

Global Perspectives 2019

Let's Make Lemonade – Legitimacy and Impact in Times of Scrutiny

Outcome

The 11th Global Perspectives conference took place on 30 October-3 November 2019 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It brought together an international audience of up to 120 participants from national and international civil society organisations (CSOs), foundations, governments and business. Under the framing of the proverb “If life brings you lemons – make lemonade!” and with the title “Let's Make Lemonade - Legitimacy and Impact in Times of Scrutiny”, the conference offered a platform for discussing these burning issues. Presentations, panel discussions, work sessions and peer-to-peer exchange offered an effective platform for open exchange, high-quality conversations and intense networking.

Day 1: The Changing Environment

Jane Muigai, Founder/Director of The Toolkit iSkills and AB Albrechtsen, CEO of Plan International, both answered the question of which ‘lemon’ they had recently received - and how they made lemonade out of it, opened the conference. Jane stressed that extreme capitalism did not lift millions out of poverty and that we as civil society actors need to be accountable in order to be the engine of social change. AB highlighted the so called safeguarding crisis as one of the sector's lemons, the challenges in facilitating youth movements as another and asked whether we as large CSOs are using our power correctly. She finished by stating the need for new values around participation, transparency and engagement of every stakeholder.

Next, the International Civil Society Centre launched its inaugural Innovation Report [Civil Society Innovation and Populism in a Digital Era](#). With 14 case studies showcasing civil society organisations from throughout the world, the report:

- Defines key features of each populist context, and summarises digital dimensions,
- Analyses and categorises each case study, with key takeaways from each,
- Provides an overall set of key recommendations, inspiring think pieces about the future, and key related resources.

After a presentation and panel discussion on the value of the report, participants got a chance to engage with four case study authors from [Operation Libero](#), [All Out](#), [RNW Media](#) and [Video Volunteers](#).

Day 2: The Role of CSOs

Holding this year's Global Perspectives in Ethiopia was aimed at supporting and learning from the Ethiopian experience over the past 18 months. The panel ‘Ethiopia: CSO Impact in a New Era’ put the spotlight on the context of their work in the country. Panellists shared insights of the inspiring recent transformations, but also challenging situation which Ethiopian civil society is currently in. That is, with an environment offering greater freedom comes pressure and expectations on organisations to deliver. Asked how international organisations can support them, Ethiopian colleagues said ‘funding’, ‘exchange’ and ‘technical support’ but they also asked international colleagues to ‘be with us in the trenches’.



In the following workshops, participants explored how various organisations are seeking to strengthen CSO resilience and impact. Colleagues from [PartnersGlobal](#), [Hope-Based Communications](#), [NEAR](#) and [Development Initiatives](#) shared their work and learnings, focusing on new approaches such as using hope-based communication, placing resilience in the heart of organisational culture, improving our partnerships with local organisations and using data better as a basis for our decision-making.

Under the title ‘Re-envisioning Legitimacy and Accountability’, the next panel kicked-off the discussion on how CSOs can put integrity, accountability and legitimacy at the core of their actions. The conversation noted that there are various potential sources of legitimacy and that CSOs sometimes grow their own lemons. Participant asked how CSOs can live their organisational values and how to be accountable to our constituents, partners and staff. In the following workshops, new approaches to integrity and accountability were discussed and presented by [Accountable Now](#), [Oxfam International](#), [Accountability Lab](#) and [Direct Impact Group](#).

As a final part of this day, conference participants were invited to join the historic moment of Islamic Relief Worldwide presenting their Gender Justice Declaration in the buildings of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

Day 3: The Unwritten Future and Next Steps

On our last conference day, we asked the question what will determine the future legitimacy and impact of CSOs. We heard four lightning talks making the case for CSOs to focus more attention on the climate crisis, the digital revolution, the growing youth population as well as their connectedness to the societies we want to impact. In the following fishbowl session, participants discussed these and other developments. It was concluded that in order for CSOs to have impact and be legitimate in the future, we need to invest in good leadership – and we need to work together.

In a final round of workshops, organisations presented their learnings under the title ‘Being Ready for a Volatile Future’. We heard from [Family for Every Child](#), [Plan International](#) and [TechSoup](#) on what the drivers of change are, what they mean to civil society and how civil society can get ready for the future. Finally, four ‘pitches’ of collaborative projects aiming to increase legitimacy and impact were presented. More information on these can be found in the [blog entry](#) about Global Perspectives at the Centre’s website. Have a look!

Evaluation

Participants predominantly rated the conference as “very good” (46%) or “excellent” (40%). They especially enjoyed the facilitation, the workshop sessions and the networking opportunities.

‘Seeing the openness of NGO leaders to talk about challenges was really significant and interesting. The way they talked about the role of international organizations in the future, and how trends are impacting that, how they connected it to values and the ‘how’ (not just the ‘what’) was really profound. If the world could hear that message, it would aid legitimacy in a big way.’ – Participant feedback