



Official Newsletter of the Global Social Observatory
Geneva, Switzerland

Ninth Issue, June 2015 (bimonthly)

Welcome to ninth issue of the [GSO](#) newsletter. The GSO aims to stimulate multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral dialogue and information sharing. The newsletter has three sections providing: updates on GSO activities; commentary on developments in international organizations and NGOs involved in addressing multi-stakeholder engagement; and upcoming events of interest.

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I. GSO Activities

Outcome of the Special Session of the GSO General Assembly 23 June 2015

The Global Social Observatory held its annual General Assembly on Tuesday, 23 June 2015, with a special session on “Challenges and Opportunities for Cross-cutting and Multi-stakeholder Partnerships: Implementing the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Solutions Agenda of the Climate Change Summit”. GSO Executive Director Katherine Hagen presented the rationale and contours for an action plan that is being developed in association with the United Nations Office at Geneva. The GSO President Deborah Vorhies welcomed lead discussants Salman Bal (Senior Political Coordination Adviser for the United Nations Office at Geneva), Catherine Bell (President of Graduate Women International), Stuart Orr (Head of Water Stewardship at WWF-International) and Peter Poschen (Director of the Enterprises Department of the International Labour Organization). The ensuing dialogue with GSO members and friends provided useful guidance on implementing this action plan.

The proposed action plan (available [here](#)) is an ambitious one that includes a basic assessment of existing partnerships and a process for developing and evaluating four new partnership possibilities. The action plan also lays out the anticipated

outcome documents from this project encompassing the common characteristics of partnerships; a basic methodology or framework for building successful partnerships; information and assessment on specific opportunities for partnerships; highlighting the role of Geneva-based networks to support partnerships; and a preliminary data base for best practices on partnerships.

Participants at the special session came up with a set of 15 recommendations that will help to focus the proposed action plan. See a full summary of these recommendations [here](#). The overriding message from the participants is that the GSO action plan should be implemented incrementally. As one anticipates the outcomes of the Post-2015 Development Agenda Summit in September and the Climate Change Summit in December, the GSO should focus first on doing a thorough assessment of existing partnerships/platforms. The GSO appreciates the many helpful suggestions and offers for sharing information made by participants at this special session and encourages others to contribute to the process. Check out the GSO website [here](#) for the evolving concept note and action plan.

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The GSO Statement on Non-State Actors at the World Health Organization, in association with the Global Health Council, May 2015

The GSO worked closely with the Global Health Council on addressing the issues associated with the proposed framework for engagement with non-state actors at the World Health Organization. The GHC submitted the following statement to the 2015 World Health Assembly to reflect its agreement with the GSO:

We appreciate the ongoing effort by the member-States of the World Health Organization to develop

a contemporary framework for engagement with the many different non-State actors that are addressing global health issues. It is important for the WHO to interact constructively with these many different non-State actors. We have two concerns with regard to this effort.

First, the proposed typology of non-State actors is proving to be difficult to take into account the many different types of non-State actors. A preferred approach is to recognize that there is far greater diversity than the four categories that have been proposed in the draft framework for engagement while at the same time acknowledging that all non-State actors have interests that have the potential to contribute or detract from the mission of the WHO. This can be laid out with illustrative criteria that are not entirely dependent on whether an entity is operating for-profit or not-for-profit or something in between.

The second concern is that transparency and the disclosure of relevant interests should be expected from all actors, but this should be laid out as a basic policy for implementation by the WHO Secretariat. It is important to define the criteria for determining the types of interests that need to be disclosed, but it should not be necessary to establish an elaborate machinery for implementing the criteria. Nor should such practices as secondments or other forms of collaboration be prohibited outright. The WHO should be able to evaluate opportunities for collaboration based on transparency and disclosure of interests.

We applaud the WHO's efforts and look forward to a successful outcome that will strengthen WHO's engagement with non-State actors.

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GSO and the IFUW at the 2015 International Labour Conference

GSO Executive Director Katherine Hagen was pleased to represent the International Federation of University Women (transitioning to a new name of “Graduate Women International” but not yet officially recognized in UN circles) at the 2015 International Labour Conference. Here are excerpts from her address to the ILO Plenary:

We wish “to emphasise the role of **women in the economy** as a key priority for the ILO in this pivotal year of 2015. Women’s economic empowerment is an essential condition for sustainable development and social change..... The gender gap in the global economy is significant, and we note that half of all women in the global workforce are employed in vulnerable employment, often unprotected by labour legislation. The significant work at this Conference on a comprehensive strategy for moving workers from the informal to the formal economy should be an important benefit for women and girls in the future of increasingly formalized work settings, with the concurrent rights and social protections associated with this transition....

The IFUW also commends the ILO for its deliberations at this Conference on the role of small and medium enterprises for job creation and economic growth. Here, too, there is a gender gap that merits a global conversation. Research shows that male-owned businesses are still significantly ahead in terms of growth and financial return. As of 2008, average revenues of majority women-owned businesses were only 27% of the average of majority men-owned businesses. This needs to change.

The IFUW therefore recommends:

- States must provide equal access to lifelong, safe, quality education and training up to the highest levels for all girls and women, including

secure learning environments. All educational policies should take into account and provide for the needs of marginalised and at-risk groups, including women with disabilities and those from indigenous, minority or migrant backgrounds or those displaced by war;

- Girls should be actively encouraged to study in the areas of STEM and information and communication technologies (ICTs), which can improve the competitiveness of states by increasing innovation. States should also foster partnerships with the private sector to develop mentoring and scholarship programmes in STEM and ICT;
- Educational institutions should design tertiary education curricula to incorporate flexible learning options including part-time, evening or online classes;
- All States should formally adopt and enforce legislation to prohibit gender discrimination in the workplace, with particular focus on applying the principle of equal pay for work of equal value; and
- Girls and women must be provided with access to safe and decent labour conditions.
- In conclusion, we encourage full integration of these issues regarding women at work into the four “future of work conversations” proposed in the Director-General’s report. The IFUW stands ready to support this effort.

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Become a GSO member

The GSO’s mission is to promote and provide a forum for multi-stakeholder dialogue on contemporary social issues. Sign up for individual membership on our [website](#).

Some of our services include:

- Providing a neutral and inclusive forum for dialogue and collaboration

- Contributing to mutual understanding of diverse perspectives
- Facilitating a broadened search for solutions
- Promoting action and partnership building
- Serving as a clearing house for research on social issues

Benefits of GSO membership include:

- E-mail alerts of and invitations to all GSO events
- Receipt of all GSO meeting reports and papers
- News alerts on matters and issues of concern to ongoing GSO projects and initiatives.

GSO members are invited to take part in the annual General Assembly and hear first-hand oral reports from GSO officials and project leaders, and participate in discussions on GSO priorities.

If you are interested in becoming an individual member, please sign up [here](#), or [contact us](#).

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II. Commentary on International Organizations and NGOs

The Power of Empowered Women 2015

The Group of Women Ambassadors in Geneva hosted a major side event at the Human Rights Council on 23 June 2015, with a focus on how empowered women can have an impact on peace and security issues. The side event consisted of a panel that included the first woman to lead a United Nations Peacekeeping Force, a former Minister of Defense of Finland, the former Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, the first woman to be appointed High Commissioner for Human Rights and a Presidential Adviser to the Peace Process in the Philippines. They were joined by a scholar and advisor in major international peace negotiations who has studied and promoted the involvement of women in peace negotiations. The dialogue

highlighted the challenges of breaking through the barriers to participation and leadership in peacemaking and security and the interplay of gender awareness and recognition of accomplishment independently of any gender identity. See the programme for this event [here](#). Our appreciation to US Ambassador Pamela Hamamoto, who spoke on behalf of the Group of Women Ambassadors at this event and to the Acting Director-General of the United Nations at Geneva, **Mr. Michael Møller**, who announced the launching of “International Geneva Gender Champions”, a new leadership network in support of “The Future She Deserves” initiative spearheaded by Ambassador Hamamoto.

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Global Futures - Geneva Perspectives

Our friend and colleague Beris Gwynne at World Vision International, who has worked closely with the Global Social Observatory on many issues, organized an impressive “first event” on “Global Futures – Geneva Perspectives” – in association with the United Nations Office at Geneva and the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies from 23 to 25 June 2015. We participated in the opening dinner event that featured several prominent “futurists” from around the world, as well as the co-sponsors. The focus was on global “mega-trends” of the 21st century, with an important message that they are different in both scale and speed from the trends that characterized change in the 20th century. We look forward to the outcomes of this first event in identifying specific, achievable options to seed change and facilitate new ways of working together among different stakeholder groups.

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The 2015 Global Ethics Forum

Our friend and colleague, Christoph Stückelberger, the head of Globethics.net, and his team hosted the

2015 Global Ethics Forum in Geneva on 25 to 27 June 2015. Christoph worked with the Global Social Observatory to integrate an ethics perspective into the emerging community of practice on multi-stakeholder alignment in the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement. The participants at this Global Forum engaged in lively debates about the merits of enabling everyone to “lead together” versus different types of responsible leadership and personal leadership characteristics. Cultural diversity was evident in the debates – from China, India, Indonesia, South Africa, Tanzania, Nigeria, Russia, Greece, Turkey, the UK and Switzerland. We were encouraged to see this Forum proposing several action items, including a working group on gender and sexual ethics, a comparative analysis of responsible investing in different cultural context, and innovative ways to build capacity for understanding ethical conduct among small and medium enterprises. See the programme for this event [here](#).

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Human Rights in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Another side event at the 28th session of the Human Rights Council was oriented to gaining a better understanding of the ways in which human rights concerns are being integrated into the Post-2015 Development Agenda and of the importance of ensuring a human rights approach to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The side event, with special guest Ambassador David Donoghue, one of the co-facilitators of the intergovernmental negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, was organized by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Geneva Academy, in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

One of the key points made by Ambassador Donoghue, and reinforced in an informative

[background report](#) prepared for FES on contributions of the UN Human Rights Council to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is that human rights concerns have been well integrated into the SDGs. As Ambassador Donoghue emphasized, however, the challenge for human rights now is in the implementation of these SDGs. The main interest in the dialogue with Ambassador Donoghue was on the role of the new approaches at the Human Rights Council to monitoring compliance with human rights standards, and especially its system of “Universal Periodic Reviews” of individual countries’ compliance with human rights obligations, that many in Geneva are proposing as a model for the follow-up and review of the SDGs.

The advantages of the Human Rights Council approach were also highlighted by the current Chair of the Human Rights Council, Ambassador Joachim Rucker from Germany. The UPR is a strong, transparent, inclusive and credible mechanism. It facilitates the recognition of other human rights priorities, including non-discrimination and disaggregated data. But most importantly, it recognizes the participation of civil society in the review process. Ambassador Donoghue responded with assurances that implementation will require a vast number of stakeholders, and a global partnership will be needed to be entrusted to implement the new framework. Ambassador Rucker, for his part, commended the dialogue with Ambassador Donoghue as part of the process to highlight human rights in the SDGs and targets and the UPR as an appropriate mechanism. See more on the FES/Geneva Academy event [here](#).

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The ILC Adopts a New Standard on Transitioning from the Informal Economy

ILO constituents have grappled for decades with guidance on how to deal with the informal economy through symposiums, recurrent discussion, and even formally adopted “Conference conclusions” (in 2002). Noting that the informal economy was an increasing phenomenon around the world, they opted in March 2013 to take this up a notch to constitute a “double-discussion” standard-setting exercise starting in 2014. Concerns to be addressed included workers’ welfare, reducing unfair competition with enterprises in the formal economy, and revenues for national social protection systems. It was, nonetheless, agreed that the standard would take the form of a “Recommendation” and not a legally binding “Convention”, but this it still deemed to be “a new historic labour standard”.

The meeting room was always full to overflowing; there were numerous NGOs representing aspects of the informal economy monitoring and informally weighing in with the official tripartite constituents. StreetNet International and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) were the most visible, but many others were there as well.

The new standard is based on twelve principles, some of which are procedural – that is, they recognize the importance of diversified and tailored approaches, specific national circumstances, different and multiple strategies to be applied to different segments, but also the importance of coherence and coordination. There are specific principles regarding human rights and “Decent Work” WITHIN the informal economy, gender and non-discrimination and vulnerable groups. Perhaps most importantly, the principles include the “preservation and expansion of entrepreneurial

potential for creativity, dynamism, skills and innovative capacities” of workers and economic units in the informal economy and the “balancing” of incentives and compliance with regulations, but also the importance of preventing and sanctioning any “deliberate avoidance of or exit from the formal economy” for tax evasion or the application of social and labour laws and regulations. See the text of the new standard or “Recommendation” [here](#) and an ILO press release on its adoption [here](#).

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The ILC on SMEs and Labour Protection

There were close linkages on the important standard-setting exercise on transitioning from the informal to the formal economy to the deliberations in the other policy-oriented committees of this year’s International Labour Conference. Thus, the general discussion on small and medium enterprises in one committee reaffirmed that the bulk of SMEs can be found in the informal economy but also employ two out of three workers generally. So they are the route to formality, and the conclusions adopted by the ILC through this committee reaffirmed the importance of “SME promotion” as a means to “create more and productive employment and decent work for all”. Meanwhile, the recurrent discussion on labour protection in another committee also took note of the links to the informal economy and the need to accommodate minimum wage setting, working time arrangements, occupational safety and health policies and maternal protection to SMEs. See the SME conclusions [here](#), and the labour protection conclusions [here](#). And see the Director-General Guy Ryder’s closing remarks linking these accomplishments to the 1919 to 2019 Centenary Future of Work Initiative [here](#).

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The World Health Assembly on Air Pollution

The GSO hosted webinars before and after the 68th World Health Assembly, and we encourage readers to take a look at them on the GSO website here. We include news only on one issue from the WHA in this issue of the newsletter – the issue of linking health to the important climate change issue of air pollution.

Many NGOs are calling the WHA resolution on health and air pollution to be a “[landmark resolution](#)” or the “[most high level health action on air pollution to date](#)”. These remarks come from the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC). The United Nations Environment Programme adds that this resolution is a “[pivotal decision](#)” of the WHA. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change repeats this same press release from UNEP on its website [here](#).

The resolution on air pollution, WHA68.8, 26 May 2015, calls for 13 specific actions, including the development of a “road map” to present to the 69th session of the WHA in May 2016. More formally called the resolution on *Health and environment: addressing the health impact of air pollution*, WHA68.8 was triggered by evidence from a WHO report that air pollution is the greatest health risk of the 21st century, with both indoor and outdoor air pollution contributing to over 7 million premature deaths per year. The resolution recognizes the two largest culprits of outdoor air pollution to be coal-fired power stations and diesel from transport. On this front, the resolution calls for air quality monitoring systems and health registries to improve surveillance from all illnesses related to air pollution. Of course, indoor air pollution has different sources, related to cooking with solid fuels on open fires or traditional stoves. The resolution calls for

developing new technologies for clean cooking, but also heating and lighting technologies. The WHO is called upon to facilitate the international transfer of expertise, technologies and scientific data.

Finally, the resolution mandates active health sector engagement in the international climate change negotiations leading to the Paris Summit. It also calls for the establishment of air quality monitoring systems and health registries to improve surveillance for all illnesses. See the final resolution [here](#).

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2015 Expo Milano

After many years of preparation, the City of Milan opened Expo Milano 2015 on 1 May 2015 featuring *Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life*, a huge complex of exhibit halls and open spaces some distance away from downtown Milan but closely linked to this major industrial city in the heartland of Italy. We are looking forward to our first visit to Milan Expo in early July. We expect to survey the various sub-themes, including nine food-related clusters, five thematic areas, over a hundred national pavilions, five corporate pavilions and thirteen NGOs included in a civil society pavilion. Critics (including Pope Francis) express dismay at the ostentatious displays, while supporters (including the United Nations) suggest that considerable efforts have been devoted to connecting the project to major food security issues, including the Zero Hunger Challenge of the United Nations and the Rome Declaration on Nutrition.

We commend the efforts by the sponsors to integrate poverty eradication, equity and sustainability solutions into the overall programme. Although the UN has traditionally had a presence in these quadrennial expositions, it is doing something different this time. The UN has 18 different installations horizontally throughout the campus

instead of having a single UN pavilion. We understand that the 18 locations are identified by a symbolic giant “blue spoon” and feature various elements of UN engagement - the priorities of the *Zero Hunger Challenge: United for a Sustainable World* and other related UN priorities, such as gender equality and women’s empowerment. Check on the UN website for Expo Milano [here](#). Several global NGOs are also participating in the Expo, including ActionAid, Oxfam, Save the Children, WWF International and Fairtrade International.

The Rome Declaration on Nutrition refers to the Milan Expo as “an opportunity to stress the importance of food security and nutrition, raise public awareness, foster debate, and give visibility to the ICN2 outcomes”. The three UN Days there will be on World Environment Day (5 June), World Humanitarian Day (19 August) and World Food Day (16 October), but the UN calendar for Expo Milano has lots more on it. Check it out [here](#). Expo Milano 2015 runs through 31 October 2015.

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III. Upcoming Events

GSO events

- GSO Management Committee, 16 September 2015
- GSO support for Post-2015 Development Agenda, 25 to 27 Sept 2015, New York
- GSO Panel on Post-2015 Development Agenda, WTO Public Forum, 30 Sept to 2 Oct 2015

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Key upcoming events of interest to the GSO

- HRC [29th Session Human Rights Council](#) Geneva 15 Jun - 3 Jul
- ECOSOC [High-level Political Forum](#) New York 26 Jun - 8 Jul

- WTO [Fifth Global Review of Aid for Trade](#) Geneva 30 Jun – 2 Jul
- UN Human Rights Council [Open-ended Inter-governmental Working Group on Transnational Corporations and Other Business Entities with Respect to Human Rights](#) Geneva 6 Jul – 10 Jul
- UNCTAD [Conference on Principles and Rules for Consumer Protection](#) Geneva 6 Jul – 10 Jul
- UN [Civil Society Forum on Financing for Development](#) Addis Ababa 11 Jul – 12 Jul
- UN [Third International Conference on Financing for Development](#) Addis Ababa 13 Jul – 16 Jul
- UN [International Business Forum on Financing for Development](#) Addis Ababa 14 Jul
- UN and ILO [Child Labour Platform](#) Geneva 16 Jul – 17 Jul
- UN [Intergovernmental Negotiations on the Post-2015 Outcomes Document](#) New York 20 Jul – 24 Jul and 27 Jul – 31 Jul
- WTO [General Council](#) Geneva 27 Jul – 28 Jul

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IV. Who We Are

The Global Social Observatory (GSO) is an international organization founded in the Canton of Geneva, Switzerland in April 2004. The mission of the GSO is to initiate dialogue on social issues in order to encourage leaders to engage in a broadened search for solutions and policy coherence. This service is based on a participatory process in a neutral space that brings all interested parties together across national boundaries to identify solutions and policies that are coherent. These solutions can then contribute to policy-making at the governmental and intergovernmental levels. Visit our [website](#) for regular news and project updates.

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