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## **Futures for civil society: ideas, implications and actions**

**A conference organised jointly by NCVO Third Sector  
Foresight and the Carnegie UK Trust**

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## Introduction

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This is a report from a conference held on 17 July 2007 by NCVO Third Sector Foresight and the Carnegie UK Trust as part of their Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland.

This report provides a summary of the discussion at the conference. The conference aimed to explore the drivers that will shape the future of civil society, looking out to 2025. The discussion was framed around:

- **Ideas** – which drivers will have the greatest impact on civil society?
- **Implications** – what risks and opportunities will these present for civil society organisations?
- **Actions** – what actions should be taken, and by whom, to ensure a healthy civil society in the future?

Speakers at the conference included: Geoff Mulgan (Inquiry Chair), Stuart Etherington (NCVO), Kierra Box (Hands Up!), John Gaventa (Institute for Development Studies), Will Hutton (The Work Foundation), and Maeve Sherlock (Inquiry Commission member). The conference was attended by 140 representatives of civil society organisations (including VCOs, trade unions, social enterprises and umbrella bodies), academia, private sector and government.

The content of this report provides an overview of what was discussed at the event. It does not necessarily reflect the views of NCVO, the Carnegie UK Trust or the Inquiry Commission.

## What is Civil Society?

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The Carnegie UK Trust's Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland is using a broad definition of civil society based on the work of Michael Edwards of the Ford Foundation. This definition has three dimensions:

- Civil society as associational life – or the 'space' of organised activity not undertaken by the government or for private-profit business.
- Civil society as the good society – used as short-hand for the type of society we want to live in.
- Civil society as arenas for public deliberation – or processes that allow people of all ages and backgrounds to voice differing views and share in defining how diverse visions of a good society and associated actions are reconciled.

Given the context for the event and NCVO's role in this debate, the dimension of civil society as associational life was prominent in discussion. However, participants were encouraged to engage with this broad definition in mind. As a consequence, the term 'civil society' was used interchangeably by participants to refer to something voluntary and community or third sector organisations are a part of as well as being a description of what they are.

## Drivers

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*The following drivers were discussed as potentially having the biggest impact on civil society looking out to 2025. They each present questions for civil society organisations:*

- Climate change
- Pervasive technology
- Rising individualism/consumerism
- Inequality
- Disengagement with formal politics
- The rise of 'digital natives'
- Corporate power
- Cultural and religious diversity
- Pressure on global resources
- Regulation of civic life
- Fear and visibility of the security state
- Increasing importance of the human rights agenda
- Growth of well being
- Fluid work patterns

### **What are drivers?**

Drivers are major forces or trends that could positively or negatively shape the future.

### **Climate change**

Climate change is perceived to be inevitable, potentially catastrophic and inherently global. It is expected to result in increasing migration and inequality along geographical and socio-economic lines. Civil society organisations have been instrumental in raising this as an issue. The question now is what role will these organisations play in response to climate change and its consequences in future?

### **Pervasive technology**

Technology is changing the way we communicate, work and live. It is seen to be both enabling (eg of global communication and social networking) and potentially divisive (eg between those with the means and those without along socio-economic and generational lines). How might civil society utilise technology, the space it creates and its potential for local and global communication, in future?

### **Rising individualism/consumerism**

Individualism and consumerism are seen to be dominant forms of self expression. We increasingly see consumer goods and public services attempting to adapt to the desires and requirements of the individual. As a consequence we have perhaps a weaker sense of the collective or public good. This raises questions about our ability to have influence as 'consumers' and about the limits of individualism in the public arena. To what extent does civil society adapt and respond to these drivers? And, to what extent might it counter them? Does civil society have a role in mediating between the individual and the collective good? Are there aspects of this individualist/consumerist mindset that we could or should tap into in the ways we communicate and mobilise support?

## **Inequality**

Inequality is increasing both globally and domestically. The impact of many other drivers is likely to be skewed along these divisions with potentially disproportionate negative impact on the least well off. Much of civil society has emerged in response to the concerns of poverty and inequality. These factors have been strong driving forces for collective action in the past. Will they continue to be so? Is this an area where more collective action between organisations might be seen in future?

## **Disengagement with formal politics**

Formal political institutions are seen to have been weakened by declining membership (eg of political parties) and falling electoral turnout. We are simultaneously seeing a rise in single issue activism focused around specific local or global issues of concern. This raises questions about the nature of our political institutions and about the desire of people to influence those issues they most care about. Does this spell the death of ideology as a political driving force? What role does civil society have in creating space for deliberation and decision making?

## **The rise of 'digital natives'**

Digital natives are the generation who have grown up with technology at their fingertips and for whom the internet represents a significant social space. Social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace facilitate the sharing of interests and information, potentially broaden the range of relationships between individuals and bring together social and professional spheres. Through digital arenas there is also the capacity for mass mobilisation. To what extent are these arenas able to alter as well as strengthen existing attitudes? How will these new social spaces impact on face-to-face interaction and the skills this requires? Do these spaces create opportunities for civil society or might civil society organisations have a role in providing alternatives through face-to-face interaction and hands-on experience?

## **Corporate power**

Corporate power is increasing with the advance of larger multi-national and global corporations. Large businesses are no longer marketing their products as straight forward goods but as lifestyle choices designed to appeal to the post-modern individualist. Notions of corporate social responsibility have lead businesses into territory previously dominated by the state and civil society. They are creating brands and corporate identities which appear, at least, to be value based. Some who have succeeded in creating great wealth in the corporate world are creating foundations (eg Gates Foundation), which may have significant influence over the future funding environment. Is the potential convergence between sectors a reality? Is it an opportunity to create new relationships and move on from some of the old sector stereotypes? Do we need to be conscious of where shifting power lies and to track it so that we can maintain influence?

## **Cultural and Religious Diversity**

Cultural and religious diversity is also increasing. In the UK and Ireland we have a society that is both secular and multi-faith. This is potentially contributing to a fractured sense of social norms. We see some fragmentation (eg single faith schools) and division along socio-economic lines which has, in some cases, resulted in social tension and unrest. We also see some faith organisations actively reaching out to the wider community. How does this impact on civil society? How might faith-based organisations, as part of civil society, be part of the solution?

## **Pressure on global resources**

The pressure on global resources such as fuel and oil is likely to have significant impacts in the future. For example: rising prices for petrol may force us to produce, source and shop more locally; and power generation in future may be more locally controlled utilising low carbon biomass technology. Scarcity might also be a cause for conflict within as well as between local and global communities. How might civil society respond both to scarcity and its consequences? Might this challenge individualism? Or prompt greater localism?

## **Regulation of civic life**

High expectations and the decline of deference have led to decreasing levels of trust in institutions and organisations of all forms. People are much less willing to be 'represented' and require greater accountability from political and public institutions. This and an inherently risk-averse public sector culture has led to increased regulation of public sector institutions and civil society organisations, particularly those engaged in contractual relationships with the state. Inhibition and lack of innovation are seen as the unintended consequences of this shift. Is this the case? Are we seeing more blurred boundaries between sectors? What impact might this have on civil society? What impact might regulation have on the future of voluntarism?

## **Fear and visibility of the security state**

The visibility of the security state has increased and may increase further in response to the threat of international terrorism. On a more local scale, fear of crime means we may see more gated communities rising up. The concern here is the extent to which these factors place limits on our freedom and increase our isolation. What role might civil society play in militating against this, defending civil rights or creating space for interaction?

## **Increasing importance of the human rights agenda**

The combined Commission for Equality and Human Rights is due to be officially launched in October 2007. In a world where we face conflict and shifting power relationships and experience a diverse, pluralist society where multi-culturalism and migration are on the increase, the human rights agenda is gaining profile and importance. Both in mediating between the needs of national and international security and individual freedom, and as a unifying concept creating some level of

common expectation and shared values, the human rights agenda is critical. What role might civil society have in this?

### **Growth of well being**

As parts of society become more affluent people start to trade-off between financial achievements and 'happiness achievements'. There is a value shift toward well-being. This may in future drive more people toward businesses which offer something in terms of corporate social responsibility. What implications does this have for civil society? What impact might it have on how, and whether, people are prepared to give time and money to 'good causes'?

### **Fluid work patterns**

Work patterns have become more fluid both in terms of style of work (eg with more people working from home) and the length of any one period of employment. This has an impact on the extent to which we conduct collective dialogue in the workplace, from 'water-cooler' conversations to formal union activity. What implications might this have in the future both within civil society organisations and civil society as a whole? Does this fluidity contribute to a weakened sense of the common good?

## **The future of civil society**

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*Discussion of the implications of the drivers suggested four ways in which the nature of civil society may change in the future:*

### **Blurred Boundaries**

The boundaries between sectors, as traditionally perceived, are almost certainly becoming more blurred. For example: between the public sector and civil society organisations through contractual relationships; between civil society organisations and business with the rise in prominence of corporate social responsibility; and between business and the public sector as new philanthropists bring significant resources to social agendas. This is potentially changing the space within which each sector operates. The question is whether we fight to protect our space or whether these blurred boundaries present opportunities to learn from each other or work in innovative and effective new ways. It might be that in future there is greater convergence between particular types of organisation. There is perhaps a need for better understanding of the relationships and interchange along the boundaries between these sectors.

The blurring of boundaries is also changing the nature of the space for public deliberation and potentially the role of civil society organisations within it. Arguably we are seeing the privatisation of some public spaces. We are definitely seeing a great deal more debate conducted through the medium of technology. We should perhaps consider the role of civil society organisations in creating and shaping these spaces in future and the ways in which we might utilise technology to do so.

## **Complexity**

The complexity of the issues that civil society, as a whole, is facing is increasing. Greater diversity, migration and inequality all contribute to this. Civil society organisations have always played a part in stepping in to fill gaps where the needs of vulnerable individuals and/or communities are not being met. Generally being closer to people's experience helps civil society organisations to be more nimble and flexible than the state or the market in responding where needs arise. In many cases these needs are created by the inadequacy of the state or the market.

To some extent these gaps present opportunities for civil society to step in and to do better. Society's increasing disillusionment or distrust of government might make the likelihood of this greater in future. Civil society organisations are also in a strong position to collect the stories which provide evidence of the need for change, be this in relation to the state or business activity. How do we balance our instinctive responsiveness with our ability to effect change through campaigning and advocacy? Might this balance become more critical in a complex and uncertain future? Where the issues at stake are the result of actions by the private sector should we be going direct to them in future rather than lobbying government to effect change in business behaviour?

## **Globalisation**

Several of the more powerful drivers, such as climate change and inequality, are global in nature. These are areas in which civil society organisations have played a significant role in the past both in raising awareness and in advocating and campaigning successfully for change. The question is, what role will civil society organisations play as the impact and importance of these issues intensifies in future? Will they be at the forefront of campaigning and responding to these issues as they have in the past? To what extent do these drivers require a change in global governance? Does this response require us to develop a stronger sense of global citizenship and if so how? Might these drivers themselves require, or create potential for, collective action between civil society organisations and across traditional sector boundaries as well as across geographical ones?

## **Localism**

Conversely, some of the drivers might lead us toward greater localism. Our lack of trust in political institutions and the representative nature of democracy potentially drives us toward more local participative processes, more active citizenship and opportunities for direct engagement in decision making within and between communities. How can we respond to this in an era of greater diversity and individualism in which we have less sense of common values and language for the debate. How do we reconcile this and single issue activism with a sense of the common good? Who takes this responsibility? And where does the power lie? Are we seeing a shift from hierarchical to more networked institutional structures? And what does this mean for the way that we work?

## Views and opinions

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*A number of views, opinions and examples of how civil society is changing emerged from the panel debate which closed the day:*

### **Global NGOs**

The UK has a great many volunteers working on development and overseas issues, perhaps more than any other country. NGOs in the Northern hemisphere have huge challenges in terms of their legitimacy and their ability to make space for small local organisations in the places they work overseas. In the future it is going to be less about 'us' and 'them' and more about common global challenges resulting from shifting power and climate change. Climate change doesn't know North and South boundaries – our response will need to bring people together across geographical boundaries.

### **Inequality**

As well as increased connection resulting from globalisation, facilitated by technology, there is also disconnection between the 'haves' and 'have nots'. There are still a huge number of people living on less than \$1 a day. Unless we radically rethink the ways we operate and address issues of power and inequality, the least well off will be left behind and will continue to experience enormous desperation both here and around the world. The response to inequality is an essential role for civil society and one that we can't be complacent about. We really do need to consider our response if civil society is not just going to wither away.

### **Democratic power and advocacy**

In terms of accountability to communities there is a huge amount that we in the North can learn from others in the South. Effective civil society has a distinctive role as a source of democratic power. In Latin America for example civil society provides a source of democratic power over the state which is less evident here.

A recent event bringing together champions of participation from emerging democracies around the world, considered how we might make use of their experience in the design of 'double devolution' in the UK. The event offered inspiration from Brazil (participatory budgeting), India and the Philippines (co-governance). Participants recognised the UK government's attempts to opening up space for local participation from above but were also struck by the lack of bottom up voice from civil society seeking and promoting real engagement of local people.

We potentially have a crisis of democratic legitimacy in the UK due to the perceived inadequacy of our representative democracy. But we are also in a very different position from these other countries in that our political institutions are comparatively strong. To a greater or lesser extent they are able to draw us in. How do we develop our role as a source of democratic power on this basis? How can we maintain our autonomy and our campaigning role and not just get sucked into service delivery?

## **Professionalisation**

The third sector's increasing role in public service delivery has already had an impact on the way many organisations are perceived. There is a risk in this environment that innovation and the reputation of organisations as 'good causes' may be diminishing – where the sector simultaneously loses recognition for its successes and gets more publicly blamed for its failures. Is the increasing professionalism and dominance of the larger contracting organisations, some with relatively low membership/legitimacy, the cause of our perceived complacency? Is this undermining the sector's advocacy role? Is risk aversion, both in the public sector led operating environment and the often 'alarmist' media, inhibiting voluntary and community action?

Competition for funds and for contracts is pitching third sector organisations against each other. As some grow and become more formal are they squeezing out the smaller charities? Is competition the best way for third sector organisations to operate – or is it potentially damaging our effectiveness? Can we really measure our successes in terms of growth or are there more fundamental things that need to be driving our actions in future? Might we see divergence between public service delivery organisations and grass roots, advocacy functions in future? Could civil society organisations potentially end up campaigning against each other as some deliver services and others advocate on behalf of communities and users?

## **Young people**

Every generation is more idealistic when young. Idealism has become a pejorative term and young people are too often dismissed as being naive. What idealism is really about is seeking the ideal solution and attempting to meet it at any cost rather than getting caught up in budgets, restrictions and bureaucracy from the outset. This is why we need to involve young people at every level. There is every likelihood that this generation of young people, like those before them, will be less inclined to challenge the status quo by the time they are in a position to lead the debate. To counter this we need, over the next 20 years, to enshrine the notion of democracy as a tool available to everyone as a fundamental right. We need to enshrine this through the education system so that young people understand and believe in civil society as a space for deliberation and an opportunity to get their voices heard. This will enable the current generation to make changes which will allow the idealism of subsequent generations to make a difference.

## **Citizenship education**

Citizenship is necessary to the survival of a thriving political and civil society. Citizenship needs to be about education but also about practical action; supporting and encouraging activism where young people have a passion. It is estimated that a third of schools are teaching citizenship 'well'. We need citizenship education not just to be statutory part of the curriculum, taught equally well across schools, but also to be more practical, akin to active campaigning, involving outside groups, NGOs and local community organisations. Involving young people in practical projects where they engage in local civil society (eg clearing play areas, consulting with older people in inter-generational projects) enables them to learn what citizenship really is in a meaningful way more likely to influence their actions in future.

A good example of citizenship education from Milton Keynes involved students in a project about slavery and its connection to world trade and fair-trade issue. The students made a film with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Making the links between these issues had an impact on student's understanding and their subsequent choices as consumers. Good citizenship education is not just about classroom learning. It is also about projects like this which require resources.

### **Individualism and common values**

Our increased individualism, where life's goal is the pursuit of individual satisfaction, has undermined the sense of the common good even though we know logically that this can't work for all of us all of the time. We may know we can't all simultaneously achieve our own happiness (eg when there are forms of happiness which diminish the happiness of others and/or which you can't get on your own) but we don't necessarily know how to address this. In earlier centuries UK civil society/society could base its dialogue on a set of relatively common assumptions about morality, based on a sense of Christian values largely being 'a good thing'. This provided a moral code of sorts which we no longer have. Our lack of a shared moral perspective can mean we lack the language and capacity to converse about ethical questions and the common good.

### **Public goods**

There is a tension within individualism and the democratic entitlement of every individual to both express what they want and to get what they want. The most important challenge in the next 20 years will be how we, as a community, provide collective public goods in a world of growing inequality and increasing individualism. Collective public goods are an essential pre-condition of a good society. Undermining our capacity to do this undermines 'the good society'. This is a significant challenge. There is a degree of individual entitlement but this also needs to be arrested so that we can contribute to public good in a collective way. Some parts of civil society are good at this. Others are individualising, single issue pre-occupations which can make it harder.

### **The language of the civil society debate**

It is important as the debate about civil society goes forward that we are careful about the language that is used and the distinctions that we make between what is public, civil, civic and social. There is some disagreement about the use of these terms and where the boundaries between them might be in future. One school of thought defines:

- 'public' as universal and representative, relating equally to all citizens through representation and crucial accountability (eg central government);
- 'civic' which is a sub-set of public at a more local level that is deliberative (eg local government or civil society organisations that are accountable in some way); and

- 'social' which has little or no concept of wider accountability (eg networks and single issue groups undertaking collective action).

The other view, set out by Jeffrey Alexander in 'The Civil Sphere' recaptures the civil/civic movements of the previous centuries and sees us move towards a universal notion of solidarities, rights, claims and recognition which is entwined with the notion of democracy and representative institutions. This model rejects the idea of the civil/civic being a world of multiple disparate organisations entirely divorced from a universal 'public' realm. A number of questions have been posed about whether civil/civic action is moving toward a single public space of argument, deliberation and decision making or whether our vision of a good society is of a much more plural (or fractured) view.

### **Space for deliberation**

Civil society is about creating space for deliberation. It is not just about our relationship with the state but with other citizens. It is about reaching agreement rather than majority rule. This requires dialogue with people who are different from us, who we may not agree with and maybe don't like. Civil society organisations can play an important part in this because they are intrinsically collective; based on the principle that you can achieve more together than you can separately. We need opportunities to interact and engage with the messy, noisy process of deliberation that gets things done. The conversation and the process can be life affirming and good for us. If civil society as a whole is to make a difference, we need to be more prepared to work across boundaries to achieve better outcomes, rather than maintain selfish focus on who made the difference. There needs to be dialogue across these boundaries which values difference whilst finding common ground.

### **Broad Based Organisations**

There are some interesting examples of Broad Based Organisations (BBOs) eg Citizens Organising Foundation, TELCO (The East London Citizens Organisations) and London Citizens. These BBOs are made up of networks of organisations (eg faith organisations, schools, students organisations, union branches, residents associations and charities) which come together to work for the common good despite their differences. They work across boundaries to respond to both the market and the state (eg to campaign for better wages).

Spaces where people can come together and talk across difference is often the precursor for collective action and meaningful change. The process of deliberation is not necessarily about agreeing but about knowing and understanding each other better.

## **Rosa Parks**

An example of this was described in an interview with Rosa Parks. Prior to her significant part in the civil rights movement, Rosa participated in a workshop run by an organisation created to provide space and opportunity for poor communities to come together. The workshop discussion, which was about the race divide, involved both black and white participants. Rosa Parks' memory of the event was nothing to do with the content but with the fact that others listened to her with respect which she felt gave her dignity. The rest, as they say, is history!

Wherever spaces exist that allow for deliberation across difference we should embrace and widen these. Not all civil society organisations are very good at this. We need to be aware that some parts of civil society are not about tolerance and have no interest in getting on with people they don't agree with. Conversely, there can also be a tendency toward conviviality within voluntary associations, where people actually just want to come together, get on and have a good time. This is not necessarily conducive to the process of debate and deliberation.

Creating space for deliberation might be a struggle at times but it is not the role of the state or the market either. The challenge is to find a multiplicity of spaces in which we can associate and come together, ideally not just within our own community but across community boundaries.

## **Faith and faith-based organisations**

The UK is both secular and multi-faith. Our shared language for ethical debate has been diminished in a post-modern confusion where individualism rules. Faith organisations can play a part in response to this challenge where we can't assume a shared language but need to have a shared dialogue to form the basis of a world in which we want to live.

There are examples of faith centres and faith based-organisations opening their doors to the wider community for activities that are not about worship. There is some mileage in this role, more as a centre or hub for the community, that churches would have played in a more mono-theistic age. One thing that religious centres can offer is a sense of parish or geographical community. However, the role of these organisations in bringing people together should not be over estimated. Some have no interest in this role. Even those that are will tend to be at their best where they have most expertise (ie catering for the needs of their specific faith community). Where funding is only available for broad based activity for the whole community this can become problematic. No faith organisation can be totally inclusive of all people all of the time. It is too much to ask of such value based organisations.

## **Business Sector/VCS – Convergence?**

Some businesses are becoming more like civil society organisations, or at least marketing themselves as such. There are very good business reasons why commercial organisations and public quoted companies want to manage their

reputation in a world of 24/7 media. At the same time we are seeing VCOs trading more and adopting more business methods. Those charities that operate in the world of contracting inevitably start to look more like businesses. These parts of the VCS and the corporate world are potentially converging. However, there is divergence where public quoted companies are being taken over by private interests including private equity companies whose sole interest is the pursuit of profit. These companies are likely to become worse employers while others may become more like those parts of the VCS that contract.

### **Trade unions**

If union membership is a proxy for civil society in the workplace then it is not very healthy, although this may be about to change. Even in the public sector, where membership of trade unions is strongest, it is only around 40%. In private sector service industries it is as little as 5%. Those unions that have done well in recent years have been those that have been less ideological about what they do. They have seen themselves more as civil society organisations, representing members to create a good work places, rather than political organisations confronting capital, in a Marxist sense, as part of a labour movement.

### **Autonomy/Distinctiveness**

If we consider the public good it would suggest that civil society should perhaps be much bigger than it is. This might in future mean greater convergence between the public and private sectors and civil society. If we truly are seeing greater convergence between different types of organisations and different sectors, then what is the distinctive role of civil society organisations, or the third sector, within civil society? Why should these organisations maintain themselves? Proposed research, to look into the effectiveness of the third sector, may help to spark greater debate about what third sector organisations or civil society organisations are really good at. This might, in turn, lead to a re-discovery of our voice role over that of service provision. We may discover that we have a notion of the public good, the common good, that is more important. Might we in future only consider doing separately those things that we can't do better together?

### **Global citizenship**

There are frequent suggestions that where there is a democratic deficit or market failure civil society can step in to fill the gap. But there is also very real fear that the more we do this and become like other sectors, the more we lose the set of values being expressed here. That is, the view of civil society as a place where people come together around some sense of values, democracy and social justice and challenge and hold other institutions to account.

In this climate, the revitalisation of civil society comes when we begin to talk about global citizenship and global issues. We have examples of civil society organisations challenging beyond self interest where it has been on a global stage like Make Poverty History, which engaged many thousands of people in debate, not just about a collective good but about the good of the people at the bottom of that collectivity.

Civil society has an essential role in raising questions about equity and justice. Advocacy is part of our role in the 21st century as a source of democratic power. If we think about democracy as something more than a set of institutions and received rights, we see that all through history civil society has been instrumental in changing the nature of democracy. At the beginning of the 20th century there wasn't a single country in the world, including the UK or US that could claim to have what we now think of as democracy (ie universal suffrage). This change didn't come about when institutions gave up power but when civil society campaigned for it.

If we project forward to how democracy might look at the end of this century, we see perhaps that it could and should be more inclusive. The frontiers between participative and representative democracy could shift and we might move from a national to a global sense of citizenship. These frontiers are about expanding our notion of rights. As before, these changes will only come from organised civil society expanding the meaning of democracy and social justice rather than from elected representatives and corporations deciding to give away power.

## **Actions**

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*A number of areas were identified for action. Each of these raises its own set of questions:*

### **Collaboration and positioning**

What is the potential for VCOs and civil society organisations more broadly to collaborate more? Where are there opportunities for us to work together better? How might we position ourselves to have more positive collective effect? For example, how might the VCS respond collectively to climate change? Should this be the territory only of environmental organisations or do we all have a responsibility to lead by example?

### **Participation and empowerment**

What role do civil society organisations have in championing participation and providing voice for marginalised individuals and communities? Where do we create space for, and facilitate, dialogue across boundaries (geographical, socio-economic, race, gender etc.)?

What shift might organisations need to take to move from 'doing things to' their users or clients to one where they are 'working with or for'? Might user-led organisations and those which empower individuals and communities to take action be the ones that are most emblematic of the future?

### **Influencing and advocacy**

How important is our role in advocacy and in influencing those in positions of power? Are we really in a period of complacency? Should we be more keenly aware of the ability of those with power to inhibit or close down debate? How can we ensure this critical role is resourced in an increasingly competitive funding environment?

### **Tracking power**

Are we conscious of shifts in power (eg between the state and the private sector)? Should we be more concerned with where power lies? Are we in a position to consider the implications of this? What power does the VCS itself have? How well is it utilised? How well is it shared? Might the foundations of the, so called, new philanthropists be the emblematic organisations of the future? What would this change?

### **Educating and engaging young people**

How do we encourage young people to understand and embrace civil society? How do we ensure they have the skills and the language to participate? What role do families, businesses, schools and VCOs have in this? How might we work together to ensure future generations have the means and the opportunity for collective participation?

### **Get the language right**

Are we clear about the language of civil society? How can we make the civil society debate more accessible? What other aspect of our language might need to change (eg use of jargon, acronyms and patronising terms) to encourage more constructive debate and deliberation in general?

### **Continuing the dialogue**

If this debate is to go further and make a meaningful difference then we need to maintain the dialogue. Might those participating in the process of these events keep the conversation going and 'recruit' others to it. Can we use the opportunities presented by technology to do so?

### **Greater connectivity**

Are we utilising technology effectively? Are there ways in which we should be exploiting the opportunities of greater connectivity? Do we have the skills and the understanding to do this? And, are we aware of the potential and the limitations of technology as a facilitator of dialogue, deliberation and practical action?

### **Better regulation**

What needs to happen within the regulatory environment to ensure that it encourages community action and deliberation? How can we address safety and security issues without stifling dialogue and innovation? Are there aspects of the regulatory environment which inhibit effective collaboration? Is the Charity Commission adding to the regulatory burden or helping to make it more proportionate? What degree of transparency and regulation is necessary for civil society organisations to be trusted and effective?

## Identifying common purpose/values

Are there things which make VCOs distinct from those in other sectors? How important is it that we understand and identify our common values? What scope is there for us to work together and to be viewed as the 'first sector' in future?

## Creating global democracy

Is a greater sense of global citizenship and global democracy essential in responding to the major drivers (eg climate change and inequality)? How can this be brought about? What role do civil society organisations have in advocating this and making it a reality?

## Further reading

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Analysis of drivers shaping the future of civil society:

- *Voluntary Sector Strategic Analysis 2007/08* (NCVO: September 2007)  
[www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/publications](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/publications)
- Two reports documenting the findings of the futures work of the Carnegie UK Trust Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society will be available in early October 2007. Both reports will be available at  
[http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/civil\\_society](http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/civil_society)

Guides for strategic planners/scenario thinking:

- *Looking out: how to understand your organisation's environment* (NCVO: July 2007)  
[www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/lookingout](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/lookingout)
- *Picture this: a guide to scenario planning for voluntary organisations* (NCVO: December 2006)  
[www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/picturethis](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/picturethis)
- *What if? The art of scenario thinking for non-profits* (Global Business Network: 2004)  
[www.gbn.com/ArticleDisplayServlet.srv?aid=32655](http://www.gbn.com/ArticleDisplayServlet.srv?aid=32655)

## Further information

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**NCVO Third Sector Foresight** helps voluntary and community organisations to identify and understand the strategic drivers that may impact on them, and provides tools to help organisations transform this understanding into robust strategies that can directly improve their effectiveness.

[www.3s4.org.uk](http://www.3s4.org.uk) (launching October 2007) | [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/3s4](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/3s4)

NCVO is the umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in England. NCVO works to support the voluntary and community sector and to create an environment in which voluntary and community organisations can flourish.

In 2006 the **Carnegie UK Trust** launched an **Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland**. The goals of the Inquiry are to:

- Explore the possible future threats to and opportunities for the development of a healthy civil society, looking out to 2025.
- Identify how policy and practice can be enhanced to help strengthen civil society.
- Enhance the ability of civil society associations to prepare for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

The Inquiry will last around 20 months, starting in November 2006.

For more information about the Inquiry please go to  
[http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/civil\\_society](http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/civil_society)