged in human rights and social justice advancement.”
[INGO – 17]

Non-independent 'civil society organisations' interviewees found still current in the global civil society-governmental space included so-called 'GONGOs' an acronym said to stand for 'Government Organised Non-Governmental Organisation', in other words organisations not genuinely emerging from associations and communities of interest, but deliberately created or controlled by (national) governments to either replace genuine CSOs, or influence debate both within civil society and in the spaces they share with global governmental bodies

“One thing that really fascinates me... is how tokenistic is it? Which is a different question from the usual suspects question, I think. But how much do governments, knowing that they have to be doing dialogue with civil society, they bring a few in. I mean even the Azerbaijan government realised it had to have an NGO forum, so built a few GONGOs”. [NGO – 26]

“So, we have seen the real problem, this shrinking space for civil society activity in many countries. I am really worried about the level of involvement in these initiatives of really independent organisations, not GONGOs.... And, in this case, we have a real risk here” [NGO – 10]

While the GONGO type non-authentic CSO was flagged only by civil society interviewees, the second type – both non-independent and potentially uncivil - caused concern across the spectrum. These are more privately/financially controlled organisations with specific agendas, taking advantage of the spaces opened up by and for civil society and perceived to cross over in some cases with concerns about contamination of the underpinning norms and values of global civil society.

“There's a rise in groups that claim to be part of civil society, but don't support social justice and human rights concerns. In the coming period, I think we will see an increase in proliferation of these. It's already started. You know, it happens from time to time in certain states, strategically positioning some groups to advance their geopolitical interests. And that's going to start to happen more. And they're going to start to claim more space from civil

society. I won't be able to give you an exact number. It's not measurable. But there is evidence of an increasing presence of those sorts of groups". [INGO 17]

"We are only talking about quote unquote, good civil society. But one of the things we are also seeing... there are now a lot of the actors and I am simplifying, but they are not good and are working for Xenophobia, Islamophobia, all the phobia you can think of, nationalists etc etc and some of them are funded by other foundations, not Ford, not OSF but others... it's an interesting phenomenon that making for all our environment much more complex to read and [challenges] the assumption that civil society is by definition is good." [IGO - 19]

3.3.5 Sustainability

Ever present alongside the issues raised or exacerbated by the growth in global civil society activity was the theme of sustainability. The ability to raise funds to underpin the core work of organisations, never mind any additional resources required for global representation work, was a challenge it seems most civil society leaders have become resigned to living with; it wasn't a novel talking point of interviews, more a background sentiment, aggravated by new demands such as those arising from Covid-19.

"We need to still have more philanthropy, more government funding, more whatever we can to get money into civil society, because we're really stretched and it's very hard to do our job well. I mean, I have no funding beyond May next year. I'm trying to respond to the pandemic and I really can't spend these months just fundraising. Hopefully, there'll be new funds. But who knows? Because the pandemic will hit us. There's always a risk that you just disappear." [INGO – 26]

3.4 Intergovernmental Organisations

As the key interlocutors with civil society at the global level, intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) were expected to be important features of the global civil society-governmental relationship being explored in this research. What is notable however is how distinct these bodies were felt to be by interviewees, with characteristics and behaviours that sometimes placed them closer to civil society than to the national governments they purportedly serve and from which their governance is constituted. While a fault line between global and 'domestic' in civil society has been acknowledged (and to some degree is being addressed, as above), the dissonance between global and national for the governmental side of the relationship is arguably just as significant.

Interviews also revealed an awareness of IGOs need to demonstrate their own relevancy and attempts to modernise, not least in their relationship with civil society.

3.4.1 Position of IGOs

Overall, the position of IGOs in relation to global civil society is distinct. While they clearly vary between them in how they view and behave towards civil society, as discussed in the literature review, in general they were viewed by interviewees as a separate category of actors to governments at national level, with their governance in which international politics plays out, and their organisational entities being regarded with a high level of nuance:

“I think International Secretariats have a very unique and challenging place on the [relationship] spectrum” [INGO -11]

Moreover, there was a general view that IGOs were more benign for civil society. Firstly as, at least certain ones amongst them such as the OECD, particular UN bodies and the World Bank, were likely to be more progressive and reform-minded and closer therefore to the social justice-orientated positions of civil society:

“It's not government per se. It's not academia. So, it still fits somehow or was closer to the to the civil society hats in the room more part of their platform” [NGO – 2]

Secondly, IGOs were considered to be safer for civil society as both as actors, and as fora in which civil society could comfortably participate:

“One thing I can certainly say is that in the intergovernmental sphere still remains or in the large intergovernmental institutions there are still spaces for civil society to be able to come and put forward a position or demand accountability which may not be available at the national level. So, in that sense, intergovernmental institutions or international events play an important role in giving visibility to national actors and or elevating their messages. And

also, in a sense, I would say providing some measure of protection to them when they continue their work” [INGO – 15]

There was a clear sense that IGOs could be allies to civil society in the drive to open civic space and increase opportunities for civil society-governmental engagement:

“I do think that the intergovernmental bodies like the Council of Europe, to a certain extent the UN with its processes and some other bodies, such as the OECD are pretty good, always, of the ones I've got direct experience of. They actually help hugely open up the space for civil society and get governments accustomed to it” [INGO – 26].

Also, that this sense of solidarity was also felt when civil society was under pressure and in defensive mode:

“The space and the opportunities for participation that those IGOs offer often at least on paper is bigger and more appealing than the space offered at national level. And I guess in the context of closing civic space and repressive governments and countries that used to be open democracies and open societies, whether it's Brazil, India or the US and other places, then the appeal of those intergovernmental initiatives, or bodies I think increases, especially for citizens of those countries” [INGO – 9]

In general, it was felt that IGOs were becoming more open to working with civil society, and that change was happening in this regard:

“For example, there's people at World Bank that have working in parliaments and parliament reform and on a lot of parliamentary reform issues, specific issues for many, many years without civil society. And they now know and now see that they have to engage” [INGO – 13]

In certain IGOs this increasingly respectful treatment of civil society was reinforced; in a few by particular governance structures, in some by organisational resource devoted to civil society relations, and in many by personnel perceived to be more aware of and more ‘friendly’ towards civil society than those working within more traditional (national) governmental institutions. However, these characteristics must not be overstated, as while they were seen to be strengthening over time, there were clear doubts about how embedded they yet were, or how influential.

In relation to governance structures, the more leading edge IGOs had created spaces for elected civil society representatives on their boards, or at least in key committees feeding into them. However, as discussed above, there was a sense that this might be tokenistic and last only as long as the first real division in national government opinion, and therefore as a vehicle for civil society engagement was to be used delicately.

Specifically-resourced civil society-facing units or teams are becoming more numerous amongst IGOs, but their place in the hierarchies of them was questioned, with a persuasive, soft power approach being favoured in their internal relationships:

‘So here at [IGO] now I lead a fairly small team in headquarters focused on community-based and community engagement, both engaging at this level with global civil society organisations and networks, but also engaging with our teams within regional country offices. They don't report to me so I can't make them do anything, but by encouraging them to make sure that they are living up to principles around community engagement’ [IGO – 18]

A particular new development remarked upon by multiple interviewees showing a depth of understanding about the challenges facing civil society was the OECD's Civic Space Observatory. A creation of its existing civil society engagement team this was launched mid-way through the interviews, so may have benefitted from the attention surrounding that, but nevertheless was seen as a very positive innovation which would shine a light on governmental practice which helps or hinders civil society to thrive and engage with public institutions.

Considering the personnel that populate these departments, and indeed IGOs more generally, interviewees reported a welcome mix of styles, in contrast to national-level bureaucracies:

“They can come from different backgrounds. And so, the team compositions are much more unique. They're not homogeneous. They don't all come from government. They don't all come from civil society” [INGO – 11]

Diversity and openness in IGOs, and the concomitant engagement with civil society and other external stakeholders was seen by some as a necessary evolution of their own, or those to which they relate, in order to stay relevant to modern challenges:

“Governments have shrunk enormously in terms of numbers, capacity, responsibility, different mechanisms... for international organisations that look at good governance, democracy, et cetera, there are actors that are more and more important and sometimes may even be more important than executives. If we want to really understand the policy cycle and who are stakeholders, what the beneficiaries want, what are the most impactful solutions to be implemented, etc. my idea is that the future of intergovernmental organisations, like the future of government, has to be more and more open and participatory engaging with stakeholders than they are now. If we preach that to governments, automatically we need to preach that also to those organisations that are made of governments” [IGO – 19]

This concern for relevancy of IGOs also, for some, took on a very practical dimension. Not unlike some of the larger IGOs they work with, they were actively considering which of their services to provide for free, which they could charge for, and more positively where they could collaborate on projects and programmes to maximise resources.

Leveraging such inter-relationships between IGOs, and their interactions with member countries, particularly where one or other may have an external grant-funding role (e.g., the World Bank), was something a few of the more sophisticated INGOs were actively building into their strategies:

“Mechanisms we use are carrots and sticks.... So, for example, like trying when a country is applying for funding or loan, to negotiate with the World Bank or IMF colleagues to say make sure that the loan agreement has particular provisions around transparency or accountability. So, there is a certain power that comes from those particular institutions vis a vis certain of the countries that we are engaging with” [INGO-12].

Nevertheless, and despite the ‘carrot’ of grant funding, there was an acknowledgement from both perspectives of the limitations of IGOs’ power, especially the agendas considered most challenging by national governments and most dangerous for the civil society organisations championing them;

“What is the real impact of IGOs at the national level? So, yes, they can address this or that, but does it have an impact anyway on the lives of the citizens, they do not represent, but will care about?... We do not have any binding resolutions or any capacity to actually impose. While, yes, we may be very successful in changing our narrative, I still think that I'm not sure how much want to be and feel ready to get into those topics that are the danger to it all and are usually the direct responsibility of national governments” [IGO - 19]

Inversely there was a recognition amongst civil society of the need to generate energy for change at national and local level to fuel global level debate and decision-making:

“Whilst one might utilise these global mechanisms, you still have to create some momentum at a local level. So, what sort of connections do you build? Because it would be difficult just talking about standards and norms at a global level, without building some domestic interest and constituents for it. And this has helped in refining the global institutions, because at a domestic level, there's some there's some push for it. They might not necessarily adopt or implement everything at national level, but they can still refer to the global standards as the entry point” [INGO – 16]

In turn, there was multiple evidence of CSOs being alert to which national governments may be helpful in relation to a particular agenda in the context of particular IGOs, in a sense shadowing the actual inter-governmental power play, and where possible nurturing and encouraging it:

“Right. Argentina is not just going to come up as the current chair of OGP and just push something without testing the waters and running it past a few countries. So, we need to know, who are the critical voices. We need to have

this or that country speaking. If it's in Asia, you need to check what maybe Japan is thinking, or what S Korea is thinking before you move it. And if it's in Africa, maybe check South Africa and a little bit, Nigeria because they are the movers and shakers. Everyone is like, take a cue". [INGO – 16]

3.5 National Governments

While the focus of the research is the civil society-governmental relationship at the global level, inevitably the role of national governments featured heavily in interviews. While interviewees pointed to the international politics played out within IGO structures, there was also considerable interest in how particular national governments could (be encouraged to) stimulate wider change, through a global leadership role on particular agendas, perhaps supported by overseas grant spending. However, all saw implementation of global initiatives as the principal role of national governments in this context, carrying through the decisions made internationally into domestic reality. Interestingly there was concern that global aspirations and profile of a national government did not always reflect their own implementation of policy, and interviewees pointed to a dislocation between governmental domestic and global functions mirroring the fault line perhaps more readily associated with civil society.

3.5.1 Implementation

The main tools to support basic level implementation were seen as norms and standards, and in the case of the open government partnership, adherence to process. While acknowledging that few real 'teeth' existed to force any countries compliance with standards, the potential to embarrass a national government on the international stage for its failure to meet elementary requirements of an agreement they had signed up to was seen as a fundamental benefit of civil society engagement at the global level. However, the possibility of a changed political regime to simply not care about such standards – and a referencing of populist governments and especially the Trump administration – tempered confidence in these. Consequent sensitivity to national political 'weather' and especially national political transitions was seen as a key aspect of global level civil society – governmental engagement activity.

"What I see that from my latest experience is the years when there is a new government, there's lots of opportunities for collaboration. But as we head for transitions, [civil society] try to take a more distant approach because of course they need to create dialogue with another government and start off on the right foot. [The new administration] may take more of a distant and confrontational role, depending on how sustainable these relationships have been cultivated". [Gov 14]

“One of the root problems that civil society partners also experience is when you try to work on such thick issues related to transparency, accountability, one of the big problems is that governments are not persistent. There are so many changes in government in a relatively short amount of time. So, if your reform goals are much longer, you have to be prepared for a change in government as a change in government priorities” [INGO – 23]

While an important backstop, rather than depending on shaming national governments for failing to implement policy according to its global responsibilities, there was an emphasis, especially in the context of the open government partnership and other settings where civil society-governmental relationships were seen to be closer, on driving a ‘race to the top’. For example, a live issue around the time of the first set of interviews was beneficial ownership and the publication by the United Kingdom and Ukraine of registers identifying the ultimate beneficiaries of companies operating within their borders. A key agenda within the open government movement, several interviewees pointed at this as an example where one, or a few countries working together, could take a global leadership role, set an example of what reforms need to happen, and model what needs to be done to achieve it. This was seen by some as being especially effective at a global regional level, with more than one civil society interviewee identifying progress on their agendas in post-Soviet countries as being affected by this:

“If the representatives of the governments saw this information describing their colleagues from other countries, this will really stimulate competition from one side, because each government would like to be better in comparison with the government from the nearby country” [NGO -10]

Acknowledging this factor, and building it into strategy had the effect of accelerating international policy transfer and global awareness as domestic civil society activists looked to the global sphere for guidance on which reforms to press next:

“I regularly try to find some new - how to say – stars. Ideas that we can push at the national level of what we can propose to our government and so on. So, this is really important for next level, or the next” [NGO – 10]

There was evidence at the OGP Ottawa Summit that the Steering Committee and event organisers had recognised both this catalyst effect, and national level demand for ideas, as strands of the programme were deliberately arranged to demonstrate good practice and give national governments an opportunity to shine. For example, an OECD hosted session was framed as a ‘show and tell’ between national-level actors on what had worked for them, and there was a session devoted to reform in Africa with participants showcasing their national action plans to their continental neighbours, both, participant observation suggests, well-received.

There was also participant observation, and interview evidence that the idea, branded as the ‘boomerang effect’ (Keck and Sikkink, 1999), whereby domestic activists sought out global spaces through which to unlock domestic reform - still

held currency. In particular the global level provided access to domestic actors, which ironically was not available at home, by disrupting the ordinary run of things:

“Because for me, these platforms, they've got a de-mystification value to it, which is that you can really sit and have a conversation with a government minister, a government representative in the safety of a global space. Because that safety might not necessarily be available at a local level. So, with the Paris Peace forum, you had the president of Cameroon coming there, right. We know what is happening in Cameroon in terms of his government and the fight between the Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonians. Shutdown for months on end. But he was at a platform where you could actually ask what was happening in his country, including questions by Cameroonians in the diaspora, but also other groups who may not necessarily be able to travel to Cameroon who are in solidarity with Cameroonians.”
[[INGO-16]

In a similar vein those interviewed after the start of the pandemic saw the shock across the established system as a way of breaking through conventional barriers and webinars and online events organised on a global premise a means of engaging with officials and politicians from their own countries, in a way that had never happened before.

3.5.2 Dissonance

However, despite these occasional opportunities to use global engagement to disrupt, established conventions inside national governments were seen as a particular challenge to securing good outcomes from global level civil society-governmental engagement. Several interviewees pointed to a fault line between the political and official. This spills over into behaviours in the formal settings of engagement and was starkly noticeable during the participant observation of the OGP Ottawa summit, with different sessions being conducted very differently depending on whether or not elected politicians were in the room. Officials who had been confidently articulating their government's position in the morning became silent assistants in the afternoon.

“We are servants and we're not supposed to be seen or heard. It's the traditional upbringing of a public servant. In some cases we represent the country and in that case, we try when speaking to represent the country. What is new is the public servant as a human person that actually has a personality. That is very, very new in public service.” [Gov – 8]

While this is, in general, a well-understood tension within government structures, in the context of the global civil society-governmental relationship it appears there is only an emerging appreciation that working with both is equally important, as expressed here by one government interviewee who had previously worked in civil society:

“I realise how as civil society we overestimated how strategic speaking to a minister is. I think that when I was with a CSO we felt that this is the opportunity to get some commitment and that the conversation with the minister is the most important point. And when I started working in government, I realised that how change happens is when you speak with the technician or maybe with a decision-making person, but not at the highest level” [Gov – 14].

While, navigating the political/official demarcations in the landscape was a priority for some interviewees, others identified frustration with a lack of alignment between different governmental departments along the lines of those that engage globally and those that conventionally do not:

“I've got one more complexity within most governments also: there are other real divides between typically the foreign ministry, the presidential prime ministerial apparatus and a few others [health, trade] who do tend to play at the global level” [INGO-11]

This was particularly noticed in the context of OGP, where from time to time the issue at hand requires an otherwise domestically focused department to step up and take a global role. In doing so they meet the same challenges identified for civil society domestic actors in adopting a global role:

“I found it very easy to observe the challenges that traditionally domestic agencies who are not used to having to be political animals at the global level when they're thrust into a steering committee or co-chair role.” [INGO – 11]

A further set of internal governmental tensions relevant to the global civil society-government relationship was felt in relation to governments' development or 'overseas aid' departments and budgets. Where there was a perceptible alignment between acknowledged global policy leadership and grant programmes, the latter was seen to add real weight to the former and galvanise partnerships. Where they were disconnected, or where politics dictated a change of emphasis, there could be a knock-on impact on the very shape of civil society and its ability to represent itself and engage. One interviewee described the consequences of withdrawal of one northern donor government from spending in a particular country:

“And so, what that does is that it then weakens domestic civil society who do not get the benefit of domestic philanthropy because the corporate world feels that the issues that we work on are sensitive: anti-corruption work, human rights work. By and large, you take on government for doing the wrong things and the private sector does not want to be seen as supporting people that are taking on government, so they prefer to support safe causes such as education, such as sports, arts and culture. So, the critical social justice work is not funded. The players or the NGOs working in that space have to close and they do close. Leaving a gap for your international NGOs to then come in and carry on with the work because they have resources to do so”. [NGO- 4]

This sort of set-back was also reported around the concept of civic space, where national government were seen in a global context to be supportive of enabling civil society and dynamic democratic participation, while in reality their actions on the domestic front were impacting in the opposite direction (CIVICUS, 2021b).

3.6 Foundations

The role of global foundations emerged as a potent theme of this research and exposed a very live dilemma facing participants on both sides of the global civil society-governmental relationship. Separate from the role national governments can take as funders through development aid departments, significant charitable foundations – many set up within the last two decades and endowed by major corporate players - were regularly singled out as especially influential in the global civil society-government relationship. The benefits of significant sums of money being directed at democratic accountability and social justice issues and processes was of course welcomed but was tempered by an awareness of the intrinsic lack of accountability of those providing the funds. For many interviewees the issue was the pressing issue of the time:

“I think for me there is danger in the concentration of philanthropic resources in very, very, very few foundations, especially private foundations. I have no idea how one would, quote unquote, federalize or democratize that. But it seems to me like it is yet again one of those moments, a chance to stand up and really say our piece, independent of what we think the moneybags want to hear or what they're interested in” [NGO -24]

This discussion of global level funding patterns was set against the background of civil society instability. Particularly national-level civil society voices expressed chagrin at the ongoing struggle to fund mainstream activity in their countries, and a perception of fashion being a deciding factor in the allocation of new resources at global level, rather than routine need. For many interviewees the Covid-19 pandemic had only served to heighten tensions, as domestic funders, especially national governments, redirected funds to frontline health services and to shore up economic deficits:

“But on the whole, there doesn't seem to be necessarily a lot consistency in how the money is being distributed to the key themes. And so, you know, just because Covid happened doesn't mean climate change has gone away. And there's been a clear demand in particular in the US, and around the world, on anti-racism, black lives matter, and all those sorts of horribly important issues that again, there's been very directed money, but almost from a more political rather than a social impact perspective” [NGO – 25]

Nevertheless, there was also an awareness that while in some cases foundations were running programmes with country-sized budgets, relatively modest amounts carefully directed, could be very influential just by helping stimulate or accelerate

different types of conversations between key actors, which in time might unlock improvements in governance and decision-making:

“This is something I've thought about a lot because it feels so anti-democratic that so much of the influence comes through big foundations and big donors. On the other hand, that's where a lot of our most progressive work is happening” [IGO- 18]

Philanthropic foundations are classified in the structure and methodology of this research as civil society – technically they are non-state and non-profit and usually charities and as such part of civil society by most definitions. However, their closeness with the global corporate world, the fame of many of the companies or individuals behind them, and their sheer financial size, mean they now occupy a very distinct space in the eco-system of global relations. Their independence from other stakeholders, and often greater agility, mean they can wield significant power, in general, and via the specific funding decisions they make.

Given the general fragility and lack of sustainability of civil society, these sort of funding decisions, fashionable or not can have a life or death consequences for organisations, or indeed whole networks and agendas.

3.6.1 Dilemma

Unease was expressed by interviewees about the position of foundations, along with a sense that their current role was unlikely to sustain, when decision-making could be so susceptible to personal whim:

“[accountability]... is almost non-existent, these foundations. I have met also with others that are really family-owned by private money given to whatever they want. I'm not saying it's not possible to have money and you give it to whatever this private person decides to put the money on. But, at the same time for the moment, they' all seem very progressive to me” [IGO -19]

This unease was mirrored by the careful handling of foundation representatives by other delegates seen during the participant observation of the OGP Ottawa summit. An illustrative overheard conversation can be summarised as follows: ‘it's unsafe...while they are doing good things and spending money in ways that are open and inclusive and good value based, you know, you have to you have to take money and say thank you. But the chances of that changing, when a different family member takes the chair of the board or such like, it could equally go in the opposite direction. So, they could start funding uncivil society, which is there, and not impossible obviously in the current climate internationally’.

There was also a worry that philanthropists might become proxies for real civil society or citizens' voices in the context of the civil society-government relationship or wider multi-stakeholder fora, or indeed subvert national governments. Their ‘real’

motive for involvement was questioned, and there was evidence people were beginning to think about ways to manage their involvement:

“Philanthropy is a product of inequality. The fact that we have one man, or one woman, holding billions and increasingly more powerful than states, actually... it's easy for philanthropy to become a power unto itself and to sort of checkmate state actors because of the financial influence. ... I worry that increasingly philanthropy itself is becoming more interested in this conversation to safeguard their own interests more than to actually support constituencies that they work with” [INGO – 16]

The concern extended to how foundations may sway governments' policy thinking. When they helped steer conversations along the lines of civil society agendas, they were at least reluctantly, sometimes enthusiastically perceived as helpful:

“And they're a little more in touch. The private philanthropy organisations are bit more in touch with what's going on in civil society. And there's a different trust relationship as well there, I would say so. They absolutely have a role to play” [INGO – 21]

Conversely when they showed signs of working in the interests of their (in some cases less progressive) corporate roots, their potential destabilising impact was highlighted:

“It's quite serious. I think it's a huge challenge. Whether it's celebrity or billionaire philanthropists that are able to single-handedly steer the agenda of intergovernmental institutions because of the economic power they bring. And it can really squash conversations around the issues such as privatisation of public services, genetically modified foods, right to privacy and in the health field.” [INGO – 17]

The influence of foundations was clearly seen to be more than financial, with an ability to affect priorities by association. Yet again this was seen to be used in a way that was ostensibly progressive, but not truly transformational in a way that it could be:

“But if you have groups like the Bill Gates? Right. Every other government would want to be seen, even Modi in India, you know, wants to be seen as being given recognition by Bill Gates for his work on water, sanitary toilets and all that. So, there is that influence. But I tend to think that most foundations do not use that influence to then create spaces for dialogue that includes civil society. Increasingly I get the sense that some private philanthropy is actually about carving space for itself, more than for citizens and for global civil society to engage.” [INGO – 16]

3.6.2 Impact on Civil Society

This 'shouldering out' of engagement with civil society was also seen in foundations' apparent ability to manipulate the very nature of civil society, whether by design or inadvertently. There was an awareness of the impact of a significant foundation pulling out of an area – geographic or thematic – similar to the aid migration seen in national governments' international funding, and a widespread acknowledgement that grant programme management inevitably pitches CSO against CSO, disincentivising collaboration:

“And the problem with civil society, global civil society, is that...the funding landscape is necessarily problematic because whether it likes it or not, it wittingly or unwittingly, creates competition” [INGO- 29]

Just as importantly at the global level this control was seen in the way foundations set out their priorities:

“I think some of these negative trends that we have seen in the field were also facilitated, if not incentivised by donor, framing and donor priorities. So, I'm quite sceptical and negative about all of the policy agenda that comes with the funding” [INGO – 23]

Also, by tending to favour certain organisations especially conventional INGOs with whom they had an established relationship, thus compounding INGO dominance, funders were slowing the trend towards greater inclusion of voices:

“There's no doubt that their very kind of ability to mobilise significant funds and support There's no getting away from that. And I think there's no denying the value of that and the significance of that. I would maybe say, though ... as in any context where you talk about big resources, is that there are power dynamics that come with that and the inadvertent exclusion that happens in some contexts, whether it is about the favoured entities or organisations that are trusted, and so are automatically within reach in terms of decision making or perhaps influence concept discussions and so on. Which can inadvertently create the same level of exclusionary practice that we want to fight, that we want to work against and mobilise against.” [NGO-27]

The fact that the significant philanthropic players are few in number was also seen to create civil society dependency:

“Where's the diversity of funding sources? My worry is that the danger is we all begin to sing the same tune because we are playing to the same audience of five or ten people – literally - around the world. How can we, quote unquote, declare our independence from those” [NGO-24]

On the other hand, this concentration of power, financial and otherwise, was also seen as potentially beneficial, with inter-funder co-operation, whether formal or informal, leading to critical change:

“But the groups that fund governance in particular are a bit of a herd and they tend to move together. So even if their grants are not enormous, they listen to each other. They learn from each other, they share experience. And so, I think that it feels like their influence is even greater than maybe the smallish grants they're making to anyone because they're building a field... And so, I've a feeling that they have their own echo chamber, which is good if you're a beneficiary, and maybe more difficult if you've got to break in. But I know they can be influential, especially if they have a certain DNA and if they hire a certain type of person” [INGO -22]

This ability, deliberate or not, for influence to transverse funding organisations has been picked up by some of the most astute civil society actors, and played into their negotiations with IGO funders or national governments funding internationally, both to build ‘packages’ of funding, but also to influence how the funding relationship is conducted:

“And I think because they have the flexibility, they also have the flexibility to model funding relationships with community organisations, for example, and sort of show donor governments what it looks like to be more flexible in funding with communities and getting the money really to the grassroots level” [INGO – 21]

This flexibility was also seen as significant in relation to some of the debates about infrastructure within civil society and relationship building across civil society and partners. It was noted by many that foundations were the key to making some of the significant events in this context happen, funding venues, travel and often bursaries for the otherwise excluded. The calculation being made about investing in these moments and spaces intrigued some interviewees, along with an awareness that the case for them had not been well made in the past:

“Why not give it to cash transfer program? Like what are they saying to themselves about the importance and unique upside that's associated with these sorts of gatherings? And you might get interesting answers and also some probably interesting lessons learned in terms of where they've been disappointed in the past, which many of them have.” [INGO – 11]

“I think those spaces are super important. Unfortunately, donors, by and large, don't appreciate necessarily the function that those big meetings serve I think it's hard to fund those meetings because, you know, donors have a tendency to say, oh, yeah, you're just gonna meet and talk and then what's going to come out of it?” [INGO – 9]

However, funding may be falling into line with other developing thinking across civil society about practical, feasible infrastructure to enable collaboration and impact:

“I think ideally you don't only fund the summit, but you fund the mechanism, the process, the institution, whatever it is in a more long-term way, and then understand that for that institution to actually reach its goal” [INGO – 30]

In the field of governance and accountability several particular foundations were regularly cited as important players, seen to be to some degree taking this long-term infrastructural view, including the Open Society Foundations (OSF, 2021), Hewlett Foundation (2021), Omidyar Network (Omidyar Network, 2021) and its offshoot Luminate (2021), and the Ford Foundation (2021). Indeed, all contributed in some way towards the OGP Ottawa 2019.

While views are very mixed across the global civil society-governmental sphere about whether overall the arrival on the scene of ‘big philanthropy’ is a positive or negative development, indeed most view it as both simultaneously, there is no doubt that all view it as very significant change in the landscape, that cannot be ignored.

3.7 Multi-Stakeholder Fora

In a study which has revealed a relationship between civil society and governmental bodies at the global level to have grown more collaborative, busier, and involving a wider and deeper range of civil society actors, the multi-stakeholder forum has emerged as an important mechanism enabling these changes.

As a jargon phrase used directly surprisingly often and readily understood, or as a concept described in additional other ways (e.g., platform) by most interviewees it is clear the multi-stakeholder forum is provoking widespread interest as a means to handle (especially complex) policy relationships and pursue reform. In essence it is a formal structure which brings together representatives of different sectors, on an equal footing. Unlike conventional IGOs, governmental bodies do not, at least ostensibly, retain ultimate decision-making power.

The Open Government Partnership is a prominent example of a multi-stakeholder forum which partners government representatives with civil society representatives. The Extractives Industry Transparency Initiative, cited by many interviewees as a particularly effective example, also brings together civil society and government, but critically in this field also mining industry representatives. CoST (2021) – also cited by interviewees – a platform working on accountability and transparency of public infrastructure projects also actively embraces relevant corporations and private companies to ensure shared policy making leading to practical disclosure of contracting and supply chains.

The topical field of digital governance – including within it ITU (2021) and ICANN (2021) – was seen to be an area of experimentation in multi-stakeholder relationships with varying configurations of the involvement of civil society and technology companies alongside government representatives.

“Maybe it was 2005, maybe a year later, when we realised that there's global movement on Internet governance. It has to be managed, you know, governed by a multi stakeholder body. This is something that we have in OGP, but it's not that broad in in terms of bringing the different stakeholders

on the steering committee. We had the multi-stakeholder advisory group to the UN Secretary-General and civil society was one of the key stakeholders, along with the governments, along with the technical community and along with business, private sector and a little bit of academia. So it was always a mixed technical community; developers, business, private sector alike, you have Facebook and you have Google and those big giants and then you have academia” [NGO – 2]

Important considerations for these platforms are who they involve, in terms of sectors, organisations and people, how they are perceived from outwith, but also within. Overall, as an innovation in global level institutional arrangements they were seen as a positive innovation with even the most sceptical interviewee remarking:

“But initiatives such as EITI and OGP and many others in those multi stakeholder initiatives, they have moved the needle ever so slightly forward in the sense that it's not as acrimonious as it used to be.” [NGO – 4]

Others were more wholeheartedly convinced that the methodology could and should endure:

“I think that multi-stakeholder approaches have become quite a trend, quite widely. I mean, it's followed in a lot of different contexts by now. And OGP and COST and EITI are just the most visible ones. But there's also multi-stakeholder approaches at local level, for example. And I do think that for today it has been established as an approach because it is very, very successful. “[INGO-23]

The engagement of the private sector in these processes would likely have met with civil society disfavour in the past but is now proving welcome in the eyes of some:

“The fact that we have private companies around the table adds a critical constituency, which in my view has actually been quite an eye opener in terms of some of the areas which they potentially champion. Including at times, civil society space and dialogue. They provide different dialogue and platforms than those offered by governments and get over some of that duality, which is an advantage for us” [INGO – 20]

Alliances between global civil society and (progressive) global business have been a developing background feature of the global civil society-governmental relationship. Organisations such as the ‘B Team’ (2021) have been created to actively promote the dynamic. At the 2018 round of talks Transparency International, acting in the role of ‘sherpa’ for the C20, evolved a formal interaction, through its ‘sherpa,’ with the ‘B20’, the powerful business lobby, creating a joint lobby and new channel for influence.

Multi-stakeholder fora were seen to be a way of positively disrupting established patterns of institutional behaviours, with the mix of backgrounds represented also introducing different skills and approaches to discussions. In the same way that new

NGO voices were contributing to global debates, it was seen as important to extend beyond the obvious voices in the corporate world:

“In the EITI are speaking about co-operation of three sectors: government NGOs and the extractive companies. I am absolutely sure that it is really important to involve different kinds of companies in the commercial structures in these initiatives as well” [NGO – 10]

With all these disparate voices involved, balance across and handling of the MSF processes at all levels was a key consideration:

“One of the challenges really I've seen in some of the local multi stakeholder forums is really getting a cross-section quickly on the team... but at the same time, you do have to have strong leadership on those multi stakeholder forums to push back when one voice is dominating or if there is a consortium of voices, maybe like the telco industry who are very key and also very talented at manoeuvring over a stakeholder forum and getting their way. So, it's important to have strong leadership that says no, that's off topic.” [NGO – 27]

These kind of management issues could really affect the overall impact of the multi-stakeholder forum and how it is seen from the outside:

“Obviously, it has lots of weaknesses and challenges of co-option, of difference in power politics. Can civil society have the same knowledge and expertise? Are they really seen as the same stakeholder, or just window dressing? And I think increasingly, are the governments who are part of this able to corral the rest of the governments and do they speak only for themselves, or can they speak for more?” [INGO–30]

Moreover, concerns were emerging that in some cases, if handled badly, rather than bring people together in common endeavour, it may crystallise differences and counter-act some of the trust building more informally in play:

“And I think that also speaks to one of the dynamics that I think we're seeing within government and civil society dialogue, which is that sometimes multi stakeholder initiatives do this really interesting and weird thing about reinforcing stakeholder divides instead of actually bridging them. I've talked to many government counterparts who are like, I came from civil society, I'm not really government, but they sit on the government side and then they feel like, oh, no, I'm being pigeonholed into this like box of you are a government person when in fact, you know, their hearts are in civil society in whatever they say.” [INGO -12]

At its best however, these fora were seen to harness efforts towards at least a common agenda, if not a totally shared goal, and providing a different, more fluid kind of interaction more suited to problem-solving than more conventional civil society-governmental engagement:

“I think the reason that there still is interest in buying in, investment from, you know, civic actors and some government departments in this discussion is a clear sense that this thing has value and that having the difficult conversations in which you may have disagreements, but that ultimately there is something that connects you, a fundamental reason that you are at this table. I think that that's important. And I think that the reason that people have come back and continue to come back into the OGP space in particular is exactly that” [NGO – 27]

As a space for detailed policy dialogue – beyond what can be achieved in more conventional processes and settings:

“The most significant contribution that it makes is a space for policy dialogue. And I think that that is a very significant contribution....but within that space, I think EITI and OGP, have been successful in mandating that there is a space for that engagement between governments and civil society. I think that's been an evolution.” [INGO -12]

In order to reach this optimum state of engagement it was however important to get the pre-conditions right. If stakeholders came into the process with assumptions, especially about power relationships, it was unlikely to fully succeed:

“In particular in some context, the government side of the equation must know that the multi stakeholder [approach] isn't just about writing a letter to Organization X, Y and Z to come to a meeting, but it's much more than that. And it has to be far more inclusive and conscientious. So, I think in that true form it definitely has value” [NGO -27]

Indeed, there was a measure of scepticism that such parity had yet been achieved, but nevertheless they represented a step towards such parity and in some cases could lead to more permanent normative shifts:

“There's a lot of positive coming out of some of them, especially out of the OGP. I'm hesitant because I know the relationship is not equal. Like the idea behind these is that you come to the table with some sort of equal footing. But we all know that that's not the case and the power dynamics are just still totally askew. I think, though, they'll continue, and I think there will be a trend to towards more multi stakeholder fora, especially if these philanthropists and society foundations are pushing for it” [INGO – 21]

“And the collaboration in the end is useful if the multi stakeholder process can lead to certain governance mechanisms which are widely agreeable” [INGO – 30]

Therefore overall, the trend towards multi-stakeholder platforms as a vehicle for global civil society-governmental relationships was seen as very positive, and likely to continue. However, aside from current scepticism about their maturity and genuine

parity of esteem between stakeholders within them, there was also a wariness looking forward about them extending to issues around inclusivity, and sustainability.

While it was seen as a very inclusive approach, there were concerns that this could provide cover for uncivil society to gain a foothold in global debates, or for certain interests to 'buy' their way in:

"Certain processes or ways of working have been established. So, you know...having a wholesale retreat [from engagement] is going to be more difficult. But, yes, it's certainly more perceptible ... it is through multi stakeholder participation where large philanthropy, large private institute entities or representatives of private entities are able to sort of barrel their way into important conversations because they bring the promise of enhanced funding. So that's a nice way to reduce civil society participation." [INGO – 17]

Also, that having too many perspectives creates a level of complexity that outweighs the benefits, here reflected in thinking in relation to OGP's relatively few current stakeholders:

"We may want to bring the business sector, or we may want to bring academia. We may want to bring the technical community, you know, because they designed the digital solutions, which is scary enough. But then we are going to complicate overall oversight of the OGP to an extent when it will become simply unmanageable because everyone will start dragging his or her own part and it will become a mess" [NGO -2]

And while it was ostensibly an inclusive approach, that a level of path dependency would be created progressively excluding new entrants to the conversations:

"And that's the challenge with OGP, right? That is, when it started it was a brand-new space for people who had previously had little leverage to come in and sit side by side with governments. Inevitably, naturally and predictably, over time, it becomes a club, which in itself is a valuable thing because you have strong social ties between groups and people wishing to work together, but at the same time, clubs have rules of entry and exclude. So, perhaps the answer is just to have a kind of constant stream of sort of wiping the surface down and starting again and having an opportunity for a bunch of new entrants to come into the marketplace" [INGO – 5]

Finally, on a very practical level the intensity of multi-stakeholder processes was seen as an issue:

"I see a lot of efforts have gone to get involved because OGP is civil society and governments at the same level at the same table. It's meant to bring civil society to the table. If it isn't that is that it's nothing. But it's very difficult for civil society to sustain the process, you know, to go to the meetings and to have ideas, then to travel internationally. Even if you are paid for international travel, it costs to sustain the process in terms of monitoring or in terms of

demanding transparency and to follow up commitments in the national plan.”
[NGO – 3]

Much like the view of the role of foundations, in that their prominence is currently viewed as advantageous for civil society-governmental relationships, but potentially unsafe, the efficacy of the multi-stakeholder approach was seen as positive for now, but participants from all perspectives were alert to potential dangers associated with it:

“So that's it for me, that is the question about these multi stakeholder initiatives and the investment of civil society in them. Can you say, is there value? and at which point do you make a call to say, you know what? Actually, the idea of multi-stakeholder initiatives sounds good on paper, but it just doesn't work. When do we get to the point of making the call? Can you make the call globally? Or is it explicitly on a case-by-case basis” [NGO – 4]

3.8 Role of Individuals

Considering each category of actor that plays a role in the global civil society-governmental relationship, what stands out across all of them is the impact particular individuals can have. While this may be a truism in any walk of life, in the context of a fluid and evolving interlocution where subtle positioning and narrative count as much as formal institutional standpoints, personal style matters. Both observation and interview data pointed towards a key role, and increased opportunities in such as multi-stakeholder fora, for those who are willing and adept at crossing traditional lines, prepared to see the issue from the other perspective:

“If you get to build the sort of relationships between people who otherwise wouldn't have them, you get to build an understanding of what it's like to work in governments to what it's like to work in such and such private sector company, and between them and the civil society organisations. And you get to have a much more refined sense of what those landing zones are.” [INGO-29]

Indeed, several interviewees spoke in terms of ‘bridging’ and ‘crossing over’, and the blurring of identities. This applied principally as to whether people were seen (or saw themselves) as civil society or government, but also across levels of governance.

“There's a small subset where the Venn diagram overlaps, people who've really figured it out.....where you can go operate and sort of try and get things done at a more discreet national or subnational level and have effective have efficacy and access to those global conversations and political spaces....and so I've always found it impressive, people who often not by design, but just accidental kind of professional history, end up playing the role of being able to vertically bridge” [INGO -11]

There appears to be a growing consciousness about the potential of this

“From my experience, we need to explore more the role of shifting sides... I meet a lot of people who come from civil society that work in government or who work in government and they go to civil society.... What I don't think is it's sufficiently explored, and I think that sometimes it can be an enabler for certain conversations on certain projects; not just because I did this, right!”
[Gov-14]

Moreover, in the case of at least one INGO, this recognition has led to specific strategies for optimising it, including running targeted training:

“We stay in touch with the alumni in terms of these identities of who is government, who is civil society, etc. Who is in companies, in our case, as well? Because then you can start to track people and people move from civil society into government and then government back into civil society. But they've maintained some of those relationships” [INGO-12]

Such switching of roles remains rare in general and, in some parts of the world and cultures, practically non-existent, but interviewees saw the multiplication of multi-stakeholder fora and other global spaces where individuals from different personal and professional backgrounds could make a distinct contribution, as likely to increase the fluidity and blurring of lines:

“Somehow, I have used what you call multi-stakeholder platforms and approaches, in all my work. I think it was a launching pad for me, a kind of natural process, you know, having experience in different sectors. Public, private, but also in addition a multilateral international organisation and civil society. I think not many in [my country] have had these kinds of, I wouldn't even say opportunities, more privilege, to work in such diverse sectors. Usually, people follow a very clear career path. You know, if you become a civil servant, especially in the administrative service, that means you go to professional civil service career and you remain all of your life a civil servant”
[NGO-28]

However, it was noted that in some systems there were structural or profit motives for personnel making these significant shifts:

“Because of context, where that almost happens on a structural basis is the US. In fact, the US is the emblematic case where this happens because of the politicisation of the upper tiers of the bureaucracy, so every four years a whole ton of people move back into academia and civil society, think tanks and back again.” [INGO-20]

“[Tech companies] just swallowing up civil society organisations by swallowing up the leadership much in the same way that they do mergers and acquisitions and swallow up their rivals.” [INGO-29]

Others revisited the need for succession planning, in a context where civil society in particular, but given the increasing volume of interactions across the global civil society-governmental body IGOs and national governments too, need more people knowledgeable and skilled to step up:

“Civil society has grown, has become more professional. It's a career for many people. There are more of us. We demanded more access and gradually won the ground by showing the contribution that we've got.” [INGO-26]

“We need younger people to come in who have not spent the last 20 odd years bumping around the same kind of conferences, and you need to create spaces for a new generation to come in, who are going to be new, and think about something different. That's just evolution, right?” [INGO-5]

Interestingly the nature of the job became a talking point for some, and the consequent lifestyle an (at least partial) explanation as to why global roles have been perceived as exclusive, only available to those able to commit to the job above all else:

“It was thinking about, it was to be on a panel on a Monday that I was traveling on Sunday. Do I really want to do that? I didn't have a life because I'm traveling on the weekends. So, I'll make the most of it; I'll have some more meetings and I'll stay that Tuesday as well. When I get back to the office, I have to catch up all week and I have to work the following weekend. I don't have a life” [INGO-26]

“I know I can't speak to all civil society really feeling under-represented. I can definitely speak to women and feeling under-represented. I've been at thousands of those.” [INGO-22]

During the participant observation at the Ottawa summit, one noted overheard conversation had participants complaining the only exercise they ever got was running through connecting airports, and another remarking she would have to ‘pay’ in extra weekend work to cover the time abroad.

Yet these issues were discussed with some hints of optimism. Technology was already enabling business to be conducted where relationships had been established, and it was clear follow-ups to conversations initiated in Ottawa in May 2019 would continue online for convenience. By the point of the second set of interviews in June 2020, the pandemic had locked down large parts of the world, but interviewees were reporting real benefits to their work as their institutional practices were forced to rethink, with a massive shift toward webinars and zoom calls from physical workshops, and even whole conferences going online.

This led to some considerable optimism that global conversations could become more accessible, and technology deployed to genuinely engage people from

different backgrounds in more than the maligned 'slactivism' of the past on the part of civil society, or the pigeon-holed bureaucracy on the part of government.

3.9 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has covered the over-arching findings of this research. It presented the external factors driving actors and noted in particular concerns about the political and structural context for global civil society-government engagement; a perceived waning of multi-lateralism and the rise of populists. This concern is set against actors' advocacy of more and better means engagement, in order to better tackle the complex challenges of today's world.

In relation to the overarching research question, it is clear that more global civil society-IGO engagement is happening in general, and that it is more collaborative in nature than ever before. Global civil society has become more sophisticated in its approach to engagement but continues to be concerned about its credibility and the fragile underpinning of its work with governmental institutions.

Global civil society has grown significantly, in that it involves more organisations and activists, including otherwise-domestically focused ones, and is far less reliant on the infrastructural roles of large INGOs. Evidence suggests this has reduced the previous northern-bias to global civil society, nevertheless, the representativeness and inclusivity of global civil society in its engagement activity continues as a preoccupation.

Looking ahead, the growth in civil society, its greater sophistication and willingness to be closer to governmental bodies (while maintaining the right and ability to protest), is set to be a significant thread of analysis. The operating environment for civil society organisations at domestic level has implications, not just nationally, but internationally, and the so-called 'civic space agenda' seems likely to become more important in coming years, affecting global civil society's capacity to challenge and engage governmental counterparts, in relation to specific policy areas, and in a more general sense.

Inter-governmental organisations are key interlocutors with global civil society and secretariat bodies seen as important (and largely sympathetic) actors in their own right, distinct from their national government constituents. National governments' attitude to global civil society is influenced by their own domestic approach to civic space, and, also, can be internally contradictory department to department, political to official. These nuances give rise to a growing interest in multi-level strategies by civil society, and sometimes deliberate engagement at the global level to 'boomerang' impact at national. Or even a conscious by-passing by sub-national/local actors of the national level, to 'cut-through' to debates at the global level, all made more possible by technology-enabled direct communication and community-building.

Technically part of global civil society, the distinct role of global foundations in the context of global civil society-governmental relationships was presented in this chapter, including the sense amongst interviewees that they were a positive force currently, but that their lack of explicit accountability and economic strength means this is not guaranteed, begging questions of relative positioning and governance going forward. Their relatively recent role in stimulating the burgeoning of multi-stakeholder fora, however, presents as pivotal; the emerging trend for multi-stakeholder fora to address key agendas in creative ways, bringing together global civil society representatives with IGOs and foundations in more intensive engagement is clearly an intriguing dimension which prompts further consideration to be taken up in later chapters.

Finally, the human dimension of engagement was addressed in this chapter, with an initial survey of the issues affecting behaviour, setting the scene for a more detailed examination of these factors in the next chapter on summits, and subsequently on the use of technology.

Chapter Four: Global Civil Society Engagement with Summit Events

Where the previous chapter took an overview of the global civil society-IGO relationship as it emerged from the data, and examined the role of different categories of actor, this chapter seeks to narrow the focus to examine the role of high-level meetings or summits as venues for the global civil society-governmental relationship. It explores how they function as a mechanism of the relationship and how as a feature of the landscape they may develop.

As Pianta (2005) and Harrybe (2011) recounted, the occasion of a summit event for the unfolding of the global civil society - governmental relationship has evolved over time, from a point where civil society activists could at best expect to affect discussions from the pavement outside the venue, through the flourishing of fringe or parallel events, to increased accredited participation, and most recently events which are actively promoted to delegates from governmental and civil society backgrounds on an even footing.

What is clear from this research is that the opportunity of big set-piece events for progressing the global civil society-governmental relationship is far more complex than it once was, and views on what the main purpose of being part of them are, vary quite markedly. This chapter seeks to explore each of these perspectives and presents a typology designed to help in thinking about the purpose and format of such events.

Importantly, what this research has also captured is the 'before' and 'after' effect of the massive disruption to the normal business of summit events created by the Covid-19 pandemic during 2020/21. Second wave interviews conducted during June 2020 (the first wave was autumn 2019) contributed fresh perspectives on which aspects of practice should be returned to, and which of the new, largely technology-based alternatives should be systemically retained. Consequently, therefore, the findings provide some indications of how the conduct of relationships could be optimised for different purposes in the future.

The first section of this chapter explores the purpose of summit events, covering the classic decision-making, though multi-faceted networking, and inspiration and momentum-building. It goes on to describe the research finding that summit events are increasingly seen as an inter-connected 'tapestry'. Finally, the human dimension of such events is explored, along with the potential for this to be neglected by technological innovation unless overtly considered, and the typology is included here.

4.1 Purpose of Event

The purpose of summit events may classically be considered to be international decision-making; the model of top-level government representatives and other stakeholders coming together to create a new global standard or norm, however

broad or niche in policy terms. However, this research tended much more to the idea of summits as nodes in a much wider network of ongoing conversations, with formal decisions or announcements being just one feature of a more complex set of interactions.

In fact, most interviewees stressed networking – both within and across sectors – above the ostensible agenda of the event as a key purpose of participating. Some of this networking was agenda-orientated or pragmatic for the purposes of gathering support for a proposition or funding for a project or programme. However, it was also about seeking or creating inspiration both in terms of learning from others, but also in the more human terms of movement-building and solidarity.

This latter aspect in particular was considered to have suffered from pandemic lockdowns and to be at risk from a more wholesale shift to online global conferencing. It was also felt to be under-considered by those planning and organising events, and especially in a context where more work and interaction is likely to remain online, it should be thought about more explicitly for those events that do continue in physical formats:

“If you're saying that the goal is the networking and the social capital, I would always work backwards from that agenda, from that objective. And what I would say is great.... Who is the target audience? Who do you want to have social capital? And you might now have a very different set of participants”
[INGO – 6]

Broadly speaking global summit events have three main elements; the ‘core’ decision-making meeting, the formally-organised programme of events centred on a ‘main-stage’ plenary format but with varying levels of breakout sessions or exhibitions associated, and thirdly, the ‘fringe’ of parallel or side meetings and social events organised by others attending or seeking to influence the main event in some way. In the case of extremely high-profile gatherings such as the UN General Assembly, or the COP climate series, all three elements feature strongly. In more technical areas of policy, the programme and side events may be less in evidence with all attention on the formal meeting. In others, including the Ottawa OGP event, focus on the decision-making (in OGP’s case, by the movement’s elected global steering committee) element has receded in favour of the main programme. In the case of the recent innovation, the Paris Peace Forum, there is no core decision-making purpose at all, rather a total emphasis on the thematic programme, and reliance on high-level sponsorship by the French President (and the initial opportunism of the Second World War centenary commemoration) to ensure the participation of high-profile politicians and commentators.

The classic view of the summit event foregrounds the interests of participants already in senior or leadership positions, in practice emphasising the decision-making and main stage spotlight moments, whereas a more rounded interpretation might consider those earlier in their careers or involved in the agenda from other organisational positions. Using a sporting analogy, the first group might be described as ‘players’, and the latter ‘punters’ to denote that while they are not in the main

spotlight, they nevertheless have an important stake in the game. Participant observation data suggests the needs and expectations of the 'players' versus 'punters' in attendance at big events are quite different, with the former often quite dismissive of the published programme, focusing primarily on a bespoke agenda of high-level meetings. Even where time allowed, 'players' expressed a dissatisfaction with the usefulness of the programme wrapped around the decision-making they were most focused on:

"I just find the quality of things is not always very high at these events.... the idea of going to a session and not getting insights or really hearing about meaningful things is high. So, it's not just about me being a busy person who is in demand. I think it's also that there's a quality problem at these things and there's an engagement problem" [INGO-22]

Arguably this engagement problem stems from a lack of priority given to 'punters' needs and interests by event planners, as well as 'players'; they are viewed along a spectrum from passive audience to, only rarely, full participant in the discourse.

One solution to this problem, and further theme of the interviews was the importance of thinking about summit events not just in terms of the few days of the event itself. Similar to the idea of individual summits being part of a wider tapestry of global events, the importance of the work in the months, perhaps years, prior to each one, and of the follow-up period too, emerged as an important concept. Even where all participants were considered to have a contribution to make, how that contribution can be harnessed during the few days of an event remained challenging:

"What I find is that with many initiatives that involve civil society, what they do is they basically will end the meeting by saying, 'well, this, of course, is not the end of the conversation is the beginning of the conversation'. So, in other words, it's just simply a way of bringing people together, talking about an issue but they're not actually leading to at that event anything of impact. And you very rarely see impact emerging from these. And they almost expect that if you bring a bunch of jet lagged people together, stick them in a room while they're looking at their cell phones and checking their email and sending texts that suddenly they're going to generate a high impact action. It just doesn't happen. And so what we've been pushing is a new methodology for meetings and summits, which is you try to do almost all the work in advance so that you have these actions and that maybe in person you'd resolve a couple of open issues and then announce the deliverables. But it's not the idea that you're generating all these actions at the meeting because it almost never happens" [INGO-6]

So, it is important to focus on getting the balance right to ensure the event has purpose for all its participants and is structured in such a way as to warrant their attention and engagement.

4.1.1 Decision-making

While networking and inspiring emerged as strong themes, decision-making and the idea of a summit as the culmination of a policy process remains very important, not least to create the moment at which people are motivated to gather.

For civil society this purpose has conventionally ostensibly involved physical protests, creating a noise and an environment from outside the formal discussions designed to influence their progress and outcome. Yet, alongside this and especially so for the more niche agendas and events that do not attract media or public interest, it has also always involved skilled lobbying:

“But it is clear that over the years, there's been a huge professionalisation in the NGO sector itself, because I think that there were NGOs who saw themselves, perceived their role to be, outside. I think it depends on your approach as civil society, not only on your interlocutors, on the government side. I mean, frankly, I'm a lobbyist. I'm a lobbyist for human rights. But we know that lobbyists get into the room and if you know how to do it you can get into the room” [INGO 26]

It is clear this applied also to the occasions where civil society does have accreditation or formal representation in the decision-making meeting, with impact on the course of a meeting relying more on influencing ideas and discourse before and around the event:

“I think a whole lot more work gets done away from the table. I think a whole lot of it really. Would we as civil society set goals, focused advocacy goals? I honestly think we achieve them through having bilateral engagements in the corridors as you walk into the room where the table is. But by the time you get to the table, it really becomes theatrical, really becomes power games and one upmanship by one sector over the other” [NGO – 4]

Yet, it is clear that the nature of this physical lobbying role is also undergoing change, with the ‘room’ in question no longer just being the physical space or meeting table, and may instead, even at in-person meetings, be an email loop or whatsapp group, requiring civil society lobbyists to create new access points to collect intelligence or influence, and ensure new modes of operation are both inclusive and transparent:

“We sit at the back of a room, and we observe the negotiations. But from my point, from an observational basis, it was interesting to see who was walking around. So, you see when Germany would stand up and go and walk over to Italy and discuss something and then Italy would make an intervention. There were always one or two government officials who were just walking around the whole room talking to other governments and trying to persuade them and get them onside and coordinate and stuff like that. But when it was in that way, it was very physically obvious who was doing what. And if you go to a committee a whole lot...I went to that meeting last earlier this year... and

hardly anyone is on their feet anymore because they don't have to be. They can now do that coordination on their phones. And the nice thing about it is, say Germany is trying to get seven of its kind of friendly governments to back it up on a particular argument. They can now do that with all seven in one go on a WhatsApp group. And it's just better in the sense that that means that it's a more inclusive process because some of the smaller governments would just be left out of those conversations when it was a case of someone physically walking round because they're in a hurry and may want to prioritise the UK and Italy, they won't go and talk to Luxembourg. But now if you're all on the same WhatsApp group, everyone's part of that conversation". [INGO - 15]

It also seems this shift from physical to online in terms of lobbying and influencing is not simply about replacing the contacts that might have been possible before in conventional settings, it is also prompting thinking about ways to influence the policy and decision-making process at other points in the cycle. The disruption to normal practice caused by the pandemic has revealed other potential access points and means of influence:

"I'm thinking about using digital as a means to decision making, like we all still work for organisations, governments are still working even if people are at home and not in the office. So those decisions that are being taken about policy, about, executive action, you know, carrying out of policy administration and some people are making things happen. They're allocating budget and spending, budget and so on. So, it's getting to those nodes of power and decision making and influencing them through online fora. That interests me. And I'm trying to figure out if we can shift some of those consultations and influencing to online so that we have the opportunity to do less in person but still get where we need to go." [INGO – 22]

These online opportunities to iterate more frequently with governmental processes may be seen in the wider context of what the OECD calls a 'deliberative wave' i.e. experimentation with new forms of - often online - citizen participation (OECD, 2020) and like these reduce the need for a single 'crunch point' to make a decision. In the context of global civil society – governmental relations it may over time further diminish the criticality of the formal decision-making aspect of summit events.

Nevertheless, having a pre-fixed date to aim towards and a format to push crystallisation of an agenda can be an important role of such set-piece events:

"The events can be a moment where if you get the right leader, meaning the right level of person and someone whose words are considered to be a mandate to move forward, then they can be useful to send a message within a particular country or government and civil society infrastructure that there is a commitment to these.... reforms" [INGO -12]

Indeed, some interviewees saw value in attending such meetings, almost in a defensive manner, to ensure good work done in advance of the published summit

date remains intact, to prevent backsliding on the agenda, or just possibly make a mark on the formal product:

“The summit document starts circulating months before, you know, the agendas of summits circulate months ahead or weeks ahead. Right. So the importance of being present is if you have an access and an entry point, then you might influence the final output, but you don't just go into a conference, and in the event think that you changed the agenda that has been building behind the scenes” [INGO-16]

Regardless of whether the actual policy development or decision has already largely been made, interviewees from both civil society and governmental perspectives saw value in creating an opportunity for a formal announcement:

“I'm not sure that's where advocacy will move [online]. Maybe that's how we'll experience common things. Maybe. But for the moment, I think there's probably something to phase through before we could get there as civil society working to advocate for change. And I'm guessing even government would still miss these moments of bringing someone on the stage and presenting the end of a process or a declaration or, you know, yeah, we've signed up, we're committed to X” [INGO 22]

For some the key aspect of this was not necessarily the substance of the announcement itself, but more an opportunity to grandstand the whole issue or debate. In the same vein as the contention that Beijing kickstarted the global women's' movement and the COP series has kept the spotlight on climate issues, for them creating a decision-point for the purposes of generating a media moment, is arguably as important as the decision itself:

“These big events are valuable because we're working on an issue that risks dropping off the agenda. Probably every issue risks dropping off the agenda because there's always something that you're competing with for public attention and for funding. So, in terms of just keeping AIDS, just keeping it front and centre as an epidemic, that's still happening. It needs a global coordinated response. Those goals are important. And I know there's a lot of fear that if we stop having these high-level meetings, that people would understand that to mean that the epidemic is over. And those people who are still at risk or are sick and dying would just be even further left behind or ignored.” [IGO – 18]

Similarly, from a civil society perspective, simply being seen to be part of the staged programme of such an event (whether or not they have representation in the core decision-making meeting), alongside high-profile leaders and celebrities, and therefore potentially influential on the agenda, is valuable:

“They are useful if civil society activists are given a space in the agenda, in shaping the agenda, if they are given space. You know, even being visible. Right. Because it's sort of it sends a message to bureaucrats. It sends a

message to governments that civil society is valued and civil society perspectives, you know, hold influence, even if their civil society may not have billions of dollars to contribute to a process or come with the sort of logistical heft that a government or a private logistics company might have or so on. So, I think it's absolutely important that these events happen. [INGO -17]

Importantly, this boosting effect for civil society in terms of profile and engagement doesn't just happen at the event itself, but the fact of the event can generate opportunities in advance of it:

“The opportunity provided by these high-level meetings happens in advance of the high-level meetings. And it's when we're able to support civil society at country level to engage with their government delegations. And that's a moment where there may be openness by the government to hear technical information, best practices, priorities from civil society that they might not have if they weren't about to go and have to represent the government position at this meeting. So, for some that can be helpful. Those pre meetings and the pressure it puts on governments to pay attention for a short time” [IGO -18]

Likewise, it is recognised as being important, if whether by design or fortune the event itself forces a change of view, to be ready to follow up afterwards:

“The ability for civil society organisations and governments to engage in global events has been very powerful and sometimes game changing. Even coming down to that almost anecdotal story where you expose the government and someone who is relatively new to a certain agenda to other thought leaders, particularly other global governments in this forum and then in this joint session with the local civil society in the room, they just make a statement like, oh yeah, we're also going to do this. And it happened in these very powerful moments because they can be followed up by the local actor. And so, the change doesn't happen at the event, but the event can be used as a catalyst to trigger some of these very initial outcomes that then can be followed up more in the in the domestic or whatever context” [INGO -23]

Though, in counterpoint, without planning and readiness there was the sense that these events could be opportunities wasted if messaging becomes too dispersed, or self-interested:

“I have a feeling that sometimes in these global spaces, these big events, we are all there to peddle and market our own idea or our own solution or our own network or our own whatever it is to try and jockey and jostle for relevance and for profile and funding and for all of these kinds of things. Making a splash” [NGO – 24]

“But we all came to the conclusion at the end that we have to strengthen our coalition building with other stakeholders in order to have a more strong presence because the competition there in terms of parallel side events and

parallel sessions, something like that is so big that you have to be very, very strong to really capture the attention of those attending the meeting” [INGO–7]

Also, there was a sense that if the event did not feel purposeful enough, had become too much of a platform for the sake of a platform, or a gathering for the sake of a gathering, then its value for civil society engagement with governmental bodies and processes was reduced:

“But of course, too often these events end up being superficial moments where a lot of resources are put in and then you have this one big plenary and then you have sorts of celebrity philanthropists and a conversation and then things get lost.” [INGO – 17]

Taken to the extreme, the lack of a pinnacle purpose, the ‘summit’ moment involving powerful representatives, could mean denuding the whole event of any purpose, by discouraging attendance and participation:

“[They think...] whatever is happening in this global multi-stakeholder forum, it's not a decision. It's not the binding process. Why would we waste our time on those? So even the governmental participation decreased throughout the years. So probably most events which don't have any follow up implications, events which don't have any recommendations, you don't have a memorandum, you don't have any agreements at the end, you don't get it. So, it results in nothing. Right. So, people just travel. They've seen each other. They participated in sessions. And that's it.” [NGO – 2]

4.1.2 Networking

Yet, this very negative take on an event without ostensible decision-making purpose, ignores, or at least downplays, the value intrinsic in people meeting that most interviewees rated at least as highly as the formal agenda as a purpose for (attending) such events:

“So, I always valued this kind of either regional or international event not so much with the content, especially I mean the last ten years because you can get access to online data and information for me to use; they remain useful in terms of establishing new contacts, you know, I always meet new people; new persons, new organisations” [NGO – 28]

Networking in a conference setting is taken to mean the conversations had and contacts made outwith or as a by-product of the formal proceedings. Many seasoned participants will go armed into the venue with a stack of printed business cards, intentionally prepared to meet and connect. This can take the form of deliberately scrutinising the attendance list and seeking out particular people or organisations, or a more random form, on the assumption that mere attendance at the event entails some level of common interest. More recent summit events have sought to use technology to facilitate this process. The OGP Summit had planned a conference

app which displayed short biographies of attendees and enabled online connections and tagging. The entirely online Paris Peace Forum of November 2020 attempted an even more sophisticated version of this with virtual business cards.

Cross-sectoral networking

Perhaps most significantly in this respect is the opportunity created by summit events for cross-sectoral networking. Clearly representatives of civil society, governments, and in some cases, the private sector or academia, are formally convened as the centrepiece of the event, but the business even in that context for many is wider than that on the order paper, having an important networking dimension:

“But at the OECD for instance? I think that the presence is very useful in terms of positioning the organisation and showing what we are doing. And in terms of the conversation with the OECD as organisation, once you participate and you go, and you are there in the meeting. You are consolidating the channels of communication personally and institutionally for the rest of the year. I have the same impression with IMF. And of course, you have then to cherish those contacts that you made in the formal events and the big events and working more closely or keeping their staff or the authorities informed about what you are doing” [INGO – 7]

The wider programme of panels, workshops, any parallel or side events, not to mention the purely informal coffee-queue or lunch table meetings provide many more ‘off-protocol’ chances to meet and talk with sectoral counterparts and gain insights and fresh perspectives on common questions. While for most interviewees from both perspectives this has a very real if unquantifiable value, there was concern event planners did not give it enough consideration, leaving too much to happenstance:

“And that's the problem. I've been at other meetings where that was an explicit goal. And what they did is they actually assigned you a table as a table of eight or ten. And their idea ... to create interactions between governments and civil society policy makers and foundations and so and so forth. So, they actually divided us up. You couldn't sit with your friends. You actually had to sit with somebody from another sector. And then they had table discussions. And that created social capital.” [INGO-6]

This kind of thinking about creating the conditions for productive cross-sectoral networking seems to be gaining interest, especially around multi-stakeholder initiatives. The OGP Ottawa Summit was preceded by a semi-formal session bringing together those delegates who had formal ‘point of contact’ roles for their governments or civil society domestically. As well as a general shared interest in open government, the fact that these individuals had designated responsibilities in relation to the open government national action plan process was felt a strong enough link around which to build an ‘ice-breaking’ session – with the objective of speeding up the networking that would otherwise take place in and around the

conference venue. Participant observation at this session noted that discussion very quickly moved to 'how' to engage and understand each other, rather than 'why', suggesting this is well-founded.

Intra-sector networking

Intra-sector networking was also important to interviewees, though had key differences. Some civil society voices highlighted the opportunity to bridge the NGO-INGO 'divide' and in the case of otherwise domestically focused civil society actors, to seek information and alliances with others working transnationally, perhaps bypassing umbrella or intermediary structures, as discussed in the previous chapter. Summit events were also a prime opportunity for seeking intelligence on upcoming funding prospects, or at least the developing thinking of key foundations or government donor agencies. For government people there was more of an emphasis on meeting and comparing notes with individuals or teams doing the equivalent role as them for other countries. One interviewee well-placed to, as someone who had worked in both roles, drew the following contrast:

“As I was in civil society, we used those moments to have a dialogue with donors. But when I was in government, I felt like it had to do more with bilateral meetings and protocol. And I think it didn't have to do with starting projects. But just keeping the ball rolling, getting new connections and doing some networking and positioning the work with the countries doing it. But what I felt that is that maybe when we started working in government, I had no time to attend sessions like it every time was a bilateral, bilateral lunch or something off the agenda. Why? When I worked in civil society, I had the time to get a meeting, have an informal coffee. But at the same time attend sessions and get to know what was going on. So, I think that both for government and civil society these summits are special places for networking. But I think that the kind of use they do is different.” [Gov-14]

In civil society the idea of sector-only space to enable CSO networking has taken hold, perhaps as an evolution of parallel events. These were civil society organised initially to provide a platform for alternate views and voices to try and influence the 'main' summit event, but also provided that intra-sector networking the benefits of which are increasingly overtly recognised:

“I think that the idea of having your pre-summit with civil society only, is now getting traction and it's almost like a standard thing now in summits that civil society creates that space or is given that space to self-organise before going into the actual summit itself” [INGO – 9]

In the context of OGP these distinctive needs and approaches of civil society and government seem to have been acknowledged with a standing tradition of a pre-day convening of each sector's representatives before the formal launch of the summit proper. Altered for the first time at the Ottawa summit to enable the cross-sectoral ice-breaker session, these discrete cohort sessions and others like them seem to be highly valued as a means for individuals to orient themselves and their organisational

position for the purposes of the imminent formal event, but much more than that, for the ongoing work ahead:

“So, I think there's a lot of intangible outcomes coming out of those meetings, which goes back to what I was saying around movement building. Right. You don't build a movement through email still in this day and age. I think even the Arab Spring, you know, people went out on the streets and engaged physically with one another, even if there was a strong technological component to it. So, I think those self-created spaces are where I think movements can build, create, reinvent themselves, evolve, adapt, you know, be fluid. And I think those spaces are super important.” [INGO – 9]

“I think those are some of the most rewarding events where people have been working and feeling like they've been toiling in obscurity, in relative obscurity for years, suddenly you can meet kindred spirits. And I think that can be both a morale boost and a great avenue for strategising, designing campaigns. I think it's hard to compare that.” [INGO- 29]

Serendipity

However, for all the planning involved in these events, and the attempts to replicate making connections online through conference apps, most interviewees related that amongst their biggest benefits was the sheer, unexpected, chance to find out a crucial bit of information, speak with an influential player, or forge a fruitful connection that could only happen by being physically present.

‘I think there's a there's a serendipity to those events, which is much harder to have online... And then once you've met with new people at those events, then you can involve them in the online space.’ [INGO – 29]

There was a sense from the second wave of interviewees that the necessity of working online had caused them to reflect on previous practice and assign value to aspects of the events differently to those they had considered in the past.

“[Looking back] it was a windowless room or different windowless rooms for days on end and I find that's the kind of meeting I'm really tired of. And I think that we could do a lot more of that virtually. The physical space in which they take place is really important. Anyway, I'll go on going to the summits in terms of networking. I do think that is important in terms of what civil society have to do with government” [INGO – 26]

Building Relationships

This serendipity of first meetings and connections was echoed for many in an emphasis on the humanity involved in building on and growing relationships. Summit events took on the aspect of a large gathering where you trusted you would benefit from running into existing contacts, but in a way that could be justified, where

formally organised online meetings or the cost of traveling to bespoke ones could not:

“Events that are the most successful are those that build on, create and build pre-existing relationships. Use the global moment as a moment of solidifying those partnerships in different ways, creating specific space and advancing particular dialogue and then having concrete action steps that will continue the conversation.” [INGO -12]

Particularly for interviewees working within governments or IGOs, the ability to have chats with counterparts about mutual challenges in a way that respected but temporarily set aside their official roles and consequent restrictions on them was particularly important. Such off the record networking, built trust and enabled ongoing work, even when formal interactions were testing.

“And there's a lot of nonverbal cues to diplomacy and, you know, it is relationship building, especially for civil society and governments like you. You know you can't just ring somebody up in government and say, let's have a chat. Whereas when you're in person and you're on the side lines of these meetings and you spot a diplomat from a delegation and you can approach them and speak to them and sort of slowly build a relationship, I don't think you have that ability online. Certainly not if you don't already have a relationship standing. So that's a crucial element, I think, for in-person meetings” [INGO – 21]

“There is a community around open government and always a bunch of civil society organisations at the national level to work with public officials that lead the charge in the administration. And of course, you know, these relationships are very much cemented and fed in the international events. And that is good. I think it facilitates informality. And through informality things can be pushed, the bar can be set higher, problems can be ironed out. So, in that sense, I feel that that the group of is importance and it is one of the reasons I always go.” [IGO–19]

“I think that there's another dimension of this summit to do with the other informal meetings, like going to dinner with someone, going to take a break. And I think that what happens on the side lines and the more 'off-protocol' really helps to shape the next steps” [Gov -14]

Own Country

Interestingly, this ability to use the conference environment for informal and unusual forms of engagement reaped benefits domestically as well as in terms of global discourse. In a specific manifestation of the ‘boomerang’ concept (Keck and Sikkink, 1999), several interviewees noted how they had used the simple fact of being away from home to reach out and connect with other domestic actors, and make progress on their own regional (i.e. Europe), national (i.e. United Kingdom) or sub-national

(i.e. Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) agenda. For some this was semi-organised, and collaborative:

“But then we organised and improvised another meeting with CSOs, who were a bit worried about our national process and we organised it from the side lines of the summit just as another panel was taking place. And it was a really honest conversation, and it was a dialogue. And we took some definite decisions like, OK, we're going to implement the local strategy this year through our forward action plan. So, there were concrete deliverables from that meeting” [Gov – 14]

For others the very purpose of being at an international event was a deliberate piece of domestically focused networking:

“It is useful and really I think it is useful to tee off conversations, so when you are at the summit and you're interacting informally with a minister from one country or the other that then creates rapport. It creates an opportunity for more in-depth discussions taking place back home or, you know, back at the capital of that particular country.” [NGO -4]

For others still, the summit event provided an opportunity to deploy more of a shock tactic, designed to create or stimulate domestic relationships:

“If you were an NGO in, say, Tanzania and you're working on treatment on the ground in Tanzania and you're trying to contact your government, you're trying to get your voice heard by your government, but sometimes there's a real reluctance for them to listen to you because you're just a little NGO from Dar es Salaam. Like, why would the government listen to you? But then if you then turn up at a United Nations meeting and make a presentation on the platform at a United Nations meeting, talking about your experience in Tanzania, then suddenly the Tanzanian government are like who the fuck are they, oh sorry! They're like, oh, wow, we've got to take these people more seriously. They mean business. I mean, we've seen that in many different circumstances where even physically being at the United Nations meeting has forged a relationship at a national level between an NGO and a government that they were really struggling to make” [INGO – 15]

Follow up Networking

Paralleling the sequential view of the decision-making aspect of summit events, with consideration being given to advance preparation, action during the event and follow up after, in some cases this thinking was also being applied to networking. All were agreed that online interaction was far easier if one had met in person before hand:

“And so actually having the ability to just, you know, be at a Paris Peace Forum or be somebody who goes to an OGP event for the first time because they'd been active in their own space, you know that the casual conversations you have opens the ability to then work online thereafter” [INGO-29]

In one case this analysis had fed into events they designed and organised themselves as part of their overall engagement strategy:

“So, the way that we think about the convening of one of our global courses is that there is advanced preparatory work that is done. So, at the start of an engagement and the building of relationships, confidence, trust between the participants and particularly between civil society and government participants who are going to be coming together. So, there's some of that sort of laying the ground. And then there's an arc where then you're bringing this group together. And over the course of the capacity development exercise itself, there is trust building exercises that are involved. There are open spaces for dialogue. There's space separately as stakeholders and then coming together as well. But then the most important thing is everything that happens afterwards. So, the convening itself is a very important moment. It's like a spike. But then when we have seen demonstrated impact of those kind of convenings is only when we are following up with the government and civil society counterparts who participated and ensuring that they have follow up meetings, are they continuing to communicate. Have they built the kind of bridges that concrete policy discussions can build on?” [INGO 12]

4.1.3 Inspiring

For all the commentary about investing in the before and after of significant events, there were as many voices calling for deeper consideration of the content during them. A distinction emerged between the needs of the ‘players’ who had an active role in relation to any policy-making or decision-making taking place during the summit, and those whose focus was principally on the more public, published, programme of main-stage speakers and panels. For many the needs of the former unhelpfully often took precedence over the latter, with a sense that the programmed event could suffer in terms of quality

“I guess my rant would be that I think many global events are not designed in a way that it's really trying to get the most out of it for participants. So, there's always a lot of politics involved and that then influences the design of a global event. And of all the events that I have experienced that were really, really

useful, were more of the smaller scale events that were really designed around the needs and interests of that few participants that were actually there and had all this big preparation that goes before and then a very good facilitation there and then a big follow up” [INGO – 23]

While acknowledging the need for ‘big name’ attendees to act as a draw to potential participants, and perhaps the need for some aspect of formal ‘summit’ proceedings to have incentivised that, this research revealed a pent-up demand for better quality event content and more thought and investment in its curation. This leant, not towards a conventional educational programme with teaching and learning content, but very much towards creating opportunities for inspiration, showcasing of practice and policy and ideas transfer which came as often if not more so from fellow participants as from the keynote speakers:

“If you want to ask me of the trips that I took over the past few years, which ones were worth it? Which ones were not: those that are the most worth it you know, they need to be well organised....is it worth it to attend like a well-organised global event where you meet a diverse group of like-minded individuals both outside and with the government, yes absolutely?” [INGO – 29]

Many examples of poor event content were cited, and what they had in common was a format where attendees were expected to be passive observers or recipients of content, with at best the opportunity to ask questions at a panel session. A programme of ill-thought-out sessions and poorly prepared or delivered presentations as window dressing for summit business happening elsewhere in the venue was clearly a long-standing irritation.

Lack of thought about the needs, or indeed potential contributions of the non-leadership conference delegates – the ‘punters’ – whether civil society or government, was the common thread, with dismay at experiences where the programme failed to deliver a galvanising effect and keep people engaged in the gathering and the conversation:

“So, when you are extrinsically motivated to go to attend an event, this is one thing in addition to the agenda that is being imposed to you as a professional, as an individual, you need to have your intrinsic motivation, for doing outreach for, engaging for taking the mike, for talking for speaking. I've noticed so many people just using these events for sightseeing, for shopping. And it broke my heart because it oftentimes we spend a lot of resources. We really were doing outreach to bring the most diverse organisations into the play. And at the end of the day, there were so few people in the room.” [NGO – 2]

In contrast there was evident enthusiasm for more purposeful deliberative formats, that not only allowed, but actively encouraged people to fully participate in proceedings:

“It was an amazing experience, I think Net Mondial as a way to do consultative processes and really get insights from everyone. Because the task, if I'm not wrong, was that everyone takes the mike. There was someone who was commenting and watching you, whether you take the mike, whether you bring feedback or an idea into the conversation for me. So, of course, for it for the physical meetings, it is important that you have really good facilitators and there is someone who has who is the holder of the overall design. I think oftentimes we see events where several people are engaged. No one is really the owner of the thing. No one takes responsibility for the quality of the discussions of the interventions of the engagement with and among participants. And this is this is something that affects badly the quality” [NGO - 2]

The Canadian Government hosts and the OGP Support Unit staff organising the Ottawa Summit were clearly aware of these kind of conference failures and had invested relatively heavily in professional facilitation of the published programme. At least two-thirds of the programmed time was given over to sessions that were held in the round while balanced with some prepared or expert interventions or structured to be ‘working’ sessions or otherwise open to participation. Participant observation suggests the former - labelled ‘fishbowl’ style - were particularly successful in encouraging contributions from a wide range of participants, but that they suffered from a lack of simultaneous translation, more systematically available in the plenary and more formal sessions. What was impressive, however, was the ability and willingness of multi-lingual delegates – apparently previously unconnected – to assist their neighbours with whispered interpretation. In general, language remains an intrinsic challenge to global gatherings, though technology clearly has some answers, with people observed reaching for translation apps on their phones even in quite informal/social settings to assist communication. Interestingly, in this context, however, language did not feature as issue in interviews. Perhaps because individuals of the nature and background selected for interview – already established in global engagement activity - were already proficient in two or more languages, or simply very familiar with working with interpretation tools.

There was also an obvious consciousness about the potential of social media to engage more people into the conversations without the need to take the mike and speak to the assembled audience, with tweeting and facebooking actively encouraged. This both increased interaction between attendees at the event whilst in the room and also some ‘listening in’ while physically participating in a different session in the venue. It also amplified the messaging and conversation beyond the venue, even to the point of some sessions being live tweeted by impromptu teams of participants effectively supporting the roles of OGP communications staff in the room.

In addition to plenaries, thematic panels, and smaller group discussion sessions, an increasingly common feature of the main programme of a global event is a standing exhibition. In some cases, these are simply spaces where participants can post pre-prepared posters pitching their project or perspective. In other cases, they are booths or stands where either wealthier INGOs or private sector companies can pay

for an integral presence in the venue and programme, and in turn publicise their involvement and support. Viewed cynically by some as a means of offsetting the costs of hosting a big event, for others such exhibitions were an important opportunity to engage corporate entities in the policy dialogue contributing to the trend towards multi-stakeholder engagement:

“We have seen some presentations like exhibition from the company side which proposed some tools, how the government can implement some of the ideas, for example, development of some technical platforms and so on. So that was like an exhibition. This presentation in the whole of this event and we have heard some speeches during the panel discussions and so on. So that's why I am absolutely sure that this kind of involvement of commercial structures, business and so on is very important” [NGO – 10]

Focus Beyond the Venue

The downside of greater social media awareness was an evident level of exasperation amongst some interviewees with global event programme sessions featuring influential speakers which were arranged almost as a broadcast opportunity with the participants in the room being treated akin to a studio audience:

“I mean, if you think of Trudeau's performance, that's maybe one of the worst examples of not knowing your audience, but like seeing the event as an opportunity for something that's absolutely in your own interest and not necessarily linked to the people who are there .” [INGO – 22]

Ironically the session at the OGP Ottawa event cited, while clearly pitched over the heads of the people in the venue, had the effect, as noted in participant observation, of stimulating chat within the room via whatsapp and other channels with as many people actively engaged on their phones or tablets as were watching the stage. It is impossible to say how much of this activity was externally facing – i.e. live tweeting to an audience beyond the venue, but participant observation would suggest a considerable amount of it was interaction between people seated in the audience sharing their grievance about whether the Canadian Prime Minister was genuinely interested in engaging with them, or just using the event as a promotional opportunity.

Meaning versus 'Spin'

For some interviewees this question read across to a wider scepticism about whether global events in their entirety engender meaningful dialogue or are a version of political spin:

“For some countries, there's limited political will. So, you want to make it inclusive. You invite lots of governments to participate. But you know that if actually push came to shove and you want them to commit to do really important things around media freedom or human rights or so and so forth, that very few countries are willing to actually invest political capital in that. So

you want to say you're doing something and one of the best ways to do it is to say you've now convened and you give it a cool name, The Media Freedom Ministerial or Summit or you know, you use these great words and then you can say you did something without actually doing anything.” [INGO – 6]

This could at the extreme not simply hide inactivity on an important agenda, but disguise behaviour contrary to the stated objective, in the case of the open government movement, participation in OGP international summits sitting uncomfortably alongside governments’ non-transparent or even corrupt activity at home:

“I think it raises a question about what is meaningful dialogue and how much are events promoting meaningful dialogue or just a space for the kind of open washing behaviour that we see out there” [INGO – 12]

Summit Fringe

This potential problem for many though was tempered by the myriad of activity that increasingly happens at global events on the fringes of the formal programme. Parallel or side meetings, or even just social gatherings, organised separately from the main programme, provide an opportunity for many more opinions and positions to be expressed and counteract, or indeed shift, positions stated, or to be stated, within the conference proper.

For some interviewees side events were seen as a means to influence any decision-making at the core of the summit:

“In the conference you might not have a platform to speak as civil society, but you can get an opportunity to have spoken to a government delegate, the government delegate then pushes that position for you... you might see that side events that NGOs have in they bring, a government representative, a UN representative that are actually influential for the conversations that then take place in the General Assembly itself, because they are building blocks to those conversations.” [INGO – 16]

However, for most they were seen more generally as a means to influence the direction of the discourse across the formal programme, and beyond:

“Another tactic, if you don't have an existing relationship with governments is to host a parallel event, an in-person parallel event, and try to get them to attend. Or as I mentioned, just if you see them in the corridors to approach them more. Virtually, I don't know, you can host side events and webinars and things. But how do you then catch their attention and bring them in?” [INGO - 21]

Inclusiveness

Despite some scepticism about using media and social media around an event, there was a sense that there was more of an opportunity to broaden the base of involvement in these global conversations, both in terms of the noise or 'buzz' about the issue, and the sheer practicality of technology now available to enable people to at least listen in:

"I think the positives of online events is that you can get more participants. I mean, if they're interested and, if you're able to mobilise this. I think now the technology allows you to go to plenary sessions, I can organise side sessions or simultaneously log in at the same time in several conferences at the one event. So, technology certainly allows that." [NGO – 28]

Some, too, were seeing greater diversity in person at the physical site of the event:

"So at least what I'm seeing is hopefully less tokenism and more sort of solidarity movements with real representatives who are committed to engaging with each other and bringing forward many voices, not just their own. They're organised, their network are committed and smart, skilled and just really, really visible and taking up the space that they should be. And I don't remember ever having that... until now. So that I think to me that's incredibly optimistic. There is this new this new generation that that's coming up. And they've got new energy and fewer battle scars. Hopefully that is something that is a big moment for optimism right now" [IGO 18]

Though others, while positive about progress recognised there was still much more to be done for these spaces for dialogue to be seen as truly inclusive, and a conscious effort required to prevent a default to exclusive or privileged behaviour. At the Ottawa OGP summit there was a particular focus on engaging youth and a particular programme track organised to engage younger, less experienced participants and help foreground their perspective on the main issues of the agenda. Representatives of the cohort involved were invited to contribute to the closing plenary sessions, effectively capturing their voices in the main record of the event. There was also a formal requirement that every session that involved a panel of speakers had an even balance of male and female speakers, a rule that was effectively policed by the wider delegate body, resulting in a flurry of negative social media activity about a so-called 'manel' in the academy pre event, and in some men actually standing down from a stage during the main proceedings when they realised they were contributing to an imbalance.

Nevertheless, global summits do remain relatively exclusive. They epitomise the wider issues recounted by interviewees in relation to the ability of civil society, or different cohorts within civil society to resource engagement in global agendas. Many of the issues of time, financial cost and related concerns around travel freedom and visas, come to a head in relation to participation in set-piece events. Many feel that to justify attendance to home or organisational audiences they must hold at least an invitation to speak, if not a paid-for travel bursary, to attend:

“I think they consume an enormous amount of resources, not only financial but, you know, human resources. Just the time that one takes off local partners who could be in-country doing important work, and you pull them out, for, you know a couple of travel days depending where they're coming from time and so on and so forth. The question is, is that the highest value added for the mission? And we generally say, no, we don't think that that's the case.” [INGO – 6]

Sadly, these issues also seem to continue to exaggerate the national-global divide with domestically focused actors (both civil society and local and national government) struggling to justify the expense of participation more than their IGO/INGO counterparts. Even where the international event was being held ‘at home’ and didn’t require international travel, it remained an issue:

“And I mean, in my experience, it was poorly done. Unfortunately, so, for the Canadian summit, because things like the scholarships weren't announced until the last minute. So, unless somebody did have flexibility and had things like spare vacation time or a very flexible boss for getting time off for essentially a week, it effectively cut out a lot of people that either would have applied for the scholarships if it had been available earlier and they had had time to make arrangements.... So, it was still a largely privileged group that got to come from the various voices.” [NGO -25]

4.2 Tapestry of Events

Yet, for all the hype around individual global events, those that miss out on a particular one through finance or visa difficulties are no longer cut out of the global conversation entirely. Alongside a growing permeability of the events themselves via social media and livestreaming, there was a strong sense emerging from interviewees that summit events were no longer periodic ‘one-offs’ and much more moments in wider global conversation and that issues could be revisited in other opportunities occurring within the same platform or via other organisational tracks that intertwine government and activist communities:

“I don't think folks for a lot of good reasons place too many huge bets on just a single day or a single three days of a gathering. It's seen as part of this kind of constellation of other moments” [INGO - 11]

“I guess the way I've always thought of it in government terms is from a diplomatic perspective you are working on a timescale of 5, 10, 15 years, you know, and it's incremental. So, you look ahead to a kind of pattern of events that are different only because of the country that's hosting them and the kind of flavour that will give them. And you will see them all as part of a kind of set of mechanisms by which to achieve a very long-term goal.... the event is simply another kind of instalment in a long running saga” [INGO – 5]

In a very explicit recognition of these linkages between events at the OGP Ottawa Summit in both informal 'coffee' meetings and in a widely publicised fringe meeting, specific planning and preparation took place for an upcoming conference of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. With a heavier decision-making aspect than the OGP event, lobbying tactics and social media communication plans were openly discussed with a view to influencing particular outcomes.

However, there was also a sense that perhaps the links between these opportunities and networks had not been sufficiently, routinely optimised:

“One has to be very careful on not just romanticising these platforms, but trying to extract, the connections between that event and actually what happens on the ground, and those connections among. The way I see it they've not been sufficiently drawn” [INGO - 16]

Addressing this concern was implicit in a session at the OGP Ottawa Summit to which panellists prominent on different global policy platforms were deliberately invited to discuss how their priorities (gender, disability, sexuality, human rights, health, environment, education) overlapped or interconnected with OGP's themes of transparency, accountability and participation. They were asked to identify how each could support or catalyse the other. In so doing they were appreciating a network of global dialogue in which summit events play an important connecting role, and a role in marking progress:

“I would see the big event as being lampposts on a on a road towards a destination at dusk. I think these big events point a way. Whether you agree with the way or not is a second point. But they tend to sort of point a way on the timeline as we as societies forge our way ahead with our own agendas, whether they are for environmental or social justice or other agendas. These events provide a moment for us to come together and see where we are. See where we've come from collectively, argue what are the priorities ... We may not come to consensus, but we'll have that dialogue and then to express hope. The ideal to which we are after is to re-energise us into moving hopefully into a progressive direction or slowing down some regressive forces. So, I think it is a moment of energy. There are moments of reflection. They are moments of inspiration. Sometimes they are moments of chaos” [NGO – 24]

4.3 Humanity and Innovation

Considering the various purposes of global summit events, broadly decision making, networking and inspiring, and the interests of the main stakeholders, sectorally and individually, a typology emerges which may be helpful in navigating the evolution of these events in the future. Drawing on both participant observation and interview data, the following table attempts to delineate the purposes of global events and weight the role and interest of different categories of actors in relation to them. Where a formal decision-taking purpose exists, this will be the primary focus of those directly involved, accredited to debate and eligible to vote, but will also draw the attention of the ‘players’ seeking to influence it. Even ‘punters’ will attempt to ‘do their bit’ from the fringes or on social media to set the tone and narrative, however in practice their agency in this role is limited. For all however, and especially for civil society, the aspects of networking and inspiring are reasons to attend and purposes in themselves, to aid movement building and advance joint work.

	Decision-making	Decision-influencing	Networking	Inspiring
Civil Society ‘Player’ INGO	√	√√√	√√	√√
Civil Society ‘Player’ NGO	√	√√	√√√	√√
Civil Society ‘Punter’ (national and global)		√	√√√	√√√
IGO secretariat		√√√	√√√	√
National Gov ‘player’	√√√	√	√√	√
National Gov ‘punter’		√	√	√√

Table Two: Purposes of Global Summits.

NB: Ticks indicate the importance of each purpose to different actors, with one denoting low, two medium and three high. No ticks indicate where an actor has no agency.

This typology, taken together with the perspective that each individual summit event is to a greater or lesser extent part of a much wider network and longer chronology of global multi-stakeholder discourse, suggests that planners and organisers of such events would do well to consider the purpose and function of networking and inspiring, at least as much as the conventional decision-making core. Considering how these purposes can be met online, or of human necessity require face to face gatherings could guide the design of future events.

Research interviews for this study straddled the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, providing a contemporary insight into the massive disruption to the normal

business of civil society-governmental relations handled via such events. A few interviewees had been giving thought to the efficacy of so much in-person travel and meetings before:

“If you want to be a higher impact global organisation, maybe you should be doing fewer summits and in-person global meetings because you may be able to affect your mission more directly and more deeply by not organising these things because they take so much time and resources for your staff, for your partners. It diverts donor funding and so forth” [INGO – 6]

However, once the pandemic had set in, all second wave interviewees were readily able to express their views about which aspects of physical in-person events would or should be sustained once travel once more was possible. What came through very clearly was the opportunity to economise on travel and streamline routine interactions, especially where professional relationships were already established, but that there still was a compelling case for summit events to take place periodically. Overwhelmingly this centred on the need for direct human contact:

“On the one hand, as someone with an environmental science background, I would say don't travel for that it might not be worth the carbon footprint. You can cut back travel, you know. But actually, for me, the last couple of months have shown the degree of interaction that you need to build trust. I think you really do I really just think our humanity is so hard wired for interaction and direct interaction and engaging with others, particularly when you're talking about issues that relate to in some instances, issues of freedom, or life and death. Actually, when you talk about some reformers and that they put their lives on the line, I think for me there's certainly in this century still a need, even if there are fewer meetings, but I think there's a value in being able to meet people” [NGO – 27]

This applied across the range of purposes of an event, in relation to decision-making:

“But what's missing is this kind of human interaction. Because what I've seen is that what I'm afraid especially at the global level is that when the human interaction I mean the face-to-face interaction, this interaction is missing. You will lose a kind of a human touch. After all I think inter organisational or institutional relations are very much based on the human relationship and sometimes not what is coming up on the official table. If you were able to talk with your colleagues or friends during, I don't know, lunch or dinner or whatever then you next day, you come to a consensus or agreement which you may not have reached the previous day” [NGO -28]

In relation to networking, in terms of initial meetings and building relationships, the human dimension was clearly necessary:

“I think [face-to-face meetings are] actually more important than before, I think because social media and digital media allows us to discount the human

elements, the hurt, the feelings, it just allows us to be very robotic and send things and kind of not know, not see the reaction of the person in front of us. I think actually physically meeting and getting the sub signal of the person in front of you saying what you want to say in front of someone looking at their eyes makes you a lot more cautious, a lot more honest. Like back to the relationship building, like actually talking to a person. And there's always chit chat around these things” [Gov- 8]

This applied not just to sectoral colleagues, but to the important dimension of cross-sectoral networking:

“Particularly when it's about multi stakeholder, it's also the joint dinner you have with people from the different sector. It's the informal conversations you have and that's what would get lost. So, in that sense, I think a lot would be lost if you move completely online, but [I'd like to see] a bit of a weeding out of the tapestry to focus, to get to keep the red thread without keeping the density of it, which is environmentally and logistically and otherwise not the wisest thing to do” [INGO – 30]

In relation to inspiring, it was important to hear and engage directly with other people's experiences:

“And there's something special that can't be replaced with digital about in person compelling conversations, even talks, speeches that can light the imagination or at least help to connect dots and that can help to bring to life issues that maybe you theoretically knew about or knew intellectually. But until you hear kind of the visceral kind of realities of those challenges, you know that's worth it. I think that has real value and I think it can spark over time a different way of pushing the agenda simply because it comes to life” [INGO – 11]

And, more broadly to engender solidarity, the human need to feel part of something bigger:

“Take UN Women. Various groups from all over the world descending in New York. There's a value in that space for the purposes of solidarity. Why do I say so? Because if you look at it in most countries and in most jurisdictions, these spaces to engage with global systems is limited.” [INGO – 16]

Yet, it was also clear that some aspects of the global civil society – governmental relationship could be relocated online, and some interviewees were already thinking about how some of the preparatory and follow-up engagement could be improved by better online working, even before the pandemic hit. This was to try and make the most of the event itself to stock-take and problem-solve, and reduce the overall logistical burden:

“So, I mean, maybe there is sort of like a pre-conference crowd-identifying of the key issues within particular countries, pull those ones together and have

them sort of as subgroups that come back to the main group and report on how they moved that issue forward. Like if there's no moving forward, then there's space during the conference to say, 'some you may have heard this before, here are some plans to have continuity and to have it impact and be sustainable'. It's a challenge and it's a challenge for the OGP in particular, because as soon as one event was over, they'd have to plan the next one. And so, it became sort of more event focused and [host country's electoral cycles] resulted in only nine months difference between the Georgia and the Ottawa summit, so that there was really no time in between to get anything done or move forward globally. And so, it was almost like every time we do one of those things, it's a reset to start again" [NGO – 25]

Indeed, the idea of a balance between more online working, and fewer but more focused and productive gatherings where ongoing work is refreshed by direct interaction and new projects conceived was an attractive ideal, made more realisable by the world-wide break in business as usual caused by Covid-19:

"But I think it is difficult to meet and to sort of have these strategy sessions if you're all in the same place, but you haven't previously been working together, at the OGP summits and the rights con summit people have been working together online for a year and that is the moment where they meet and they can plan, do strategy workshops and development. And there are many of the seeds of new initiatives and campaigns that are born at those events. So, I think this is a world where we travel less mainly, hopefully due to a greater understanding of climate change and unfortunately this is due to Covid. I would imagine actually a world where we work online even more and then we meet once or twice a year in one of these big events." [INGO 29]

The elements of an in-person event that people valued which could up to a point be enabled technologically, but not be entirely substituted online were particularly the opportunities for informal connections and side events:

"I think with most of those events, for most participants, the benefits are the networking and the side events and all that which you wouldn't have if you have something more digitally." [INGO – 30]

Experience of the Paris Peace Forum in November 2020 which was conducted entirely online of necessity as the city faced total lockdown, and the organisers of which invested heavily in bespoke digital platform to deliver the event online suggests that plenary 'keynote speeches' and parallel session 'panels' which follow a conventional question and answer format rather than discursive format are straightforward to emulate online. Questions were moderated via online posting and enabling access to recordings as well as livestreaming sessions accounted for time zone differences. However, the more fluid workshop style sessions that had characterised previous PPFs simply did not happen, and the online business card function did not in practice offer more than other conference apps, suggesting that informal networking is not so easily read across from the physical to the virtual.

Moreover, with pessimism some interviewees predicted that despite the shock of the pandemic providing an opportunity some old practices would revert, simply as a result of institutional habit or inertia:

“I think, for example, if we just take the Human Rights Council, if they're given the opportunity to revert back to the old in-person meetings, they will take it in a heartbeat. That kind of institutionalisation will take a lot more effort and a longer time, I think, to shift than other kinds of global meetings. We might see a sustained shift [in other cases] as I think more people will, especially the climate activists will, definitely push hard to say, look, you've done it, we've done it. We've seen it works to do virtual meetings there's no reason to fly 30000 people across the world. And then I think we will see in those 'floating' meetings which don't have an institutionalised presence anywhere, I think that'll definitely shift” [INGO -21]

Similarly, others saw a moment of opportunity to establish new practices where they were possible and desirable as the norm, but foresaw practice slipping back if not consciously embedded:

“So, if it's just that you wanted to shift things to online, I think you might have a competition with travel once travel returns. People will be busier. They'll be more stressed again, through the in-between stuff and all the catch up we have after travel and so on. I think then it would be harder to say it will just shift somewhat. I think some of it has shifted online during the pandemic and we have to see which of these work practices stick. Like will we all reduce our travel by 25 to 50 percent?” [INGO – 22]

On balance it seems likely there will continue to be a demand for in-person summit events, and a role for them as a key vehicle for the conduct of the global civil society-governmental discourse. The need for direct human interaction to create and sustain relationships and trust was evident across the board, while for some, the element of glamour and excitement of hosting or being involved in a high-profile international event meant they would continue to have a role albeit for superficial reasons:

“And I certainly think that the kinds of things that a lot of organisations look for which I call shiny moments. We love shiny moments; governments love shiny moments ... that you can't really do online.” [INGO – 22]

However, for some summits were already becoming of less significance:

“Why do you have such a focus on summits? I have to say I think the way to describe them might be to think about them as part of an array of forms of engagement as opposed to distinctive categories” [INGO – 20]

Cynicism that had already begun to set in even before the pandemic about their value for money and their environmental and logistical burden has been compounded by widespread experience of online alternatives, and will force many platforms and international organisations to rethink their practice:

“And you can make a really good case. It sounds great because you can use all the budget buzzwords where you bring people together. You develop social capital. You need to have dialogue and consensus and you can't just impose. And that's why you end up spending a couple million dollars. I think there was actually some kind of review of the Media Freedom Conference saying they'd spent two million pounds... There was a real question about what impact it had.” [INGO- 6]

More substantively the elements of a summit event that are valued are likely to be reassessed and a typology such as the one presented may help with thinking, innovating and planning for those that are yet to come. It is clear this next generation of summits will need to meet the zeitgeist which allows for a better balance or blend of online and in person gatherings:

“I know from myself, and I know from many others that we are all tired of all of these conferences and we wish there were a little less. I do think that there's still a need for them. So, I don't think they will disappear. But if we could do a little less of them, I think everybody would appreciate that” [INGO – 23]

Yet thinking about future events in the context of global civil society -governmental relationships must also not lose sight of the grander purpose for which, in essence, they engage:

“I think when you talk about social change in general, if and when and how we meet or build connections in a movement through face-to-face encounters or technology, I think is central to that theory and practice of movement building” [INGO – 9]

4.4 Chapter Conclusion

In focusing in on the purpose and experience of summit events, this chapter sought to present a more detailed analysis of their place in the conduct of global civil society-governmental relations. Beginning with a consideration of the overall purpose of such events, the findings extended beyond the classic decision-making/influencing role, to include multi-faceted networking and movement-building, and inspiring and learning as key reasons that actors participate. A typology was presented to clarify this analysis, and provide insights into the main research question of how global civil society operates in relation to governmental bodies, in the context of this very visible dimension to international relations.

Summit events were found to be less ‘one-off’ chances to influence agendas than they might once have been, instead perceived as part of a wider ‘tapestry’ of global moments to engage, across policy areas and over time. This ‘inter-sectionality’ enabled by events, and the potential to enhance it further emerges as a key theme, and builds on the appetite for multi-level, multi-stakeholder approaches identified in the previous chapter. Individual summit events have thus become less critical over

time, but the value of summits more generally has shifted to serial opportunities for intensive engagement, and the presentation of issues and agendas in different lights, to varying audiences of government/IGO, private sector and media.

However, Covid-19 has hit this evolving aspect of international relations practice hard, and given the research fieldwork straddled its onset, a clear sense of its immediate and potential longer-term impact was able to be set out in this chapter. It seems certain that more, perhaps routine, engagement 'events' will remain online-only, and those that do revert to a physical format will nevertheless now be expected to utilise the technology everyone is suddenly more familiar with to be more inclusive and productive. Yet, it seems unlikely that in-person events will disappear altogether, and indeed civil society would not welcome this as the informal opportunities presented by physical events to engage with sectoral counterparts, and indeed intra-civil society networking would be missed. The focus on the human experience of such events in this chapter was designed to give insight into the impact on engagement of a permanent large or wholesale shift to virtual formats, which is explored further in the next chapter in the context of wider technological change.

Overall, there emerges a sense of increased complexity around the role of summit events, requiring civil society actors and other stakeholders to strategise and plan towards them, use these intensive moments to ramp up their agendas, and intensify their networking, alliance-seeking and movement building, and then follow-up afterwards to consolidate gains and contacts. Moreover, the research findings, clarified by the typology, suggest that future hosts of summit events would do well to consider their design and format with multi-faceted purposes in mind, innovating beyond the conventions of the past.

Chapter Five: The Impact of Technology

This chapter surveys the impact of technological advances on civil society engagement with government at the global level. It explores how new channels and internet platforms have facilitated communication and in doing so builds on and extends the previous chapter's focus on technology in relation to direct interaction around specific events. It discusses how the availability of such tools has changed the space for, and nature of, engagement, and how actors perceive likely future development.

It begins with an overview of how basic digital tools have impacted especially on civil society's capacity and consequent ability to pursue new dimensions to its relationship with governmental bodies. Interview data shows persuasively that administrative and, especially, communications tools have wrought change across civil society to the point of affecting its organisational shape – especially in relation to those previously playing intermediary roles. Picking up some of the themes of the previous chapter this section also revisits aspects of technology in relation to meetings and events.

The key role of the web as a means to publish and to find information to enable campaigning and collaboration is examined next along with a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the social media revolution to global dialogue.

Finally, there is a focus on open and shared data, which emerged as a strong theme of the research, levels of interest matching those in communications technology. This section explores whether and, if so, how the rollout of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals has met the expectations of such as Webster and Ravnborg (2016), who predicted the creation of new opportunities for civil society engagement in global agendas and better foundations for partnership in policy making and collaboration in implementation.

5.1 Digital Tools

As with practically every other walk of life in the last decade technology has had a profound impact on global civil society, in terms of individual activists' mobility, organisations' agility, and sector-wide collaboration:

“I think technology is pretty huge. If I think back to my first jobs when the Internet was just, you know, a green glowing screen. Remember that? When you had to go type on the university computer, that was email. I think it's changed our work ability incredibly, I mean, everything from that to now I work almost paperless, which is shocking for my generation I mean, when I look at the amount of paper I threw out when I left my last job, you know, and had generated over those years, and now I'm able to work almost paperless”
[INGO-22]

“I think so on that basic level, even if you think about very basic things like collaborating in a Google doc or using a doodle to find a date, these very basic things, they have really I think had a big impact on civil society worldwide and yes, in a positive way” [INGO-23]

This, for some, is beginning to extend also to the practicalities of civil society engagement with governments, improving intra and inter-sector communication, in this case a government overcoming bureaucratic culture to engage externally more freely:

“I think it depends on the context, but... we're now really used to sharing Google Docs. Of course, that's not always the best option for a government where I mean, you need to protect some kinds of information. But what we always say is that we do open government so we can't have private documents. I think we are used to that. And we take it for granted.” [Gov 14]

However, others were more cautious about how truly change-making these basic administrative tools are in the context of civil society-government engagement:

“I tend to be a little bit more cynical, I suspect, than the average person. I think there has been convenience that's been gained through some of those tools, you know, meaningful convenience from scheduling apps, which helps you not miss the important stuff, to shared docs and scratch pads or whatever. It is all really nice, but I haven't found any of them to be particularly transformative” [INGO-11]

5.1.1 Communications

In relation to internet communications tools, on the other hand, all were agreed a revolution in practice had taken place, certainly within civil society for co-ordinating action, strategising and movement building:

“Certainly, just being able to message freely, to talk face-to-face like this and to message freely has made a lot of difference. I'm working with colleagues all over the world all the time, including on some very secure, we really believe, very secure messaging apps just to share information, in particular when people are facing arrest or have been arrested and we're trying to respond to that. So, actually having some kind of secure messaging system is invaluable” [IGO-18]

This intra-civil society communication in itself underpins more impactful engagement with government counterparts, and the real time nature of this kind of communication was a clear theme in relation to pressuring government on crisis issues:

“[Looking back at] Human Rights work and data gathering, getting information. Think if you would hear of a killing or the arrest of a journalist in Kenya? News

would reach you three weeks later by post. You would read it and then you'd have to take a few days to write a press release and so no hurry. So, by the time you release your press release is ready it's a month after this person's been detained and then you fax it through to the Kenyan High Commission in London or whatever. And now I mean, this instantaneous world, that's really important" [INGO-26]

Now, more than ever it is possible for global civil society to mobilise around specific incidents or issues, adding weight to both domestic civil society efforts and longer-term reform:

"I think technology certainly in being able to get human rights messages across, in being able to communicate and act in solidarity with our members, many of them who are spread out in different parts of the world is great and has a very important role for us to be able to do that and to be able to share concerns in real time. If activists are getting arrested or organisations are getting raided or even if new legislation is in the making that is restrictive of civil society. So definitely it's absolutely crucial for us." [INGO-17]

5.1.2 Impact on the Shape of Global Civil Society

As well as this agility to mobilise on a global basis, the freedom, flexibility and relative informality for civil society activists to communicate via these internet platforms was also seen to be behind a significant shift in the shape of global civil society, and therefore its ability to organise engagement with governmental counterparts. Technology was perceived as inducing a level of organisational redundancy across global civil society; intermediary roles undertaken by INGOs or network bodies was less necessary as self-organising becomes increasingly practicable:

"So, the time of big international NGOs is over to a certain extent. And I think digitalisation has something to do with that because their role as intermediary is no longer as necessary as it was 30 years ago. You can build partnership. You can even as a private person in Europe, find easily on the Internet a group in Tanzania which you feel you want to support" [INGO 30]

Whilst this was welcomed in many ways, including the efficiency savings involved, a challenge for governance was identified, with too much looseness creating a different set of organisational problems:

"So, there was a person who took the role, I'm not exactly sure how they got the authority, but he did nice job of sort of being the contact or focal point for civil society. He then creates a [email] list serve. So, using sort of initial level technology. But this has to be vetted, you know, who's going to be put into the listserve and get sent information" [INGO-6]

There was also a sense that while technology tools had speeded up communication and the ability to respond to events, and cut down the costs of keeping activists informed, some aspects of communications technology were yet to be fully utilised as a means of energising networks and movement building:

“We started seeing a lot of groups and sorts of other organisations using webinars to share information amongst themselves. I'm not a fan of webinars because they tend to be one-way traffic, one-way type of communication. The presenter and the moderator speak, and you can see the other people who are taking part in the webinars, and you have one or two people, participants actively engaging. And then the other 24, 25 people are just quiet. I'm really not a fan of that. So, I don't think we've really harnessed the potential of technology in driving coordination and teamwork within the civil society sector. There is potential, it's just that using technology is not sufficiently embedded in our tactics. We do have strategies, but as a tactic and a tool, it's not sufficiently embedded” [NGO-4]

Some of the more structured or federalised INGOs have adopted a ‘corporate’ approach to communications technology and invested strategically in systems which encourage ongoing dialogue and interaction:

“I think ‘yammer’ is increasingly becoming a more effective and familiar way of communicating. So, chapters go there and say, well, today we met with x and y, so we did some kind of event or we receive an award or things like that, or I use the yammer for making questions in order for them to answer and participate. For instance, what are you doing in terms of election observation? And they send the materials, or they say we are going to do that. Can I help, that kind of conversation? So, for many years we were not using technology for communication apart from e-mails. I would say with a very simple platform more than 10 years ago, at the beginning of the 20s, I think it was awful really. It was so hard to participate there. There were always the same people participating.... it was not OK... This is for the first time in our history the platform has been more successful. Really”. [INGO-7]

5.1.3 Cost

Yet for most of civil society such significant strategic investments in technology are out of reach, through both a lack of funds and a lack of expertise:

“But they still struggle with this because that for many organisations, they don't know how to approach and design their organisational views of tech and data in the first place, so they stand a bit like the rabbit, looking at the mountain, not knowing how to address it. So, then they outsource things, or they go for, you know, some expert told them that they need this interactive Web site and they don't have a solid basis to make an informed decision of how and what data and technology and how to use it in an appropriate and effective way within the organisations. So, I think that there is still a lot to do

on this kind of facility, helping organisations to make informed decisions on the use of... tech” [INGO-23]

The speed of innovation in technology compounds this problem even for those civil society organisations that have some ideas about what they want, as their initial investment becomes obsolete very quickly, and other more pressing day to day demands for resources take precedence:

“Then I think the investment in platforms, because you look at it between 2000 and now, there's so many tech platforms that have been made, you know, your Skype, your Bluejeans, your Google chats, they are multiple and for groups that have been investing in particular software and some of the software that many invested in 2000 is now considered archaic. Right. So, it's also a heavy investment in terms of having that type of technological infrastructure that you would want to use unless if you're going to be using open source. And once you use open source, then the trust factors come in because you don't know, you know how secure the back end is and how secure you are” [INGO-16]

5.1.4 Security

Much of civil society worldwide is facing this dilemma between strategic investment in technology to improve their work and more immediate demands on their scarce resources, leading most to adopt cheaper, readily available technologies, hence in part the huge uptake of such as whatsapp. Yet interviewees' express worries about internet security show this issue has moved beyond the niche of tech experts or the academic debate exemplified by such as Mackinnon (2011) and Morozov (2011). It is now a mainstream concern amongst civil society activists, causing conversations online in practice to become less free and frank than might be truly effective:

“[Activists are thinking how what they say] will be used against them and how they know you're not entering a very secure conversation. I mean, if you look at recently the fact that platforms that many civil society groups have been using to converse are on WhatsApp was recently hacked by this NSO group. So, the confidence within most of these groups is: are these platforms as secure as we thought they would be? Can we use them for having serious conversations without what you say being distorted or being seen in a negative light than actually having one on one conversations? [INGO-16]

Especially where the issues at hand are sensitive, or the conditions for activists dangerous, awareness of online security has heightened to such as degree that there is a demand for greater expertise within global civil society:

“It has opened up civil society to increased illicit surveillance, increased chances of harassment, which is something that we're all aware of. And I think we all operate with the assumption that nothing that we are saying in the normal technological channels is going to be immune from scrutiny by those

who may be fundamentally opposed to what we stand for and believe in. So that is certainly a challenge in digital security is absolutely something that that civil society needs to do a lot more on. And there's a whole lesser level of sophistication among civil society organisations on digital security techniques. And, you know the impacts it can have. So, it is certainly a two-way street.” [INGO-17]

5.1.5 Online Engagement

Already a source of anxiety, as business has moved online accelerated by the pandemic, it has also created new tensions in the conduct of civil society-governmental engagement as the implications of different methods of communication are brought to the fore:

“We're looking at it [the IGO] fluctuating between thinking about doing an online session. Then they said, no, no, they're going to have an in-person meeting and it's going to be limited....and the states are pushing back quite heavily on that. They want an online virtual meeting because they don't feel that it's safe enough yet [to travel]. And even in that, when we were talking to the president of the Human Rights Council and her bureau, it was just as simple as saying like putting different policies in place virtually has unintended effects on civil society, on privacy, on surveillance, on data, on all these things that it's not that they don't care about, they just don't think about it. They don't. It's not a daily impact for them... I think the concern for activists is that online, they're more vulnerable. Like it's easier to trace. It's easier to surveil. So, we still haven't, I don't think, gotten to the bottom of the security issues. It'll be interesting, we're saying, to see what reprisals happen after the virtual meetings versus the in-person meetings and whether there's a decrease in reprisals or an increase. I don't know how much more danger, there is for activists virtually. We just know that it's easier to trace them and to watch them” [INGO-21]

5.1.6 Governments and Technology

Despite security issues, it was very apparent from interviews that the immediacy, and relative informality of communication tools such as messaging apps and video chat, meant they were being adopted by government actors as much as civil society ones, and have become a significant new feature of global dialogue:

“The other big thing that's changed and I know from what I understand this is this is quite a common thing across different sectors. The real game changer has actually been WhatsApp. And WhatsApp is now a kind of a staple part of the diplomatic process. So, all the governments have WhatsApp groups and they're all talking to each other. Like minded governments are all talking to each other on WhatsApp.” [INGO-15]

“I think the tech is exactly the reason why we have a really deep relationship with some of the countries we work with, especially some of the founder members and some newer members - we feel are part of the same team that we've been supporting, Iraq or Tunisia and also Finland, Italy, even France, although a little less visible, but in a way that is really deep. Thanks to technology, we are in constant contact, we share information. We work together on documents. We chat with each other. We talk.” [IGO-19]

Yet that's not to say governmental bodies don't also face similar challenges to civil society in keeping pace with technological innovation. While civil society may presume a higher level of technological uptake amongst their governmental partners, on occasion government personnel look enviously at CSOs' ability to pick and choose available technologies rather than abide by bureaucratic standards:

“Civil society probably says that because they don't know how governments work. They have an assumption that government uses it [technology] better, but it is not the case.” [IGO-19]

“They're doing zoom on their children's iPads because they can't do it on their government computers, which I think is rather interesting.” [INGO-26]

Indeed, in terms of facilitating civil society-governmental relationships, the emphasis of interviewees' comments, was rather on how actors use the technology as opposed to what was available to them. Respective cultural backdrops, and online behaviour were as important a consideration as the technology itself:

“And this is where we really see I really observe a lot of challenges because communication means different things to different cultures and different organisations. And if you come from an environment where that is not being addressed in any form or shape, then you struggle in the way you communicate as part of global projects.... governmental or multi stakeholder platforms through digital means” [NGO-2]

5.1.7 Meetings

These cultural and behavioural aspects of technology use were especially pertinent when considering tech as a supplement to, or complete replacement of face-to-face meetings. Some interviewees were real enthusiasts for such technology, even before the pandemic:

“Improvements in mobile telephony allow for more sophisticated conference calls ... We use it for multiple constituency committee business, for example, multiple-organisation calls across time and space. I think technology in the last five years has made that even more efficient than before. I think there's much more potential around technology and remote engagement as opposed to in-person engagement in events than perhaps has been used to date, and I

think that will get more attention with growing concern around air miles”.
[INGO 20]

As well as efficiency, the benefits to inclusion were identified:

“You know, a few years ago, five years ago, say, they [governments] would never, ever have entertained the idea of Skype-ing in a speaker. They would have just been seen as a bit kind of weird and, you know, too risky. But now it is kind of an accepted part of the procedure. And it allows people who just wouldn't otherwise be able to get to Vienna to still have their face seen and their voice heard. So, it definitely has been a useful tool” [INGO-15]

This point was exemplified at the Ottawa summit, when one of the civil society members of the global Steering Committee participated in ‘robot’ form. Aidan Eyakuse the chief executive of a transparency advocacy organisation in Tanzania had had his passport seized by the authorities in an attempt to curtail his activities on the global stage. In response the summit hosts arranged for an iPad telepresence robot to have access to all the places in the venue he would have had in person, had he been able to travel, and to contribute to the formal meetings. Symbolically it made an important statement about inclusion and rights of expression, but was not without its limitations:

“Technology can be an enabler in different ways, but it also can then, I think, just be an excuse to say no, look how open and inclusive we're actually being, when in fact it's still hard to meaningfully engage from afar. So, Aidan is a great example. Being there on a computer, on a robot, when you're like trying to participate in an all in-person meeting where everyone else is there and interrupting and talking and, you know? Yes, he was able to bring his voice because he did that. But he missed out on all of the intangibles that technology doesn't bring, which is a huge part of human relationship building. So, I think we still haven't cracked or understood that technology in and of itself can connect people up, but there is still a fundamental human connection that is very different when you are meeting in person.” [INGO-12]

In the context of large multi-faceted meetings or summits, however, interviewees felt technology could actually add new dimensions to the debate, by linking up conversations happening across the venue:

“It's kind of basic now, but just being able to divide up in a space but to stay in touch on apps, to make sure you're coordinating your messages or giving people a heads up, you know, sharing information or even being able to coordinate walk outs like from the U.N.... because you can't bring in much, but you can bring in your phone, right? So, there's ways to coordinate” [IGO-18]

“I think that in some cases technology is not a deliberate decision but something that really just comes up. For instance, when you have this summit, at least with my CSO colleagues, they're following a whatsapp group connecting everyone who's there. And that's where conversations happen.

Okay, like, what are you going to do next after the meeting? Where are we going? And those are the spaces for networking that are like improvised in some way. And I think I think that in that case, technology really works for networking at a global level. Because you even have the contact of those people you've met on a whatsapp group on a night out. So, I think in that case, there is some informal dimension of the use of technology that goes beyond the event itself” [Gov-14]

“Every meeting we will have a group on WhatsApp for every NGO that we know is there and they'll be using that to strategise, to physically connect, to find out what's going on in that room because you're over in this room. And then different NGOs also had their own one to one WhatsApp chats with the governments. So, you're able to WhatsApp your government if you've got a good relationship and say, you know, could you help argue this point or could you do blah blah blah? So, WhatsApp as has as really been a game changer in how civil society works, but also how the governments work” [INGO-15]

In an implicit acknowledgement of this engagement across the event, some summits now explicitly involve attendees in the staged debate, using polling apps to enable registered delegates to vote on key questions, or test the mood of the whole participant body with gradating scoring of issues. Of course, this technology can also extend to registered participants engaging remotely:

“I think that some sessions I liked from events at the international level were the ones where you could do some polls online where the public were really engaged. I think that that's useful, especially for instance, maybe the opening or the closing thing. What did you expect and what did you like? Most people start voting and you see that. I think that that really works, but I haven't seen it that much. I would have expected it more nowadays where everyone has their own phone or is watching the phone at the plenary. [Gov-14]

Where such voting is limited to designated participants there is the advantage that the result is a definitive view of an identifiable constituency but advocates of transparency and inclusion are increasingly arguing that the technology be used to its fullest extent bringing the public into event debates. Video-recording some sessions of meetings or events for subsequent release to the media or publication online is now a standard aspect of event communications, however livestreaming technology has enabled some innovation in participation by a broader community:

“Every single session has a remote coordinator, and all the sessions are live streamed. And it is the responsibility of the remote coordinator to do promotion of the session that he she is going to be a remote moderator for. And then the remote moderator would get the questions from those who would connect remotely. And there was a time slot allocated for the remote interventions for the panellists, regardless of what the topic was. And for me, this was a great experience because we did it for many years and it worked” [NGO-2]

Moderation of such remote participation is becoming a recognised skill, as more widespread use of such meeting technologies during the pandemic have introduced many more people to meeting in this way, and new functionality has been developed to distinguish between the different roles of participants – whether ‘panellists’ or ‘audience’ – effectively introducing a new generation of designated access to summit events, replacing the different levels of venue and programme accreditation. It remains to be seen whether this becomes a help or a hindrance to global civil society – government engagement, but concerns about these new forms of access issues are already beginning to surface (Powell, 2021).

5.1.8 Accelerated Online Engagement

Access to meetings held online is an issue which exemplifies a broader set of challenges facing civil society and government actors in adjusting to a relationship increasingly conducted virtually. When considering networking, most interviewees were of a mind that face to face gatherings, embracing essential elements of chance and humanity were irreplaceable:

“I think actually technology has a tremendous ability to improve the efficiency of organisation and communication with civil society. But I think where it falls down a little bit is in the serendipity that is required to move certain agenda along or to bring unlikely people together and form some powerful alliances that reach beyond sort of traditional constituencies” [NGO-24]

However, of those interviewed after the pandemic had set in and lockdowns were widespread across the world, some were already adjusting to new possibilities that a wholesale shift to online working had brought about. For some this had a very practical dimension:

“For me, one thing is just the informality of it. Second thing is I've been in more meetings in Brussels during the lockdown than I normally am with MEPs talking to people because when they've invited me normally, I just wouldn't be able to go. Now it's like, yeah, I can join for a couple of hours” [INGO-26]

For others, online meetings potentially create a different mode of participation, altering the conventions of diplomacy:

“There may be a flip side to that, that we might see more diplomats attending the virtual meetings because with the in-person meetings, they have to obviously physically come into the room. And if they physically come into the room on a topic that their government doesn't stand behind, there's a problem, because then somebody says, oh, look, so-and-so was in the room. They must either support it or, you know, they have to be very careful about what their attendance means, they are seen there even if they don't say anything. So, I think that that could be a bonus virtually that they could attend even anonymously or just under their name or something that they still can

get information about the issue without showing support. But that's yet to be seen if that happens" [INGO-21]

There are some very practical problems to trying to transfer all or the majority of business online. Principally a differentiation of access to digital skills and tools was clearly already an issue for the civil society-governmental relationship:

"I think technology has to play a role. At the same time, it cannot be only through technology as the digital divide exists in a lot of countries." [IGO-19]

Though it is arguable whether the expediency of some of the communication platforms and other online tools that have rocketed in use since the start of the pandemic would eventually have brought about their widespread take-up, the disruption to normal business caused by the pandemic has undoubtedly catalysed their use, and awareness of the potential to exclude as well as include as practice develops was an underpinning consideration:

"You know, there's been an acceleration and just a realisation, you know, you have zoom and there's lots of functionality I've never thought to use before or never needed to use when suddenly I'm forced to, and I must, and I will. So, there's that element of necessity and creation and innovation and suddenly you're learning how to annotate things and diagrams online and shift things online and use Google Docs and now you're collaborating online and its great. But for me one of the things that really has been highlighted certainly within our context is that unless you can guarantee that everyone has the same level of access and reliable connection, then you'll actually rebuilding inequality... Normally we would have been able to put aside the resources and let's get into a space together, and we're all equal all sitting in the same room all equal. You don't need to have a laptop. You don't need to have Wi-Fi connectivity. It's OK. But now I'm saying in order to interact and to be part of the conversation, you need to have a decent connection. You need to be able to stay online for X amount of time. You also need to be able to use all these things that I'm throwing at you, which I think in some contexts is great, easy. People will adapt. We adapt. Human beings adapt. But in other contexts, I think it will deepen differential access" [NGO-27]

On another level of practicality second wave interviewees were encountering the issues that occur when global business takes place on a truly global basis, and in particular the fact that the working day had to become very elastic:

"[Time zones are] one very practical thing for a global meeting. I mean, there's literally, if you want to have people from Manila and San Jose in Costa Rica in the call, there's only two hours a day you can do that. And it's very uncomfortable for them already. So, for some for some type of meetings it's a problem" [IGO - 23].

Yet already some actors were beginning to see how new practices emanating out of even this necessity this could be turned into a positive:

“If we give you a very concrete example from about two weeks ago where the World Bank is now putting together a world development report for 2021, which is about data to improve lives. So, it's about data. And so, they ask that the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data organise a webinar. And I was a panellist on that webinar. So, you know, we commented on the concept note. We made our views known [in the webinar] and heard the World Bank. We noticed that they were taking some of them on board. It was a webinar that had to happen twice over the same day because of time zone things. I was on both of them and by the time we came to the second one we saw that the bank directors were writing the report or a good draft report and from what they said we had influenced it” [NGO - 24]

This ability to iterate agendas more, through regular and frequent online meetings that would not be practical to organise physically, has forged new connections and created new levels of dialogue:

“There were people I met during these webinars who I didn't know. Lovely woman from the Austrian statistics agency. We had three sort of small group webinars in total. And now I feel like I know her in some way” [INGO-26]

“I got connected to somebody I would never have been connected to in other circumstances. And this is a German data scientist in Qatar. He found me on LinkedIn. And we are now in conversation about using Google data, Facebook data, other data to try and shine some light on the Covid-19 situation ... Outside of the webinar and these technologies I would never have met this guy, would never have really gone down the rabbit hole of data science to try and illuminate an important issue in our region” [NGO-24]

5.2 Web Information and Social Media

While the use of instant messaging for communications, and catalysed by the pandemic, of video conference apps for meetings, have been more recent innovations in global civil society – governmental relations, it is clear the internet had already revolutionised aspects of it. All interviewees saw the web as the principle means of publishing information by civil society as now well-established, even accounting for connectivity or skills-related digital access issues. Research, leading to position statements, campaign building, media engagement, and lobbying activities were all now routinely undertaken via a website and linked social media:

“Honestly, I think because of the advent of technology, a lot has changed. And I think one of the most important changes is more access to knowledge and information. I want to believe that I'm right when I say that CSOs you know, NGOs, have become better, more professional, more articulate in their agendas, in their programmes and interventions, basically due to the fact that they had access to this huge repository of best practices, of various cases of

descriptions of different programs, they could get in touch with different experts. They could easily connect with people who would be working on the same issues as them” [NGO-2]

While revolutionising intra-civil society knowledge and movement building, this clearly has also made it easier for governments at all levels to understand their (potential) civil society partners. When combined with smart use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to pro-actively push out the weblinks to webpages hosting information and fuller narratives the ability to influence the thinking of key personnel and institutions is substantial:

“Through social media we share information. I read papers that I wouldn't read because if I only used the old school kind of subscriptions to academic journals etc. So, my capacity to absorb as an IGO the conversations that civil society is having around the world is transformed” [IGO-19]

However, despite the relative ease of web publication and civil society's ready use of these channels, governments' willingness to share information in the global space, for some interviewees remained in doubt. Though whether this was as a result of policy choice, over-caution, or simply bureaucratic obstacles was not clear:

“I mean the technology is there for all of these institutions to utilise and for governments to utilise to share their information. It's whether they put the information out there on social media or on the websites or through whatever platforms or whatever they want to use” [INGO-21]

In some cases, civil society had effectively stepped in, and in the interests of transparency had become a proxy publisher for governments and IGOs:

“There's never been a kind of formal record of what was said. So, if you weren't in Vienna [at a UN venue], it was virtually impossible to try to work out what was going on in Vienna. So that's why a few years ago, [we] launched a website... and now every time there's a meeting in Vienna, we have a team of seven or eight people for the big meetings and we make an effort to blog and record every intervention that is made, every statement, everything that is said. So, if let's say you're an NGO from Ghana and you want to know what the Ghana government is saying at the UN you can now go on the blog, search Ghana, and it will show you every statement that the Ghana delegation have made. It's about opening it up and trying to increase that kind of transparency. And that's got to a stage where we actually now get governments coming up to us with their statements on little memory sticks saying, hey, here you go, here's my statement, can you upload it to the blog? That's been a real kind of turn around.” [INGO-15]

In general terms the benefits of web publishing and social media as tools for accountability of processes was highlighted:

“There's no question technology has made a fundamental difference in multiple ways and continues to do so. Social media has created quite an important additional element in the armoury of accountability mechanisms. In particular, I would probably highlight Twitter and Facebook in that regard so the fact there are many, many more civil society, as well as many more other stakeholders, users within these communities and it's much more real time. That's the massive contribution” [INGO-20]

In the case of multi-stakeholder processes where transparency and accountability were fundamental to the achievement of policy goals, such tools were indispensable, and experimentation with new channels to reach different audiences an essential consideration:

“When we develop and when we implement our national action plan we try to include, first of all, and then to implement practically different instruments, different tools, which can be useful for [different] people, for communities and so on. For example, in the context of EITI [the Extractives Industry Transparency Initiative], we have a special obligation... that we should develop a special platform for online reporting of companies, extractive companies for different projects.” [NGO-10]

Similar to the use of communications tools, there was a suggestion the pandemic may provide an in-practice boost to transparency and the efforts of freedom of information campaigners, with the dispersal of personnel away from offices and public institutions requiring more to be published online by default, rather than as an added extra:

“I can't go to the municipal office to see X, Y and Z. What is what is the solution to that? And then, whether it's officials or others being forced to think about, okay, how do we actually make this available? Because we must make it available in the parliamentary context, you know, parliamentary information and so on is being forced online because there are no public, physical hearings. And you can't be sharing hardcopy documents. You've got to put that stuff online. I think there is a fundamental change” [NGO-27]

Less positively, there was also concern about the potential of social media to skew information, to disseminate false narratives or indeed spread deliberate lies:

““But more importantly, what is more worrying for us is hate narratives that are antithetical to social cohesion.... So, that is something where I think civil society needs to do a better job in creating positive narratives, in being able to challenge the disinformation and the divisive discourses that are out there” [INGO-17]

5.3 Open Data

One way to combat false narratives online, and in the wider public sphere, is through the pro-active dissemination of facts. In part this is the reason civil society organisations have increasingly been seeing a role for themselves in the curation of data; the analysis and presentation of official and other statistical information that can both support policy debate and challenge misinformation.

However, this is only one aspect to a much greater interest in open data revealed by this research. Open data has been a central theme of the open government movement from the outset, providing as it does a means to hold governments (and private companies) to account. Interviewees were by design connected to the open government movement and it was therefore likely awareness of the agenda would be relatively high amongst them. Yet, going beyond accountability, open data emerged as a much broader and more prominent theme of the global civil society-governmental relationship than might have been expected in the context of wider technological innovation.

Open data was seen as a way to strip away obstacles to constructive policy debate, and interest in it has increased significantly since the launch in 2016 of the Sustainable Development Goals framework, known as Agenda 2030. As technology makes access to and manipulation of datasets more feasible (if permitted), it enables it is maintained, a shared view of the policy problem to emerge, allowing the debate to move past arguments about facts and on to solutions.

“Of course, what to do about the problems or the opportunities that the data reveal is still like you end up in those same judgment calls regardless. You know, in terms of what is the quote unquote, “correct” policy prescription or political approach to Problem X, even if we're all finally now agreed on X being a problem to begin with. So, I think it helps you get through to a shared understanding of problems and opportunities, but certainly not automatically giving solutions at least for most issue areas” [INGO-11]

It is felt that pursuing reform from an evidence base, well communicated, can both build campaign pressure and convince policy makers, and that there is a role for civil society in curating data in a way that ignites public and political interest:

“I think the salience of the importance of data is more obvious now than it was even five years ago when we started on the global goals agenda. The trick, especially for civil society, is the translation of that data from technocratic, dry, language into narratives that people can then wrap their heads and their hearts around and therefore engage with, you know, either to protest or to support. And I think that is something that I am afraid civil society almost abdicates their responsibility to government or to somebody else. And then we cherry pick those points that we want to make noise about. But I think we need to really step up and use that raw material to inform our own narratives and to make them come alive. And therefore, that will make a difference” [NGO 24]

So, while data does not necessarily provide ready answers to the social policy challenges it does potentially provide coherence to debates, and crucially creates a focal point for engagement between civil society and governmental bodies on potential policy options.

Moreover, evolving global frameworks for the collation and analysis of data, provide new spaces for engagement to happen:

“But let's just focus on the collaboration and cooperation; it has developed significantly over the past few years. And you can see the instruments that have been utilised; the MDGs was one in the early 2000s. At a global level where you have, you know, the Millennium Challenge, Millennium Cooperation as a platform for engagement and conversation. So, it was a very clear global framework that created a space for civil society.” [INGO-16]

Yet while some were enthusiasts for the evidence-based approach and these meta-frameworks for data sharing, others were frustrated that they were not delivering on their promise:

“To be honest, I feel like it takes up so much space and energy in that it has become an industry. I'm not sure that it is the right industry and the level of investment and funding that is going into the SDGs versus the positive impact that it's had I question. To be fair, I love the UN, like I have this like weird kind of idealistic obsession with it, but I think it's a total mess and the SDGs are kind of part of that mess in my view. Not that I don't think there are certain organisations that use it very effectively and are really able to leverage the framework and for conversation and offered for concrete development outcomes” [INGO-12]

One explanation for this frustration is a seeming one-sidedness to the platforms. While the technology clearly allows for inputs from multiple sources, so far, the processes were mimicking a conventional accountability approach where government provides information and civil society scrutinises it:

“I think that there is an opportunity in the SDGs, but I haven't seen it as a collaborative effort. I feel like governments are doing reports and then civil society is reporting on what governments say... I agree that there are opportunities, and we need to explore them, but I haven't seen that much. I feel like sometimes it's more of working in isolation, like civil society asking government for information to nurture a platform rather than asking the government to implement these platforms so that we can jointly work on the information on them”. [Gov-14]

5.3.1 Accountability

While interviews therefore revealed a number of layers to this increased interest in open data, at base it stemmed from a desire by civil society to competently scrutinise

government activity and decisions, and by government reformers to modernise government processes and improve efficiency. This interest was tempered by poor experiences of early open data initiatives leading to some disillusionment:

“Partly because the data is far from being usable in many cases, partly because some of the data is not the right one to answer some of the questions we have. And partly because we don't have the technical skills to use, analyse that data to inform our advocacy” [INGO-9]

Nevertheless, it was clear that open data advocates from both perspectives had had some success in recent years breaking new ground in the way civil society organisations and governments operate, particularly in multi-stakeholder settings, and technological innovation to improve this further and make it more timely and impactful was a live consideration:

“The whole open data movement has been critical to the whole transparency space that OGP [the Open Government Partnership] and EITI [the Extractives Industry Transparency Initiative] operate in. Both of which are putting open data much more at the heart of their respective efforts. And technologies for open data aggregation, access and usability have the potential to transform the way we work [and is the subject of] a conversation I've had with our Chair in the last 48 hours on how much she is very anxious to move us away from the paper-based reporting to smart use of online systems or more real time” [INGO-20]

Critically, to be useful, these successful open data efforts had an international character, and could be used to reveal organisations, private or public in character, trying to bypass global standards:

“For example... The global register on open ownership ... I am absolutely sure that it will be extremely important, especially for cross national, multi-national, companies which operate in many countries. So, yes colleagues from U.K. analysed these data, beneficial ownership data in Great Britain and our colleagues from Anticorruption Excellence Center made the same exercise in Ukraine. And yesterday they presented the preliminary results of their study and they saw very interesting information that, for example, they took the companies from the register published in Great Britain and the same information from Ukraine in the register. And they compare beneficial owners of the same companies and they have so far found that only around 25 percent gave the same information in both registers.” [NGO – 10]

However, while transparency of data was clearly starting to leverage change in some fields, getting governmental bodies to commit to an open data approach, and one that was truly developed with accountability and external users in mind was still some way off in many more. There was a sense, in contrast to those developed with an agreed clear purpose, that some open data reforms had been undertaken in a tokenistic manner:

“We have seen on the outside that it looks like governments have gravitated towards proactive transparency. And we have seen a lot of these data portals. But in many cases, they've been designed very poorly and mostly addressed as a technocratic thing they have to do, but not with the actual use in mind. And I think that is where we see a lot of these of these early initiatives failing, not designing it as a change process, not to engage with the foreseen users to understand what type of data they need in the first place. And on the other hand, we also witnessed that there's still lots of civil society organisations complaining that it's really, really, very, very hard to get hold of the data that they actually need for analysis or investigations. So, I think it's quite a mixed picture there. That's what I'm trying to say” [INGO-23]

Poor design of processes and sub-optimal use of technology meant that while data was on the face of it more readily available, there was no means to check its accuracy, or indeed challenge it where it was clearly wrong, thus reducing or eliminating any accountability benefits:

“I mean, there are probably better transparency of data now, but it's all still kind of your web based databases and stuff like that rather than what I'd class as kind of new technology as such, particularly in the drugs field. I mean, in the drugs field the data collection still follows a very old school method. Literally there's an Excel spreadsheet sent to every government. Every government fills it in and sends it back. I mean, there's no transparency, those data sheets and never shared and that's why you get things like Russia saying they don't have any drug users or Singapore saying we don't have any drug users, because that's just what the government want to say. There's no mechanism, no formal mechanism for civil society to intervene and say, well, that's obviously nonsense, because we've got 500 people in our treatment centre, you know?” [INGO-15]

Misdirected or ill-designed open data efforts in the past therefore have not only wasted resources, but also subdued some of the enthusiasm for the approach:

“I have mixed feelings about itin the open gov movement and it was in all OGP commitments, we have seen a lot of focus on this. I would frame [these projects] more as like a technical fix, setting up a data platform. Let me try to frame it differently, sharing of data and proactive transparency is really an essential step towards government transparency and it can enable all of these follow up changes that we want to see. But it doesn't enable and empower by itself. And we have seen a lot of these data platforms that just have turned into data graveyards and actually by very design. So, it was by no means a surprise, for example, that the one of the first open data platforms in Africa, which was the one from Kenya, which was a big World Bank funded thing - is up until today - it's an absolute graveyard. This data has not been used by anyone. And why? Because it doesn't contain any data that is relevant to anyone” [INGO-23]

Yet overall, there was a sense that despite some mistakes there was still a lot of potential, from a focus by civil society and governments on open data, but that this had to be founded on a shared view of the use to which the data would be applied:

“We do a lot of work with the information that we've been advocating to be available and then helping that information to get into the right hands for decision making and for our policy advocacy work and such. But what we haven't done is create spaces for dialogue around the data, if that makes sense? So, I think if you look at the users, yes, there's a ton of different multi stakeholder users who are accessing our data tools and data platforms. And a lot of what we do with these data platforms is to actually just take information that's available and scrub it and clean it and organise it... So, yes, I think that there is a huge potential there, but I don't think that we have effectively leveraged it. And I just think the bottom line for me is that technology of any form has to be complemented by non tech interventions. Or it doesn't work” [INGO-12]

Furthermore, it was clear that this potential for greater use of data in the context of the civil society – government relationship, for accountability purposes and more, could be relatively readily realised. For some of this was about better context and communication:

“[Open data] is much more than the numbers and monitoring and accountability, change is also how you bring people onboard with stories and narratives, with examples, with emotions and all of that” [INGO-30]

For others it was about an investment in skills, and even then a relatively modest one:

“We asked practitioners, from more advocacy focused organisations to really investigative organisations with big data analytical skills in-house, what they need. And the funny thing is... I mean, we asked them about what data they use and what it was for, and it turned out that what most of the organisations actually need is just advanced excel skills” [INGO-23]

5.3.2 Policy Debate

So, despite some setbacks and disillusionment there remains an aspiration for open data to not only enhance accountability efforts, but also reshape and refocus civil society-government policy debate. The Sustainable Development Goals framework, itself the result of extensive multi-stakeholder consultation was supposed to address these issues and create a consensus around how to understand the key global societal challenges. However, five years in it seems some of the fundamental questions remain. The purpose of the data, the audience for it, how it is collected and how it is presented are all preliminary issues, before both government and civil society actors can be confident that they are addressing the same substantive problems:

“I'm sort of on the front that it's not about open data, it's about responsible data. And if you don't take that position first, you will have the arguments happen that, well, you haven't thought of these other things, that it was just sort of a push to get this in the open without consideration... civil society and the representatives of the residents and citizens of a country need to have influence on when and how the data is collected.” [NGO-25]

There is thus an evident wish to circle around and reopen debate between governments and civil society about the very nature of open data and its ability to underpin successful policy engagement. This has been accentuated by the experience of the pandemic, which has shown even basic data collection, curation and dissemination processes to be inadequate:

“One of the things that the pandemic has exposed is the pretty abysmal state of our open data, actually all of our data systems, of our digitalisation, of our digital record in many ways. You know that the lack of data we've seen in any slightly larger countries, the difficulties of collecting data from deaths, even something so basic, you know, from the local to the region or getting it up to the central levels... we've seen it. It's a slightly different problem, but I understand it is compounded by officials working from home, the lack of digitalisation of all kinds of data and documents, which means that the public officials are stymied in their attempts to actually do things because it's not fully digital. So that's one side of things. There's still too much on paper, too many scanned pdfs. Look. I mean, we have a problem ...a combination of lack of digitalisation and bureaucratic reluctance to allow data to get out there.” [INGO-26]

It has also exposed how critical good data is for good short-term decision-making, as well as longer term policy development, and how the two aspects inter-relate:

“This Covid-19 has put in very stark spotlight or in stark relief the different attitudes towards data and what it reveals that governments around the world have. Some are preferring to hide it, some to ignore it, while others are using it for good or ill to inform their... What's it called herd immunity strategies like Sweden? ...I think that Covid-19 has put data for good or ill on the forefront. You need to know. You must have the numbers and the effect of what you're trying to do on the health side. And of course, the data on the economic side as well with respect to unemployment, with respect to the size of the stimulus or the lack thereof, you know, all of these numbers are mattering more” [NGO-24]

In general, the pandemic has increased demands for good data and widened the audience for it, with a broader cross-section of citizens and businesses wanting proof that covid responses have been appropriate:

“Where is the money? How are you responding to Covid-19? How is it that more people are dying and yet we're using lockdown? Show me the

information. Show me the data to prove what you're saying is true. That you aren't just thumb sucking. And so, there's been an imperative for them to make data available and accessible to everyone" [NGO-27]

In terms of global dimension, reporting upwards for comparative international purposes remains weak in implementation, with ongoing disagreements about the soundness of data being published:

"I think that's what I see is different in a way, a kind of a disconnect, you know. A disconnect between what the government reports at the UN level and disconnect between also government and the civil society. Because we have a civil society coalition for agenda 2030.... But what I see is that both sides are not using open data properly...The government sometimes tries to only use data which would put the government in a positive light. Civil society sometimes uses the data that puts the government in a negative light. So how do you get this connection between the two, you know?" [NGO-28]

As a result, overall, the comprehensiveness of multi-lateral data is open to challenge, limiting the scope for developing genuinely transnational policy responses:

"We published a report on.... the availability of data on SDG Five in seven European countries. We took the SDG Five gender equality indicators and then a few others like the salary gap and others that appear in other places... 28 different indicators related to gender equality and mapped in seven European Union countries whether or not they are available. And the average across the seven countries with 57 percent of our indicators were available, even though that's not always talking about quality. Ranging from 96 percent in the UK, which is brilliant, down to 34 percent I think in France, which is really pathetic. We're talking about the datasets being available online, not again evaluating whether they're PDFs or not. Now what does that mean? It means that the basic data that we need in the developed European Union to have a discussion about gender equality is not available to society." [INGO-26]

Beyond the ability of governments to competently collect and publish data, more worryingly there was concern that the more we move to data-driven policy debate, the more possible it is for some issues or interests to be excluded or ignored, simply because they are not part of official statistics:

"Data has often been seen at the highest levels of the UN and promoted as a silver bullet to solve all the problems of sustainable development without creating the conditions for the creation of data that is truthful or that is grounded in people's needs and the needs of those who are at risk of being left behind, or those who are outside the political calculation and government discourses" [INGO-17]

Therefore, despite the SDG framework, or perhaps also because of it, there remain questions about exactly which data should be routinely collected and these choices

are in some ways as politicised as the political and resource choices the data is supposed to inform. One point of view was that the SDGs did not extend far enough to provide information to support all the issues of the day:

“One of the ones that they excluded is female genital mutilation, which you might say, well, you know, that's not the biggest issue in gender equality here. No, but there's an estimate to be six hundred thousand women who have experienced it in Europe and quite a lot which are at risk of that practice. You can't get any data on it anywhere around Europe or very few countries have data on it. So, we actually had a debate between someone from the Female Genital Mutilation Awareness Network in Europe and people from the European Union, the National Statistics Office, to talk about how we improve data collection. What are the obstacles? Why aren't we collecting this? Well, this is a really small example, but having launched this report, we were contacted by people from all over the world talking about how we're going to carry on working on it.” [INGO-26]

While on the other hand there was a concern that too deep a collective immersion in data collection would result in no agendas being adequately addressed at all:

“So, if there is an ability to sort of define what sort of data we're using, what sort of data we're collecting, then there'll be convergence. And I've noticed that right now with the SDGs I'm concerned with the fact that there's going to be a multiplicity of data points that are going to be generate-able, that are going to be identified, which might not necessarily lead to any practical policy changes. You know that we will be so fixated with the number of this, the number that, the number of these, the number. But without that translating into what does it actually mean in terms of policy shifts and practices on the ground” [INGO-16]

This debate about which data and how it is presented extends beyond government and civil society. For some it was a case of not too few or too many data points, but the incompatibility of data actually obfuscating debate rather than facilitating it:

“If you look at [the issue of] work gender equality in one of the business forums, they were saying they're sharing data from business on gender equality. And I think the metrics were like, how many females were on the payroll. You know nothing about like the level, nothing about the parity between men and women and this was the sort of presented very proudly. This was their idea of how you share gender data. Civil society is sharing constantly the data that they find useful. But again, how it's how its organised and whether it fits the proper metrics. So, I think everybody is sharing the data. I don't think the comparability is necessarily there” [INGO 21]

5.3.3 Shared and Citizen-generated Data

Compounding the problem of which data should be officially collected and published, there was also evidence of ongoing distrust of non-official data. A role for civil society in doing its own research and data collection, and facilitating a wider movement of citizen generated data, was being held back by a reluctance of governmental bodies to accept it:

“Of course, governments will always start by saying why should I include you on my platform - which is official information - that which I don't know if it has been verified” [Gov-14]

The solution to this was arguably shared platforms where the source of data and therefore its relative trustworthiness from any perspective was in view, but this was largely aspirational:

“With all the gathering, there's obviously more opportunity for government to produce data. But civil society produces a lot of useful data too. And I wouldn't necessarily call it like shared platforms. Maybe I wish there were more shared platforms.” [INGO-22]

“One of the good practice that we always mention is the Open Data portal of France which allows for citizens to upload data and actually deliver them , verified it becomes official data of the government , which we thought was really great because it's an opportunity for basically citizens to generate data and to share them. But it's also very rare. It's the only one that we know about” [IGO-19]

Pending the evolution of such shared platforms, there is a need for civil society to advance its own legitimate role in generating data, not just curating and disseminating it:

“The essential element of citizen generated data in any form is to provide in an alternative or at least a shadow narrative to what might be the official narrative. So, in that sense, to be able to leverage the power of citizen generated data we need to create the conditions for people to be able to produce that data without fear of persecution” [INGO-17]

This extends to fora where civil society-government engagement takes place, where there is a need for a level of acceptance of civil society researched and citizen-generated data as a valid contribution to policy development:

“This thing which we tried to challenge unsuccessfully, this notion that civil society's only role is advocacy rather than expertise on data collection and this is what we were trying to argue is, yes, we do do advocacy and I myself work for an advocacy organisation. But if we were given that space we would give that space to NGOs who are specialists in data collection and evaluation. And they exist, you know” [INGO-15]

“The movement needs a lot more investment, needs a huge amount of investment. But I think more importantly, you can create citizen generated data, but if you're not going to have governments where dissenting voices in being able to speak truth to power help create those conditions then citizen generated data can be easily manipulated.” [INGO-17]

Importantly a place for and (degrees of) acceptance of citizen-generated data was seen as one way to address the ‘invisibility’ of certain groups or issues from official data:

“One of our drivers is to promote the investment in data by national governments. But the other one is what I described as the use of that data to make better decisions, to better understand what's going on and ultimately to shine a data light on the large swathes of the population were completely excluded. From unregistered births and unregistered maternal mortality to populations in migration or on the move. Many, many, many people are just not counted at all. So that's the other thing. How do you do that? And that's where citizen generated data becomes important”. [NGO-24]

Going beyond citizen-generated data, some interviewees touched on the potential of so-called ‘big data’ to illuminate or enhance knowledge and policy debate. While owned and controlled by the corporate world, the potential of that information generated by technology and service usage worldwide was coming into view:

“And I think that the whole data, big data sector will play a critical role” [NGO-4]

The idea of hitching ‘big data’ – to other citizen or official data had on the one hand some real potential advantages:

“And that is where big data in terms of mobility, you know, the mobile phone signal or trail that we all leave behind also becomes an important part of understanding what was happening to people in their populations and where they are”

Yet, on the other caused real concern in relation to privacy and the potential for too much openness to actually set back effective social interventions:

“There's the dark side or the dangerous side of data which I think about often... which is that there is a lot of interest in gathering biometric data on people, people living with HIV, people who use drugs... The idea is that we could have better data and better interventions if we had biometric data, so we know exactly that we're seeing the same people over and over and over again. But in HIV, most of the people that are at most risk right now of HIV, whether acquiring HIV or becoming sick and dying are usually criminalized... And so, this is really threatening that there's this scientific enthusiasm and also government enthusiasm for tracking biometric data on people in the name of creating better interventions. So there's a lot of actual concern that

data sharing actually might mean it could take us backwards in terms of the things that we know people need, which are a sense of safety or human rights being protected, some a personal contact and support and assurance that their information will be kept confidential, which are low tech, but absolutely work” [IGO-18]

Overarching questions about data ownership, privacy, and the appropriate governance of technology as it affects policy and citizens’ rights have not been resolved and are emerging as key themes in themselves for multi-stakeholder debate. The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD) with a modest but growing number of cross-sectoral agencies in membership has emerged as a focal point for this debate (GPSDD, 2021):

“I think five years ago when we came up with these global goals, we really did not know how we were going to have a common view on what was going on. And so, I think part of the mission of the GPSDD was to make people visible in data and visible globally, and visible to governments and visible to civil society and the private sector itself. The private sector struggle continues. They only have a particular view of citizens as a private sector. But I think the language, the framework around the importance of using data to both inform and understand where we are and to inform some decisions about where we ought to be and how we might want to get there and how we're going to measure our progress is beginning to get some traction” [NGO-24]

On the opposite end of the spectrum from these grand issues of principle, lie some of a more mundane and practical nature. Unsurprisingly, as with basic administrative and communications infrastructure, civil society voices spoke about the need for resources for technology and skills development:

“There's this huge hope that civil society advocacy organisations could use technology and data to really upgrade and improve their advocacy work. And this is something that we have seen a lot of organisations struggling with. I mean, we see some organisations really mastering use of data for analysis and advocacy, but many others still struggle and fail.” [INGO-23]

Yet governmental bodies too saw obstacles in terms of securing investment and procuring the right kind of expertise:

“I think we're moving in that direction [shared data]. The problem is that it's expensive. So, we're trying to support an organisation to build a platform now to be able to better share information on stigma and discrimination that's being reported by different countries. I know another organisation that's got a really nice system for document gathering and documenting human rights violations through cell phone apps and then compiled up into national and global databases. So, I do think those things are happening. It's just that they're so expensive. It takes a lot of work, and you have to find the right technical people. So, there are some barriers. But I think that there is a lot of potential there” [IGO-18]

On the flipside a concern was the opportunity cost of providing openly and for free that which might in the past or otherwise be charged for:

“I've been pushing for open data policy...and it's very complicated for a simple reason. We do get a lot of money from our publications that are bought mostly by university, etc. And our budget is small; compared to other international organisations we're among the poorest. What we are saying to our member countries is that if we open data you'll need to compensate the money we'll lose, which is not a lot of money by the way in absolute terms... where all the data will be a great contribution to the conversations on policy, in public policy making in general, because this will be a lot of interesting data for citizens of civil society to use to monitor all governments to hold them accountable.”
[IGO-19]

Thus, balancing this question of cost (or unrealised income), it was argued opening data helps realise the value of the investment in it allowing it to inform and underpin the widest range of debates:

“Government statistics office is often under resourced but tasked to it are gargantuan tasks of producing information for this kind of never-ending demand for metrics. And so, I think it is really important that all the data that's collected and gathered and produced can be made public, but also made sense of.” [INGO-22]

5.3.4 SDGs optimism

Despite the enumeration by many interviewees of these weaknesses and challenges of an open data approach, it is notable that it was nevertheless a central theme of interest to the evolution of global civil society-government engagement. When asked about technology they might have limited their responses to administrative and communications tools, but most, unprompted, demonstrated awareness of technology unlocking the power of data, for good or ill. While the subject of some scepticism, it was apparent, too, that the Sustainable Development Goals framework has brought some level of coherence to and a wider engagement with data as a means to progress policy development. Referenced frequently throughout the Ottawa OGP conference, and unfamiliar to no-one during interviews, the language and construct of Agenda 2030 has undoubtedly become an accepted 'lingua franca' of global debate, and for many an opportunity:

“So where in the past open data was a thing that only a few techies were interested in it has become apparent now that all of us involved in social justice issues, we need to be data competent in order to be able to weigh in on the conversations taking place on the implementation of the SDGs. We need to create those skills to be able to engage in deep learning, to be able to engage in deep analysis of what is actually taking place. And I think technology provides that opportunity, our tech savviness to be able to deal

with such huge data sets and make sense of them will become critically important. I think the SDGs provide for that. Both domestically and regionally, there simply isn't capacity from the government side to even begin to put in place systems that will enable them to manage and deal with data and package data appropriately in order to make sense on the trajectory towards achievement of the SDGs, so I think there's an opportunity for civil society to come into that space as a technical support as much as come in the space to persuade governments on the right things to do." [NGO-4]

As essentially a new arena, and data a new topic for debate the SDGs have attracted and enabled different voices to contribute to global debates. The SDGs build on the experience of the foregoing Millennium Development Goals, but which only focused on developing countries. The approach's roll-out worldwide in 2016 had the effect of foregrounding those with expertise in data for development established during the MDGs era, almost by definition therefore people and countries conventionally less dominant in the global space:

"I have a different take specifically on this one, because I see it differently. I really do see that it's not business as usual when you just have a look at who is involved in these initiatives and platforms. I see a lot of presence by people from the global south really taking leadership on these things" [NGO-4]

The buy-in to the global goals concept has also opened doors for engagement domestically:

"Many parliaments are creating committees related to the SDGs and some within the standing committees and some new committees. And that's really, really interesting because what we need is the parliamentarians to get involved in that agenda" [INGO 13]

And even if not yet generating truly comparable quality data, the SDGs has accelerated an examination of the underlying issues and provoked attention on how to share data methodically:

"So, there are all these groups that have got all this wealth of information, but at what stage are they going to converge? I think we're still in the early stages of using or getting to the stage where governments and global civil side converge around shared definitions and shared indicators and data collection protocols" [INGO-16]

In some places or in the context of particular policy agendas this convergence has centred on the idea of a 'dashboard' of core indicators. In most cases these spin off from one of the seventeen SDGs and drill down in more detail into a particular shared agenda. Similar to where open data is seen to be successfully driving accountability, these development dashboards are seen to be most useful where they have multi-stakeholder 'ownership' or governance:

“What we have been also seeing, what I've been seeing in the past year is probably a tool which I really have at heart. It's called the scorecard.... the recent attempt just to give an example these days, the conversations in Geneva within the Global Fund, see there is there's a global fund which deals with HIV AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. And at the global fund level, they want to co-create together with CSOs and government counterparts some sort of scorecards or dashboards, which would help everyone engaged in this movement to understand where they stand the vis a vis their baseline data targets” [NGO-2]

Such examples and a more generic effort to promote the approach may well see it gaining popularity as a tool for civil society - government engagement. Critically these efforts to distil data in order to share, also helps make that crucial step into narrative and explanation, which connects more and different stakeholders to the conversation:

“And I have to say that the GPSDD is trying to see if they can see that they can bring some partnerships into playing that role [of running] a sort of a data clock. You pick some 10 or so indicators and have some kind of running clock as to how far or how close we are to achieving some of those indicators. But the main story ought to be about what stories do you tell from the data? I think we can get more data even the unofficial data from, for example, the private sector itself, the mobile and Internet, big data, all of these tell stories. We need to be savvy enough to take them to tell the kinds of stories that we need people to hear.” [NGO-24]

In this it contrasts with, and also challenges the ongoing concern that a preoccupation with the data will divert attention from policy solutions. Rather it suggests that new means of and foci for engagement generate a new type of policy dialogue:

“Over the years there are now spaces for engagement that include groups that historically might be seen as very confrontational, and the SDGs is a good example. But beyond the SDGs in other settings like in Africa you've got agenda 2063, which is the African Union's developmental road map, that has allowed them to start engaging with global civil society. So, it's the presence of frameworks, in my view, that has created the space [along with] ...your civil and political rights instruments or economic, social and cultural rights instruments, or your children's rights instruments. It's a mix of, a condense of these instruments that have sort of allowed for that space to happen for collaboration and in cooperation” [INGO-16]

As with the use of communications tools the pandemic has had a catalytic effect on interests in open data and data tools, suggesting that despite some discouragement engendered by the various obstacles to achieving an approach that its broadly accepted as reliable, that there will be renewed calls to open up official data, and redoubled efforts to share with it appropriately citizen-generated and private sector data:

“I think what will come up in the next few years is how the inequality numbers will become even more salient. I think as more people realise how they have been affected so directly by this, and how maybe the recovery is or is not helping them to get back onto their feet, while others seem either not to be affected as much or they are getting a bailout, for example. You know the Americans said that they will not issue the data of who got the first 350 billion dollars of stimulus. That's a data issue. It's an openness issue, it's a transparency issue.” [NGO-24]

Overall, this very process will likely continue the trend towards new types and levels of global civil society-governmental engagement, and require thinking about how best to adapt and take advantage of new opportunities in relation to particular global social policy agendas:

“Because this is about INGOs, governments, local NGOs coming together and designing a tool for cross-sector collaboration and also having the feedback parts coming from the different interested parties. So, for me, this is an indication - and SDGs of course - this is an indication that we are moving to a different sort of discourse. We used to meet in big rooms physically, you know, face to face to discuss, brainstorm like we do in the steering committee. But we probably have to rethink the way we do it in the online forum and the digital tools for that kind of conversation to happen now on a regular basis, not necessarily in a face-to-face environment.” [NGO-2]

5.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presented the research findings on the impact of technological change on the global civil society-governmental relationship, directly addressing the second research sub-question. After an initial examination of the basic digital tools that have enabled global civil society to, predictably, speed up its administration and communications over the last decade or more, it then picked up where the last chapter left off with scrutiny of the impact of meetings technology on direct interactions between actors. More civil society activists, (acknowledging resource and connectivity issues), than ever before, are able to relate to each other, wherever they are in the world, to share information and experiences and to build common cause. More than just speed and volume however, it is clear technology has enabled global civil society itself to evolve and change shape rapidly, allowing national and sub-national actors to engage directly at the global level, and in the process, and as signalled in previous chapters, making the infrastructural hierarchies of the past redundant.

Findings about the actual and potential impact of the open data agenda were also presented in this chapter, revealing an unpredicted, albeit low-key, excitement about how the systematic adoption of data collection and sharing practice could transform the content of global debates and the nature of global civil society-governmental engagement in them. While there was some scepticism prompted by a perceived

early 'over-hyping', there was nevertheless associated optimism about the sustainable development goals framework to cohere this, and leadership from unusual quarters, namely the global south, to accelerate it. The promise associated with these issues, the new ways of working made possible, and the catalytic effect of the pandemic on the massively increased demand for better data sharing also emerges as a key theme for further consideration.

These real benefits of technology identified, including communications, cost and inclusivity, were set out and contrasted with concerns about new means to be exclusive, a dehumanising effect, and security and surveillance fears. This latter threat alongside the now high-level of dependence of global civil society on technology to function as a credible network, never mind the potential opportunities lost, emerged as a widespread concern amongst interviewees and a prevalent theme of the participant observation. Not limited to technology specialists, a debate has begun across global civil society around questions of how civil society can become more pro-active about their use of technology and influence the further evolution and governance of it. This and the role of and civil society relationships with 'big tech', are taken up in the discussion chapter, which follows.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusions

This PhD thesis set out to consider in depth the changing nature of the relationship between civil society and governmental institutions at the global level, and the practice and practical settings for the discourse of it, and the offer of technology to it. Drawing on the overarching findings set out in chapter three, and the more specific examinations of summit events and technology in chapters four and five, this final chapter aims to synthesise the findings and relate them to prior and wider literature.

The literature review (chapter one) suggested that from the point of 'global civil society' being an identifiable phenomenon in the 1990s (Lipschutz, 1992, Keane, 2003, Kaldor, 2003), its interaction with global level government actors and inter-governmental organisations, and influence on them had increased dramatically. A number of writers had analysed the nature of the relationship along a version of a spectrum of closeness, from civil society as 'outsider' to 'insider' (Florini, 2012, Steffek, 2013). The research sought, using the now most widely accepted version of such a spectrum, the IAP2 participation spectrum (2021a), which spans from 'inform', through 'consult', 'involve' and 'collaborate', to 'empower', to build on this to find out whether and how the relationship had further developed, and how established it now is.

The PhD research fieldwork began with a deep immersion in the global open government movement – an international platform which claims to model parity of esteem between government and civil society actors – and therefore ostensibly at the collaborate/empower end of the spectrum.

A participant observation of the Open Government Partnership's global summit event in Ottawa in May 2019 gave rise to a number of issues around the purpose and character of such global events as focal points for the relationship, and also generated more detailed questions about the potential of technology, principally more effective communication and data sharing, to bring about further shifts in it.

These issues underpinned a series of interviews with individual actors from both governmental and civil society backgrounds which elicited rich and indicative data as to important developments in the nature of the global civil society-governmental relationship in recent years. A further set of interviews following the sudden disruption of established practice caused by the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic in Spring 2020 provided insight into the direction of travel for such engagement, revealing trends and patterns accentuated or transcended as a result of the worldwide shock.

Overall, the main findings are that global civil society has evolved significantly. In a marked departure from academic findings of the 2010s, it is no longer dominated by relatively few international non-governmental organisations, and technology has enabled it to become flatter in structure, with more opportunities for national or local actors to break through into international conversations. Summit events are no longer seen as critical one-off opportunities to impact decision-making, but rather serve as just one type of focus within year-round engagement. Nevertheless, global

gatherings remain important for movement-building and the human dimension to international relations between governmental and civil society actors is likely to become more poignant as much routine engagement shifts online. The thesis offers an analysis of the different purposes of summit events which moves beyond the classic influencing/decision-making focus to encompass networking, learning and inspiring.

This chapter opens with a discussion of the changes in global civil society that have made its engagement with global governmental institutions more agile and comprehensive. It goes on to explore the importance of protecting and nurturing civic space, and the research finding that global civil society and its processes of engagement with government bodies are more inclusive than in the past, both in terms of the kinds and primary foci of organisations connecting with global conversations and of the people representing them. The importance of personal relationships between these people is revisited at section 6.4.

Different aspects of this more complex engagement landscape are explored in section 6.5, including the challenges and opportunities of multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder fora. The increased significance of foundations as a key category of actor, and of the open data agenda and evidence-base approaches to policy-making are touched on, along with a reflection on the impact on the significance of summit events in the engagement context.

Section 6.6 discusses the potential for further research in this this agenda, and 6.7 lays out some longer-term impacts and questions to support this. Methodological reflections follow, along with a statement of this PhD's contribution to knowledge. A final set of conclusions and recommendations are at section 6.10.

6.1 Changes in Global Civil Society

Global civil society has developed significantly in the last quarter century. All interviewees for this research were agreed that where in the past it was dominated by relatively few, specifically globally-focused International Non-governmental Organisations (INGOs), there was now a much greater number and richer variety of civil society organisations engaging with each other and with governmental institutions at the global level, even where their main *raison d'être* may be more nationally or even locally focused.

These observations build on Katz and Anheier's (2005) foundational work appraising the breadth and density of inter-organisational networks and suggests a further broadening and intensifying of intra-civil society activity at the global level. Following on from the initial forays into mapping and measuring global civil society in the 1990s the work of the Center for Civil Society Studies (2019) highlighted the importance of infrastructure to enable collective action and more effectiveness in terms of holding institutions to account. There is no doubt global civil society is now a greater counter-balance to governmental bodies than at that point and is visible in global dialogue and institutional processes in a way it was not previously. Stages of this

development may be credited to INGOs playing an organising infrastructural role, intentionally building networks between CSOs, but this PhD research suggests that this role has now been overtaken by technology, with web-based information sharing and online communications tools from email to whatsapp surpassing the need for more formal structures.

So global civil society has gained weight but also become flatter/less hierarchical in shape. By foregrounding the, then, infrastructural role of mostly northern-based INGOs Katz and Anheier's work indicated a bias towards the developed world in the functioning of global civil society, a theme taken up by Smith and Wiest (2005), but this research found this to be a diminishing feature of the landscape, as CSOs, regardless of their location or resources can more easily connect with counterparts directly online without the need for intermediaries. That is not to say access to digital connectivity and other resource constraints was not a limiting factor in developing countries, but that even with modest means activists were finding ways to engage in global dialogue in a more self-empowered way than in the past. Interestingly, investment in expertise in social policy data associated with the Millennium Development Goals period 2000-2015, appears to have catalysed new ways of working across global civil society and with governmental bodies, with different organisational and individual actors in the lead. Several interviewees associated this with a general, southwards shift in global civil society leadership, with notable hubs of data activity, especially in Africa. Technological advances have therefore been a major enabling factor not just in terms of the number and range of civil society organisations connecting to global agendas, but also in helping reshape some of the internal dynamics.

Nevertheless, imbalance in capacity remains an issue, and tensions associated with competition between INGOs and domestic civil society for available funding, characterised by writers such as Carroll and Sapinsky (2015) as 'NGO-isation', continue in places. This can be seen as the sharp end of a long-standing 'disconnect' between local/national civil society and the global level, correcting which on a more systematic basis some interviewees still saw as a priority. Many more national or sub-national CSOs were noticeably (by CSO colleagues and governmental actors alike) cutting-through to global level engagement, but it was felt yet more could be done, strategically, to ensure this was comprehensive and create an enabling environment. These issues can be clearly seen in the context of summit events, where the ability – and importantly the reasons - to participate have evolved alongside the changes within global civil society and its engagement with governmental bodies.

Interestingly this was not just about availability and allocation of resources. Building on the theme of civic space (both online and offline) written about in the mid 2010s by such as Dahlgren (2015), Buyse (2018), and Brechenmacher and Carothers (2019), and monitored on an ongoing basis by CIVICUS (CIVICUS, 2021b), the importance of an enabling environment for civil society to flourish was a very clear theme of the research. Interviewees came at this both geographically – acknowledging specific challenges in some countries/regions - and along policy lines identifying certain agendas where civil society was being encouraged and enabled to

step up and contribute, and others where its input was (perhaps periodically) actively resisted and its ability to function as an interlocutor, or even as a lobbyist/protester, was closed down.

6.2 Civic Space

These issues of civic space do naturally and principally depend on the prevailing political and legal circumstances at national level, where fundamentally the environment for civil society to exist, express itself and engage with government and others will pre-determine how successfully it can also participate globally.

A running tension throughout the observational and interview stages of this research has been between the trend for global civil society to grow and thrive, and the counter-vailing forces of populism and authoritarianism. This is clearly relevant in specific country contexts, but also as a contaminant of more social development worldwide. The CIVICUS Monitor's 2020 update report (CIVICUS, 2021b) has 43.4% of the global population living in countries with repressed civic space, and an alarming increase in those experiencing an actively obstructed environment. Concern is noted about ongoing declines in Asia and Africa, and a particularly sharp drop is respect for civic space in Latin America where countries formerly leading democratic reforms have regressed.

In fact, it clearly emerges that civic space has become a key agenda in and of itself, not just a background or contextual issue. Political choices at national level about whether, and the extent to which, to facilitate citizen interaction and expression underpin whether and how global civil society continues to become more coherent, and fully representative in its engagement with global agendas and governmental institutions.

There is also a very important digital dimension to concerns about civic space, as more and more of the functioning of global civil society depends on technological means. Castells (2008, 2014) and Shirky (2011) led the school of thought that the internet and online communication channels would provide significant new opportunities for civil society to flourish and there is no doubt that this optimism has been at least partially fulfilled. However, the warnings of such as Fuchs (2014) and Mackinnon (2011) on the limitations and drawbacks associated, including the ability of hate narratives as well as progressive ones to circulate, increased and new forms of surveillance on activists, and the ability of authorities to simply shut down platforms as seen in China and recently in Nigeria, rapidly disabling civil society, have also come to pass. It is perhaps no surprise that existentially dependent as it now is on the internet that global civil society leaders should now be prioritising digital governance. Tech security and oversight of the global network providers and social media channels is rapidly becoming a mainstream issue for global civil society, and widespread awareness of the dangers as well as the opportunities of online engagement was a notable feature of this research.

Civic space is clearly an underpinning factor to the capacity of civil society to engage in global agendas, but even on issues or in policy contexts where circumstances are benign, global civil society continues to face challenges in doing all that it might. As Sellar and Lingard (2013) note in relation to their observation of the operation of the OECD, engagement processes take time and energy, and it is clear that coverage of all aspects of institutional process presents a major capacity issue for global civil society. While civil society actors can be agile and choosy up to a point about when and where they interact, there was a sense of frustration amongst interviewees (from both perspectives) that opportunities to advance progressive agendas were being lost, especially when resources were necessarily diverted to defensive mode in the face of civic space challenges.

6.3 Inclusiveness

The need for greater capacity is one practical reason for global civil society leaders to consider how broad-based its networks and representative processes are, and how well they reach a wide range of organisations and individuals. The practical challenges around representation highlighted by Martens' (2008) critique of self-selection and elitism are apparently still problematical, as global civil society processes struggle to keep pace with the opportunities emerging. However, given new opportunities are welcome, arguably a strain on representation processes is a good problem to have, one of which actors are aware, and to which technology is providing new solutions. There does however appear to be an ongoing process of self-reflection relating to this which stretches beyond the pragmatic.

Indeed, inclusivity of global civil society was an outstanding theme of this research. From being a palpable issue at the Ottawa summit (both in relation to its practice and the content of its formal agenda), to a recurring topic of interviews, it is clear actors are concerned to warrant legitimacy and a valid mandate. Former UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, Mary Robinson's from-the-platform assessment of the OGP Ottawa Summit's gender balance and inclusivity as "not bad" was broadly shared by interviewees, but it was marked how many were keen to do better, and be vigilant to such as Chandhoke's (2002) calls for global civil society actors to actively engage with, and empower their own constituent communities. Though despite best efforts and a live debate around inclusion and representativeness, it did seem initially that interviewees were struggling to find new ways to break the mould, although experiments with communications technology such as using Skype to bring the direct experience and voice of citizens to the policy table, had already clearly had a positively disproportional impact in some formal contexts.

However, as in other areas, the second wave of interviewees were already seeing the 'mould-breaking' potential of the pandemic to open up new technology-based practices in the work of global civil society both in terms of including more people in internal debate and strategising and in relation to formal engagement with governmental partners. While acknowledging the challenges of forging human relationships anew via the internet, interviewees were optimistic that this could be balanced, or even outweighed by, the ability to harness wider and deeper

engagement. It is impossible to say whether the shift in the business of global civil society-governmental relations would eventually have migrated online without the wholesale shock of Covid-19, and too early to predict with confidence how much will remain there or revert to in-person contexts, but it is important to be aware of potential consequences. Alongside those welcoming the ability to cheaply and easily bring more ears and eyes to important global debates, were warning voices that access to and the ability to speak at online events can easily be manipulated and exclude as well as include (Powell, 2021)

Thinking about Pianta's (2005) typology of events (see Chapter One, page 27) in relation to global civil society in the context where digital solutions will likely - at least in part – now continue to replace in-person meetings and summit events, it seems probable more activists and civil society organisations will experience the 'opening door' stage and become more aware of global agendas and their relationship to them. However, the 'deepening effort', and 'launching pad' stages of forging relationships and stimulating joint action, will be less spontaneous and require proactive effort to follow-up potential connections online.

6.4 Personal relationships

All of which emphasises anew the criticality of professional and personal approaches in the context of global civil society-governmental relations. The methodology pursued in this research was particularly useful in revealing the individual, human dimension to this area of international relations. The amount of 'career cross-over' between civil society and government amongst the interviewee sample was unexpected, suggesting that significant value is already being applied on both sides to the skills needed to build relationships and bridge between institutions and indeed cultures. It recalls Steffek's (2013) mention of the importance of the informal and personal relationships of 'like-minded' personnel in his study of why, as he termed it, 'IGOs and NGOs co-operate'. For him it was a side issue, but the significance applied by interviewees to having open-minded people in key roles in IGOs, and also in foundations, was marked. In the context where more engagement is happening in fluid, multi-stakeholder settings it seems likely that this human dimension will become more central (see pages 63 and 113-116).

6.5 Engagement

So, it is clear that the evolution of global civil society, its inclusiveness and representative mandate and the behaviours of people acting for it are material factors in how it engages with its governmental counterparts. Larger, stronger, more agile global civil society, fronted by more skilled professionals exhibiting more nuanced behaviours, would suggest at least the potential for richer more productive engagement. In fact, it is an undoubted finding of this research that significantly more engagement happens now than a decade ago, and that – applying the IAP2

spectrum – there has been a significant shift in many areas beyond merely informing and occasionally consulting, towards greater ongoing involvement and collaboration.

Indeed, the very fact of the existence of platforms such as the Open Government Partnership, modelling a peer relationship and multi-level engagement, and the spread of multi-stakeholder fora in other specific policy fields is indicative of this shift. Every interviewee from both perspectives, while varying in their views on the consequences and sustainability of this change, were clear that their operating context was busier, more complex and more demanding. This greater level of engagement across the board was welcomed, yet marred, by a lack in confidence that it represented a trend that would continue unhindered. Indeed, a sense of the fragility of the current ‘system’ of engagement pervaded conversations, along with a feeling of defensiveness from civil society (and allies in the government sphere) of progress made to date.

However, overall, it may well be the case that this nervousness is unwarranted. The sheer scale, and complexity of engagement now, and the fact that much of it is embedded in processes which transcend political cycles, even acknowledging the widespread concerns about civic space, suggests it would be very difficult for major regression at the global level. Added to this is the reality that global civil society’s tactics are now more sectoral rather than organisational, meaning that even if one organisation in any field experiences push-back or exclusion from dialogue, other voices can come forward. Technology has enabled a new level of teamwork across civil society which is both more organised and more subtle; Fuchs’ third ‘C’ in his typology of digital civil society networking and mobilisation (cognition, communication, co-operation) has taken root (2014). Early observations by second wave interviewees of changing online engagement behaviours by national government personnel, alongside the already more dynamic IGO staffers, after the onset of the pandemic may suggest adaptation and culture change is also happening within their traditionally slow-moving counterparts.

In thinking about the shift along the IAP2 spectrum, it is important to note that there is no suggestion that more collaboration means less ‘outsider’ activity. Indeed, protests on the consequences of the pandemic, along with online and street campaigning on poverty, gender and such as the Black Lives Matter campaign, and pro-democracy demonstrations in many countries worldwide in the last months indicate that such tactics are still needed to draw attention to perceived injustices. It does, however, perhaps raise the question of how well civil society is using established relationships (where appropriate) to leverage movement in these campaign agendas.

6.5.1 Multi-level Engagement

An important strand in the foregoing literature around global civil society-governmental relationships is around the ability to operate across levels of governance. Keck and Sikkink (1999) coined the term ‘boomerang effect’ to denote impact on domestic agendas of lobbying and activity at global level, and Smith and

Wiest commented on the arguably disproportionately high engagement of developing countries' civil society activity on global agendas in order to stimulate progress at home. These are still, undoubtedly, features of this landscape, but an interesting new take on the vertical/multi-level governance issue emerging from this research, is, inversely, the influence of the national, and even very local, on global dialogue.

The 'cut-through' of otherwise domestically-focused actors into global conversations and fora is one aspect of this, but so is a deliberate strategy in some fields by civil society to work with a handful of governments to undertake reform - for its own sake nationally - but also to change the nature of the global discourse and act as an exemplar for regional/global reform; there was notable progress of this kind on anti-corruption and beneficial ownership transparency during the course of this research.

This sense that global change can be driven from bottom-up, sometimes even bypassing the national level is also increasingly part of the global civil society narrative. Foreshadowed by such as Dufour's (2016) examination of local social forums emerging to 'feed' the World Social Forum, it is also a perspective that is influencing thinking amongst funders. An engagement session with a very influential global foundation CEO during the OGP Ottawa summit ended with him concluding his 'takeaway' was the wisdom of investing directly in civil society at sub-national level. OGP itself has made a major strategic pivot in the last three years towards recruiting member partnerships between civil society and government at municipal, city and provincial level, as a way of stimulating action on its overarching priorities of participation, accountability and transparency. Conscious bridging of levels in those movements that have adopted federal or chapter-based structures may also have anticipated the importance of this ability to traverse levels of governance to a degree, but they do tend to stop at the national rather than sub-national or local level. The pandemic, again, has accelerated this trend for global actors to pay attention to the local with a resurgence of community and local civil society activity, often in pattern-breaking collaboration with public authorities (Brechenmacher and Carothers, 2020).

In relation to governmental structures, the research clearly showed that IGOs are, and are perceived to be, distinct from, and not creatures of (at least up to a point), their constituent national governments. As already touched on, secretariat organisations and personnel are critical players in the global civil society-governmental relationship context, some actively using civil society engagement at global level, and on occasion in-country, as a means of stimulating debate and driving reform amongst member countries.

6.5.2 Multi-Stakeholder Fora

The Open Government Partnership was chosen as the centrepiece of this research both for pragmatic reasons of access, but also because the Open Government Partnership claimed to model collaboration between civil society and government. What was unclear at the outset, but emerged throughout, was how it can be seen as part of a wider experiment in collaborative multi-stakeholder working at global level. There was no significant overarching background literature to work from initially, but

a number of more contemporary assessments of the potential and progress of the multi-stakeholder approach are emerging in a range of specific policy areas, and it is hard to disagree with Scholte's conclusion from his (2020) attempt to survey the field that "multistakeholderism warrants substantial priority in global governance research going forward". In drawing the distinction between 'ancillary' and 'executive' multi-stakeholder fora, he demarcates the shift from global civil society engagement with governments at the global level on the latter's institutional terms – i.e. via setting up consultation fora or enabling parallel summits, to one which is (more) evenly balanced from the outset. However, it is probably fair to say that such new model engagements would not have been possible if global civil society had not flexed its muscles on the world scene via IGO processes and events throughout the preceding decades.

What is clear from this research is that multi-stakeholder processes, while resource intensive and demanding of unconventional and innovative ways of working, are fruitful territory for global civil society. The novelty of the approach was evident from interviews but referenced positively as a way of working, and it is clear many civil society networks have been quick to take up the opportunities multi-stakeholder fora present. However, they retain some scepticism about whether such fora are sustainable structures and processes for the longer term, mainly because of concerns they may become unbalanced by inevitably better-resourced governmental or private sector interests, or worse, abused by political or ideological campaigns using them as an unobvious way to influence broader agendas.

In the meantime, drawing on the processes with which interviewees were familiar, there was a particular – if surprising given the potential for capture by corporate interests - welcome for the involvement of the private sector and a sense that the corporate-civil society dynamic had potential to drive change in a more agile way than was possible via governmental institutions. Similarly, philanthropy was seen to be in a position to make a substantive contribution in the multi-stakeholder context and indeed foundations have been the driving force behind the creation of some, notably The Global Fund (for AIDS, TB and Malaria) and, topically, GAVI, the vaccine alliance, both kickstarted by the Gates Foundation.

6.5.3 Role of Foundations

More generally the role of philanthropy emerged as a strong theme in interviews. Carroll and Sapinsky (2015) flagged this as an emerging issue in relation to policy transfer, but it appears foundations' dominance has now extended and is becoming embedded in some structures and processes. From both civil society and governmental perspectives there was a welcome for the involvement of these increasingly powerful players, but a very qualified one. While seen as progressive allies at the moment, the governance and accountability of these incredibly wealthy organisations was seen as a key issue for the longer term (see pages 77-82).

6.5.4 Evidence-based Policy-making

While the agreement of Agenda 2030 in 2015 (the Sustainable Development Goals framework) was recognised as significant context to this research, what emerged more strongly than anticipated were widespread aspirations for evidence-based policy-making. The open government movement has a history of interest in open data, and so interviewees' association with OGP will no doubt have influenced their familiarity with the subject, but it was nevertheless significant that many saw systematic progress in opening up and expanding sources of official data as a means to break through stagnated policy debate, and challenge established institutional thinking. The fact that leadership of this aspect of civil society-government engagement has fallen to actors of the global south in itself is seen as mould-breaking by civil society activists. Some scepticism was evident, and some over-promising and 'false starts' perceived in some of the hype around the SDGs, but also an appreciation of the significant, if slow-burn change the system of shared goals and indicators, and comparative data, can ultimately make.

In the context of multi-stakeholder governance models, and something that came through very clearly from those familiar with specific processes such as EITI, is the value of neutral, or widely accepted, data from valid sources. Giving a focal point round which to centre their deliberations, it serves to shift power imbalances and therefore the whole nature of the engagement.

6.5.5 Summit Events and Engagement

In this complex new world of multi-level, multi-stakeholder, multi-stream (diplomacy, research channels, informal relationships), engagement between global civil society and governmental bodies, it could be argued that the role of the summit event is receding in importance. It is certainly changing, and instead of the previous one-off opportunity to impact decision-making, it is seen much more now as an opportunity within a wider tapestry of clarifying and catalysing moments where all participants meet, research results are shared and discussed, and decisions announced. Such events are becoming much more inclusive and by virtue of technology much more transparent.

6.6 Further Engagement Research

Overall, therefore the nature of and opportunities for civil society-governmental engagement at the global level are changing and several strong themes emerge that would merit further research interest. There is a strong case for ongoing monitoring of civic space on a global comparative, and a case specific basis, to understand this as a pre-condition for engagement, and it is to be hoped CIVICUS can continue to resource their work in this area (CIVICUS, 2021b). There is also a case for periodic revisiting of the IAP2 (2021b) or similar spectrum-based analysis to assess further evolution of the closeness and extent of engagement across different fields. The Open Government Partnership's own systematic Independent Reporting Mechanism

(OGP, 2021b) provides a useful ongoing assessment of the relative ‘openness’ of countries’ practice of engagement with civil society and other stakeholders. At global level, this research has shown (see page 54) that the extent and quality of engagement across policy areas/IGOs, while improving in general, remains very inconsistent, with the experience of civil society activists working on gender issues with UN Women, or health issues with the WHO or UN AIDS being far more positive than those seeking to influence older, more established, or perhaps more economically-focused institutions (the OECD apparently being the exception to this generalisation). Consistent assessment over time of this pattern may serve to prompt active reform.

Looking both vertically and horizontally, multi-level dynamics, and the rapid spread of the multi-stakeholder model are fertile research themes. On the former, the potential for excellent, locally based action to act as a demonstrator to global policy making, perhaps bypassing national structures is tantalising. On the latter, (comparative) assessments of the soundness of the governance of such structures, and the accountability of their participants (perhaps especially foundations), in contrast with their inclusiveness and agility might allay some practitioners’ doubts about their value and longevity.

New overarching opportunities for data exchange, many stemming from the Sustainable Development Goals framework give rise to a whole host of research potentialities, but perhaps in this context of engagement and dialogue, the nature of such evidence-based working and the ‘how’ of open data would be an important ongoing contribution to the field.

6.7 Longer-term Impacts and Questions

Why is any of this important? Scholte throughout his long career in the field has consistently argued that engagement with civil society is a means for both holding global governmental institutions to account, and to improving their policy-making (Scholte, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2020). Immersion in the field of open government where civil society and governments work closely in the global context has exposed the degree to which civil society actors are ‘making the running’ in terms of reform on the key global issues and challenges of the day. It is clearly not just the case that pressure is brought to bear by ‘outsider’ tactics of protesting and media campaigning, but also by insistent and co-ordinated ‘insider’ force behind the scenes.

Nevertheless, and despite significant growth in size and sophistication, global civil society could still do much more and bear greater influence. If the trends towards greater inclusion and better organised collective action continue it seems likely that at least some of this potential could be realised, especially in the absence of individual or collective political leadership from governments.

The (albeit low-key) excitement amongst interviewees about open data, and the slow but systematic adoption of data collection and sharing under the ambit of the SDGs

could also influence significantly, not just the content of policy debate as anticipated by its instigators and early enthusiasts (Webster and Ravnborg, 2016), but also the way in which such dialogue is conducted. There is an increasing acceptance that governments don't have a monopoly on the intelligence needed to make good policy decisions, and the pandemic has only accelerated a willingness to bring corporate big data, and citizen-generated data into frame. The more this happens, and data-gathering and presentation stand apart from the political and institutional actors, the more debate can shift to ideas about how to address challenges, not question whether or the extent to which those challenges exist. Not that such unproductive debate will be eliminated, the continued virulence of climate change deniers and recent bout of pandemic-related conspiracy suggest there will always be people who will see what they want to see regardless of the evidence, but it is to be hoped these can be pushed further to the margins of global deliberation.

This is not to suggest that the blueprint established by Agenda 2030 is perfect; there was significant evidence from interviews that building a truly comprehensive evidence-driven approach was controversial in and of itself. Set-backs from initial over-hyping of expectations, concern about those issues that had been excluded from specific goals or targets, and the capacity of governments, civil society and academia individually and collectively to amass, stay abreast of and analyse, and respond to data, are all struggles to be overcome. Yet the long-term possibilities of new, collaborative ways of working, and new technical arenas or settings for such collaboration should not be under-estimated.

The speed with which technology can innovate is well known. What the pandemic has shown is that people and institutions can adapt and adopt new technology just as quickly when necessity demands. Global civil society's development had already been facilitated massively by the use of technology, especially in relation to communication channels and modalities. That these are also now – relatively suddenly - used much more for the purposes of engagement with global governmental institutions suggests a new period of practice is beginning. However, the rife concerns revealed in this research about abuse of existing communications and social media channels, both by governments intent on surveilling or shutting down networks, and by extremists peddling hate narratives, raise questions about how truly positive this new era can be. The role and governance of the massive and truly transnational technology companies at the centre of this has rightly become a mainstream issue of concern to global civil society – but how influential they can be on them remains open to question.

As more engagement shifts online the underlying question of the role of big summit events deepens. This research set out to examine how global civil society used such events and has brought to the fore a wider set of questions about their design, audience/constituency, and value going forward. At the end of the OGP Ottawa 2019 Summit, the incoming Government co-chair, the Government of Argentina announced its intention to break with pattern and *not* host a major event during its term of office. Citing diversion of resources of the Support Unit/secretariat of OGP explicitly, it also implicitly questioned the value of (frequent) such events for everyone else involved. It certainly seems true that more international diplomacy

between governments, and civil society engagement around these processes, can and likely will be undertaken digitally. Yet it is worth considering what might be lost in this shift. Given the nature of the Partnership, the OGP summit never had a strong multi-lateral decision-making meeting at its core, its value, rather already leant towards learning, networking, solidarity and movement-building. The typology presented in this thesis (see page 113) intends to underline the importance of thinking through the purpose of major international gatherings for governments and IGOs and for civil society, and for the people representing them, in participating, and acknowledge the power and utility of these arguably 'softer' purposes, alongside conventional decision-taking meetings. A genuine break with the past in terms of design, harnessing the ability to blend a digital approach to improve participation both within the venue and beyond, could reap major benefits of reach and inclusion.

The idea of summits as pivotal moments in a wider narrative discussed variously by interviewees in this research – knots in the wider 'tapestry' of engagement – is attractive both because of the human need to connect in-person, but also for the ability to take stock of progress and give intense attention to a particular agenda. Governments and IGOs have an audience with which to share gains on agendas they may be leading. For global civil society intent on catalysing further reform these are moments to plan towards with the launch of new data, reports or campaign materials. Major events to which people travel may become less frequent, interspersed by online engagement but overall engagement continue to flourish, nevertheless. It seems unlikely that in-person events will disappear altogether, and indeed civil society would probably see this as a retrograde step in terms of access to global institutional dialogue contained in a physical place, never-mind missing the by-products of intra-civil society networking occasioned by lobbying and parallel summits. It remains to be seen, though, whether genuine new departures in practice unfold as the world unlocks from the grip of the pandemic, or we default to conventional practice.

If it is the case that practice settles back into its pre-existing channels, an opportunity will be lost in particular for an inter-sectional joining up of agendas; human rights with climate change, budget transparency with gender, anti-corruption with health. Talked about prominently on and off the platform at the Ottawa OGP Summit, there was a perceived need, certainly by civil society activists and indeed by some governmental actors, to reach out and connect more and build new progressive alliances. However, the capacity to cover all these bases is an issue, not just for civil society but also for governments (the Government of Iceland reportedly at the Ottawa summit had decided not to engage with OGP but the OECD instead on open governance issues), requiring strategic choices to be made. Nevertheless, technology, and perhaps a new approach to (planning for) events can enable this as never before, and perhaps be a critical development in the face of the counter-vailing anti-democratic forces evident across the globe.

Research revealed very real concerns about the global trends towards populism and authoritarianism and the consequent limitations on a productive civil society-government relationship; indeed, on the very existence of such a relationship in a world where such national behaviours prevailed. In an insightful *mea culpa* one civil

society leader interviewed asked ‘did we let this happen?’ by not doing more, sooner, pro-actively to promote liberal, democratic ideas and practices. The interviews took place before the election of Joe Biden as 46th President of the United States, replacing Donald Trump - for many the embodiment of their fears - and some of that level of concern may have been relieved to a degree as a result. But that one political event does not in itself reverse a now decade long trend towards reductions in civic space in countries across the world. It is clear a tension between that trend towards closing down civic space and the imperative for global governmental bodies to engage more and differently with civil society will continue for some years yet. Political initiatives such as Emmanuel Macron’s Paris Peace Forum series, or Biden’s promised ‘D10’ summit of major democratic nations are potential arenas for this tension to play out, and civil society and its allies in IGOs - notably the OECD given its launch of a ‘civic space observatory’ - could maximise these opportunities.

There could also, in these contexts and elsewhere, be a renewed effort to build familiarity and trust between representatives of global institutions. The research showed a level of maturity had developed within the cadre of people acting for civil society, along with a willingness to work with the grain of reformers within governments and IGOs through active collaboration, where it could achieve good results, seeing their role as going beyond accountability oversight and critique (see page 63). Personal relationships are critical and clearly the serendipity and human aspects of summits and events is relevant here, and too much transfer away from in-person to digital meetings may be a set-back in this respect. More positively, an intentional encouragement of cross-sectoral working; the use of secondments, exchanges and the like as well as career changes – perhaps made easier in multi-stakeholder contexts – would swell the emerging pool of actors who can see global civil society-governmental engagement processes from both sides.

The ability also to stay abreast of multi-level governance dynamics may become more important as interest in and the ability of local actors to gain global traction grows. As with connecting institutions and policy agendas, this is arguably easier than ever before as careful use of channels such as twitter can readily feed updates and intelligence from chosen spheres of interest. Yet this too requires active choices to be made, and a desire to look outwards. Ultimately people’s attitudes, the ever-present issue of language, and the spread of the concept of the ‘global citizen’ will make the difference between global civil society fulfilling its potential or not.

6.8 Methodological Reflections

This research was inspired by the intense experience of hosting the CIVICUS World Assembly series in 2006, 2007 and 2008 in Glasgow. Ostensibly one of the relatively few global gatherings targeted at civil society, the events nevertheless drew attendance from an impressive range of global governmental institutions and national government leaders, all, to a greater extent by their presence seeing value in engaging with civil society.

This gave rise to an ongoing fascination with the nature and product of global civil society-governmental engagement, and especially the role of key events. The rise of social media and its evident role around the Arab Spring and other social movements throughout the 2010s added a technological dimension to the picture, only accentuated in 2018, when upon being appointed to the global committee of the Open Government Partnership a whole new way of working online was unveiled; since the pandemic ubiquitous, but at the time eye-opening.

This background is relevant when in reflexive mode considering what about the method deployed on the research was particularly helpful in generating insights, and inversely potentially throwing up bias.

Firstly, the deep personal and professional immersion in global civil society networking undoubtedly revealed the human dimension to engagement practices in a way that would never come across in a more arms-length study of the subject. Participant observation of the Ottawa Summit enabled a conscious recognition of the informal or unofficial elements of engagement practices, which in reality are as significant in driving it as the ostensible formal ones. A purely textual analysis of minutes, reports and communiqués of events would never capture this ethnographical aspect.

This experiential approach was particularly important in adapting to and depicting the onset of the pandemic. 2020 is now a seismic moment in global history and being directly involved and active in global civil society-governmental engagement practices throughout meant the ability to witness first-hand how it affected the conduct of one thread of international relations, with potentially paradigm shifting consequences.

Secondly, whilst being directly involved in global engagement from 2018, as someone whose career had otherwise focused at domestic, and indeed 'sub-national' level, there was particular sensitivity to the barriers preventing 'cut-through' of local actors, and this may mean the multi-level governance issues are a stronger theme of findings as a result.

Indeed, whilst a full participant in the Ottawa Summit and the networking that preceded and followed, the domestically-focused background ensured a level of objectivity when observing and interviewing much longer-standing global practitioners; that cohort of professionals from both civil society and governmental backgrounds who some (Martens, 2008, Chandhoke, 2002) had critiqued as a detached elite.

Beyond these issues of positionality of the researcher, other limitations, of the method chosen (described in more detail in section 2.12, page 48) were the complexity of incorporating all the different components and timing. Bringing together the participant observation, evaluation material and social media tracking data provided by the Ottawa Summit hosts, and the interview data, was already a challenge aggravated further by the decision to undertake a second wave of interviews in light of the onset of the pandemic. However, the complexity and impact

on timetable was more than compensated for by the richness of the data and the marked shifts from the first wave that could be brought to bear in analysis.

In general, the experience has undoubtedly served to throw retrospective light on the motivation of some of those attendees at the CIVICUS Glasgow events in the mid-2000s, indicate the way forward in some important respects, and renew enthusiasm for the challenges ahead.

6.9 Contribution to Knowledge

This PhD research has contributed to knowledge in a number of different ways. In terms of the topic, there is clear strand of academic interest around the relationship between civil society and government at the global level, which in general this work builds on and brings up to date. More specifically, while previously there had been a number of studies focusing on the nature of the protest end of the engagement spectrum (Juris, 2012, Gerbaudo, 2012, Glasius and Pleyers, 2013), there had been little focus on collaboration and partnership at the global level, a gap which this study fills. Learning from the use of participant observation in social movements in protest mode, this work applied that method to a contrasting situation, providing unique insights into a growing area of international political activity. The trend towards multi-stakeholder engagement is captured in real time, having attracted no academic interest before the start of the PhD research, and now the subject of calls for more attention (Scholte, 2020). In particular the methodology chosen heeded those advocating greater scrutiny of the actual practice of politics (Freeman, 2019) and in doing so provides novel insights into the human dimension of cross-sectoral relationships.

The research focus on events builds on and brings up to date literature around summits, a subject which has not received much academic attention since around 2010, and by combining this with a focus on technology the thesis provides new understanding of how online and offline engagement co-exist in such moments. This spotlight on how engagement happens via digital channels was especially timely given the onset of the global pandemic and consequent urgent need to shift to new practices. Findings on other impacts and opportunities provided by technology, notably the open data agenda, build on and bear out the work of previous thinkers such as Castells (2004), Shirky (2011) and Fuchs (2014).

The research also serves to update knowledge on the nature of global civil society, following the end of a series of long-term projects (Center for Civil Society Studies, 2019, Conflict and Civil Society Research Unit, 2019) which observed its evolution through the 2000s and 2010s. This research captures its further development through the reflections of well-placed interviewees.

6.10 Conclusions and Recommendations

6.10.1 Research Question One

In addressing the question of how global civil society operates in relations to global governmental institutions this research has concluded that:

- Global civil society is larger and busier than ever before since it became an identifiable phenomenon in the late 1990s; this underpins its position and ability in relation to governmental structures
- Its infrastructure is flatter, more technology-based and less reliant on the intermediary roles previously occupied by INGOs
- It is more inclusive of marginalised groups, of organisations primarily focused at the national and local level, yet leading actors continue to be concerned about legitimacy and mandate
- IGOs – perhaps especially their secretariat organisations - welcome active engagement with global civil society, and structures and opportunities to enable that have expanded (although this varies by IGO)
- More engagement is happening that can be described as involve/collaborate on the IAP2 spectrum, i.e. engagement is deepening
- There is significant interest in, and a flowering of ‘multi-stakeholder fora’, whereby representatives of civil society and governmental bodies can engage on a peer footing; the open government partnership was an early pioneer of this model and remains an important advocate of it
- Widespread restrictions on civic space at a national level challenge the efficacy of global civil society-governmental engagement and can be seen to stem from a wider tension between democratic open governance approaches and the countervailing forces of authoritarianism and populism.

6.10.1.1 Recommendations

It is recommended that civil society and its allies in foundations and IGOs invest in examining some of these existential issues for global civil society and its engagement with partners; the OECD’s civic space observatory is a good example of leadership on this. The multi-stakeholder fora approach is an emerging area and would benefit from further research into the advantages and disadvantages of it and the development of good practice guidance. The role of ‘big philanthropy’ in particular, and the accountability and mandate of participants more generally merits further scrutiny. Actors at the global level should consciously develop a more multi-level approach and work with national and local actors to develop their global sightline.

6.10.2 Research Questions Two and Three

Specific examination of the questions of how global civil society uses summits and other global level events, and how it uses technology in its engagement work with global governmental institutions concluded that:

- Summit events have become gatherings with a range of purposes, not just the classic inter-governmental decision-making meeting, and networking, learning and community-building are all now arguably just as important
- Global events are increasingly being seen as focal points of a wider web of global civil society engagement and cross-over between formerly discreet agendas
- An online dimension to events has the potential to increase this intersectionality and inclusion more generally, but there are dangers in moving wholesale online, potentially creating new forms of exclusion of voice and denuding interaction of humanity and chance
- Communications technology and social media have transformed the way global civil society operates internally and in relation to governmental counterparts, though concerns about digital access, control of misinformation and hate narratives, online surveillance and the overall governance of digital platforms and channels have become mainstream
- The potential of open data and evidence-based approaches to policy excites actors in the global community, encouraged by the strategic investment in the Sustainable Development Goals, but also catalysed by the pandemic during which the demand for neutral statistics and online methods of working has grown rapidly

6.10.2.1 Recommendations

Actors at the global level should actively consider the 'how' of engagement, and the purpose and nature of summits, using analyses such as the typology presented in this research to recognise the needs of all participants. Further exploration of creative and innovative uses of online solutions associated with, and between, events could increase participation overall; default to pre-pandemic modes of operation should be avoided. Similarly, capitalising on the shift in interest towards open comparative data associated with the pandemic would give a much-needed boost to the long-term SDG agenda and enable different forms and fora for participation in global debates and fresh participants in them. Consciously retaining a human perspective on global interactions and enabling opportunities for trust-building in the engagement processes of the future will be vital.

Appendices

Appendix One: Consent form

Department of Social Policy and Social Work



CONSENT FORM

Project title:

How does Global Civil Society operate in relation to Inter-Governmental Organisations?

- How does GCS engage with high level meetings or summits?
- How does GCS use technology to support its work in relation to IGOs?

Interviewee Name:

Interviewee Contact Information:

Email:

Skype:

Phone:

		Please Initial
1	I have been told what this research is about and what it involves. I have been given an information sheet [dated April 2019] and have had opportunity to ask questions.	
2	I understand that I do not have to take part in the research. I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
3	I understand that I will be acknowledged by name within the PhD thesis as having taken part in the interviews (if you prefer to remain anonymous, do not initial this box). All personal information will remain confidential.	

For office info only.

Respondent ID

1

Version: consent_1.1

4	I understand that if the researcher thinks that I or someone else might be at risk of harm, they may have to contact the relevant authorities. But they will try and talk to me first about the best thing to do.	
5	I understand interviewees will take place via skype or phone call and I agree to be audio-recorded. Audio files will be transcribed to text files. The text files will be retained, the audio files deleted at the end of the project.	
6	I understand that my words may be used in research reports unless I expressly indicate otherwise relating to all, or part of the interview.	
7	I understand that I will not be able to amend or withdraw information I provide after November 2020.	
8	I agree for my data to be archived at the University of York for up to ten years.	
9	I agree to take part in the research.	

Participant signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher signature: _____

Date: _____

Global Goal(s)	Government	Civil Society

For office info only.

Respondent ID

2

Version: consent_1.1



**SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL WORK
DEPARTMENTAL ETHICS COMMITTEE**

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW OF RESEARCH

Instructions

The Social Policy and Social Work Departmental Ethics Committee (DEC) oversees all research studies undertaken in the Department. This form must be used for all submissions for ethical approval, including student research. Please note that research activity (including contacting prospective participants) cannot begin until a letter of approval has been issued by the DEC.

Please complete all sections as applicable and sign the undertaking (electronically). Once completed, email it - with all required attachments - to spsw-ethics@york.ac.uk for review by the DEC.

Do I need to apply?

If your study will be reviewed by an equivalent ethical review body then you do not need to apply separately to the DEC. For example, submissions to an NHS Research Ethics Committee, or an ethics committee from another UK university, does NOT need further ethical approval from the DEC. However, you are required to notify the DEC that such a review has taken place (see the Documents Library). Research using only archived secondary data is also outside the DEC review process.

If you are unsure if you need to apply to the DEC please contact us for advice: spsw-ethics@york.ac.uk.

Checklist (click on the box to enter a cross)

- I have answered all relevant questions of the application form.
- I have attached a data management plan (an SPSW requirement).
- I have attached a risk assessment form (an SPSW requirement).
- I have attached all additional documents that will be used to recruit participants, such as information sheets, consent forms, recruitment materials (e.g. posters or flyers).
- N/A I have attached any quantitative data collection instruments (e.g. questionnaires) the research will use.
- For student applicants:* My supervisor has reviewed and signed my application (using an electronic signature)?

Part 1: Overview of the research

1. Please provide details about the Principal Investigator (lead staff researcher or student).

Name	Lucy McTernan
Course (students only)	SPSW PhD
Supervisor (students only)	Chris Holden
Job title (staff only)	
Email address	lkm514@york.ac.uk
Telephone	07718 526027

2. When do you expect the fieldwork to start and end?

Phase One: May – September 2019; Phase Two: October-December 2019

3. *For staff:* List any SPSW DEC member who might have a conflict of interest so should not act as reviewers for the project, such as those consulted in the development of the project, or close colleagues. *A list of members can be found in the Ethics for Research section of the [Yorkshire VLE](#).*

4. What is the full title of the research project?

How does Global Civil Society operate in relation to Inter-Governmental Organisations?
 How does GCS engage with high level meetings or summits?
 How does GCS use technology to support its work in relation to IGOs?

5. Is the research funded? If so, please name the funding body(ies)

N/A

6. If the research is funded, does the funding source create any ethical concerns and/or actual or perceived conflicts of interest?
See section 4 "Funding" of the University's [Code of practice and principles for good ethical governance](#)

N/A

7. What are the research aims?

To discover current practice in global civil society – inter-governmental organisation relations, with particular reference to global summit events and technology.

8. Please summarise the research methods, listing **each** research activity (e.g. focus groups, telephone interviews, online questionnaire etc)

Ethnographic observation as a participant at the Open Government Partnership global summit, May 2019

The research seeks to examine how global civil society and inter-governmental organisations relate in the context of high-level events or summits. A number of ethnographic studies have been undertaken in relation to summits (and indeed outside or protest events relating to them), and the benefits of participant-observation in this context is established e.g. (Little, 1995) (Ollion, 2010). The Open Government Partnership is a global platform that has been deliberately designed to foster a collaborative approach between government/IGO and non-government/civil society representatives. In this its flagship summits are (supposed to be) quite unlike other global level summit events, even those that welcome civil society personnel as observers or facilitate parallel events. Participant observation of this event will therefore use tested methodology in a fresh and distinct context.

Analysis of data from (host-administered) post-event evaluation survey.

It is anticipated that the co-hosts of the Summit will be agreeable to giving the researcher access to data collected via the post-event evaluation survey (and potentially contribute to its design). This will enable a level of triangulation of observational data, and also help shape the interview schedule and prompts.

Follow-up semi-structured interviews with global civil society activists, conducted by skype or phone.

It is proposed to undertake up to 40 semi-structured interviews in the period following the Summit event. Interviewees will be selected largely from the delegate body, but may be supplemented (via networking) in a purposive fashion to ensure a comprehensive spread globally, socially and across policy areas. Where possible agreement to participate (and formal written consent) will be sought on site at the Summit, though some approaches are likely to be necessary via email. Given the participants will be worldwide, skype (or similar online video platform) will be the chosen form of communication for the interviews, though some may require phone only. The interviews will be based around a series of prompts relating to the research including; attendance at global summits – motivation and how enabled; membership/connection to global civil society networks; previous and current methods/techniques of GCS-IGO working; use of social media; use of open data platforms; resonance of global goal framework; perceived benefits of GCS-IGO engagement. The interview schedule will be refined following and as a result of the Summit ethnography and evaluation data analysis.

REFERENCES:

Little, P.E., 1995. Ritual, power and ethnography at the Rio Earth Summit. *Critique of Anthropology*, 15(3), pp.265-288.

Ollion, E., 2010. Summits of information: Advocacy officers, journalists, and newsmaking at international summits. *Qualitative Sociology*, 33(3), pp.211-227.

9. Please briefly summarise the key ethical issues or risks that you have identified in this research.

There is a risk my participation and observation of the summit may be misconstrued and perceived as conflicting or inappropriate. While personal/social vulnerability of subjects and participants is considered very low, it is possible some delegates professional roles may cause them to feel guarded or dissuade them from accepting an invitation to be interviewed. To address this an overt and transparent approach will be adopted - in keeping with the theme of the summit. Explicit permission to proceed will be sought from the co-hosts: Nathaniel Heller and the Government of Canada, including a proposal to include a short, appropriately-located post about the research on the summit website. Information sheets will be presented to all potential interviewees explaining the nature and purpose of the research.

Appropriate data handling is a key issue for this research, and each element will require a differentiated approach. Data accessed via the evaluation survey will be subject to both the data policy of the Government of Canada and the University Research Data Management Policy, and anonymised. Data collected directly via observation or interview will likewise be subject to the University Data Management Policy.

Part 2: Research participants and activities

10. Please describe the research participants taking part in each activity listed in Q8.

If your study has explicit inclusion / exclusion criteria, please list them.

Delegates to the OGP global summit under observation will include up to 3000 civil society activists and government representatives (official and political).

Follow-up interviews will be undertaken with a sub-set of approximately 40 of the above, assuming a comprehensive spread globally, socially and across policy areas can be achieved. If not, the sample will be supplemented via networking, but likewise all participants will be IGO/government or civil society personnel operating in a professional/formal capacity.

11. Approximately how many participants will take part in each activity listed in Q8.

Up to 3000 conference delegates may be observed. Delegates are present in equal numbers from governments/IGOs and civil society; all acting in a formal/representative capacity.

40 interviewees: delegates to the conference selected for follow-up interview to represent a range of policy areas (framed by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals), supplemented through networking to fill any gaps and/or pursue emerging lines of enquiry.

12. If the research may involve 'vulnerable' populations or children, please describe the ethical challenges that arise and how these will be managed.

By 'vulnerable' we mean anyone disempowered and potentially susceptible to coercion or persuasion. This may include people vulnerable through social context (e.g. homelessness, poverty); through experiences (e.g. of trauma or abuse); through learning difficulties, dementia or mental health needs; or through other factors. Please also provide details of the relevant DBS checks and/or ISA registration that have been undertaken.

All delegates to the conference are acting in a formal/professional capacity, either as a recognised volunteer representative or civil society organisation employee on the civil society side, or government

bureaucrat, IGO official or elected politician on the government side. As such none are likely to be vulnerable, and all will be expecting to be observed at some level, given that the entire programmed event will be recorded in some way, including via livestreamed coverage. Likewise, formal Steering Group meetings are all on record and transparency (as one would expect given OGP's purpose) is paramount.

It is acknowledged, however, that every participant in the Summit will be subject to some level of professional vulnerability in this context, whether constrained by policy and role as a government representative, or by, for example, concerns about future funding as a civil society representative. This will be unaffected by this research in the formal context, but it is acknowledged planned observation of the less formal aspects of the summit could be misconstrued, and every effort will be made to be open about the approach, including efforts to secure a short statement on the summit website.

13. Please describe how will research participants be identified, and who will be involved in the process?

The co-hosts will make the full delegate list available: around 2000-3000 individual registrations are expected. Registration is invited from civil society and governments of any of the circa 90 member countries and localities (and may also include representatives of aspirant member countries).

A sample of 40 of the above individuals will be selected for follow-up interview. Selection will be designed to ensure a good distribution across global regions, and between civil society and government, between genders, and between those presenting at the event and not, and use the 17 Sustainable Development Goals as an over- framework to ensure the sample includes those with a spread of policy expertise/interest.

Part 3: Choosing whether to participate

14. Please describe the process by which prospective participants will receive information about the research, including who will provide information, when and how.

If a different process will be used for different participants or different activities, please describe each separately.

The co-hosts will receive a formal letter seeking permission to proceed, accompanied by an information sheet. A skype meeting is likely to follow to confirm details.

As described above it is anticipated the co-hosts will agree to a short, appropriately-located post on the main event website stating clearly the nature and purpose of the research. It will include a contact link to invite further interest, specific questions or objections.

Potential interviewees will be approached either in person at the summit event, or by email subsequently. An information sheet will be provided, and permission sought via written or electronic signature.

15. Please describe how prospective participants will give their consent to the research.

If a different process will be used for different participants or different research activities, please describe each separately.

Written permission to proceed will be requested from the summit co-hosts.

In keeping with the open nature of the event delegates are expecting to be on the record, and this is confirmed in their registration materials and on the event website. In relation to this specific research, hosts will be asked to post a short appropriately-located statement on the main event website outlining

clearly the nature and purpose of the research. It will include a contact link to invite further interest, specific questions or objections.

Written (or electronic/email) consent will be sought from each interviewee.

16. If you do *not* envisage providing an information sheet and/or obtaining a signed (or audio recorded) record of consent, please justify and explain the measures taken to compliance with data protection legislation.

N/A

17. If research participants are to receive any payments, reimbursement of expenses or other incentives for taking part in the research, please give details.

N/A

Part 4: Research activities

18. Please describe what participation in each research activity involves (e.g. what activities, how often / for how long, with whom, in what setting)?

Co-hosts will participate in one skype (circa hour-long) meeting to confirm details of summit access.

The Summit lasts for 3 days during week beginning 27th May 2019. It is preceded by a day of academic, civil society-only and government-only events and incorporates the formal, decision-making meeting of the over-arching Steering Group of the Partnership. There is a formal opening ceremony, a number of receptions and a closing plenary. It is intended to plan to observe at least one of each type of setting/sub-event. Participants will not be asked for any additional activity beyond their own planned attendance at these.

All delegates will be asked to complete a post-event evaluation survey. While it is hoped the researcher will be invited to contribute to the design of the survey with the advantage of aligning it where possible to research themes, overall there will be no additional activity requested of participant beyond what they would have in any case expected as a delegate.

Interviewees will each participate in one hour one to one semi-structured interview conversation by phone or skype. Where possible they will be approached during the summit event itself to request the interview in principle, provide the information sheet, and seek formal written consent. Follow-up communication via email will provide the information sheet electronically and diary options for their convenience (with due consideration of time zones and office hours).

19. Please provide a summary of the headings you will use in any research instruments eg topic guide / questionnaires.

You should ensure that these headings are included within the Participant Information Sheet

Topics to be included as prompts in semi-structured interviews: attendance at global summits – motivation and how enabled; membership/connection to global civil society networks; previous and current methods/techniques of GCS-IGO working; use of social media; use of open data platforms; resonance of global goal framework; perceived benefits of GCS-IGO engagement

20. Do you think research participants may be distressed by their involvement in the research? If so, what action will you take to mitigate these?

This is highly unlikely.

21. Is any element of the fieldwork taking place outside the UK? If so, you should refer to the University of York '[Guidance on conducting research outside the UK](#)' and paragraph 2.13 of the [Code of practice and principles for good ethical governance](#) and explain how you will take account of political, social and cultural sensitivities.

The ethnography will take place in Ottawa, Canada. Canada and the UK are very similar culturally, socially and in terms of political structures, so no significant cultural sensitivities are expected.

Interviews will be online and arranged to be sympathetic to time zone and language.

Part 5: Data processing and protection

Please note: all applications include a completed Data Management Plan. You should refer to the University's guidance on Research Data Management

22. State any promise you will make to participants about how their data will be used, including in publications and dissemination, for example whether names, job titles, or direct quotations will be used, and state what protection of anonymity you are offering.

Please be aware of your Funder's requirements for data to be made available for reuse. If your funder does not have a policy, the [University Research Data Management Policy](#) should be followed. This states: 'Where possible, relevant elements of research data must be deposited in an appropriate national or international subject-based repository, according to their policies. Data should be kept by the researcher in an appropriate manner when suitable subject repositories are not available.'

A Data Management Plan (attached) has been prepared in line with the University of York's Research Data Management Policy, and, as appropriate, the Government of Canada's data management policy relating to the summit.

Interviews: in the consent form, and at the beginning of each interview, the interviewee will be told that:

- They have a choice between remaining anonymous, or having their name listed in my final thesis.
- That their words may be used in my thesis, unless specifically signalled before or during the course of the interview.
- Interviews will be transcribed to text. At the end of the project the text files will be archived, but the recordings deleted.

23. What will you do if information is disclosed to you that legally requires further action or where further action is advisable?

In this highly unlikely eventuality, I will seek advice from my PhD Supervisor in the first instance, escalating to University authorities, if necessary.

24. GDPR Declarations (please check box to confirm)

- I have considered whether any [personal](#) or [special category](#) data being collected is the minimum necessary to answer the research question(s)
- I have considered anonymising or 'pseudonymising' data to mitigate data protection risks.
- I have considered whether I need to consult with the Information Governance Office (e.g. where sharing data with third parties outside the university)
- I have considered whether the study requires a Data Protection Impact Assessment (see [here](#))

25. Are there any other specific ethical problems likely to arise with the proposed study? If so, what steps have you taken or will you take to address them?

N/A

Part 6: Signatures

I have checked this form carefully and I am satisfied that the project meets the required ethical standards.

Signature of Principal Investigator or student	Lucy McTernan
Date of submission	April 2019

For student applications

Signature of supervisor	Chris Holden
--------------------------------	--------------

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