

Ken Wiwa's Speaking Notes from Lecture on October 20, 2004 Entitled:

Globalization, the Pervasive Business Agenda, and Civil Society

I want to thank Keith Seel, everyone here at the Institute for Nonprofit Studies and all of you for coming out to share this story. I'd like to start by focusing on the Ogoni campaign for social justice in Nigeria by way of teasing out some of the salient points relevant to the issue at hand this morning. Throughout, but especially in the second part of my presentation, I will be stepping back to take a global view and perspective on the business agenda, Non Profits and Civil Society.

So let us start in Ogoni. My community in southern Nigeria has become something of a footnote in social justice history. In the weeks after my father's execution, the Times of London declared that the story of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni was a morality tale of the late 20th century. How that came to be offers some lessons and insights for the relationship between the business agenda, NGO's and civil society.

The Ogoni number an estimated 500,000. We live on 404 sq miles of a gently sloping fertile and oil rich plateau of the Niger River Delta in southern Nigeria. We have lived in this place for anything from 400 years to since time began, depending on which of our histories, oral or written, you subscribe to.

The Ogoni – and we say Ogoni rather than Ogoniland or the Ogoni people – to emphasize the symbiotic relationship between land and people – The Ogoni were never involved in the Atlantic slave trade, we were largely a community unto ourselves until the British arrived on the scene in the early 20th century. Our eventual absorption into the British colony of Southern Nigeria was without our consultation, but had been decided by the stroke of a pen at the treaty of Berlin in 1884.

During the 19th century, the Niger Delta had been a lucrative space for the British, especially its palm oil merchants. But it was the discovery of another kind of oil, crude oil, that really altered the dynamics of the relationship between the British and the inhabitants of the Niger Delta.

Oil was discovered in Nigeria in 1956 and in Ogoni two years later. Since then an estimated 900 million barrels of oil has been pumped out of my community. But instead of benefiting from this resource, the presence of oil companies has proved to be a curse for the people and the land. A region that ought to be as rich as a small gulf state is underdeveloped. Pipe borne water is still non-existent, the electricity supply is barely functional, schools and health services barely fit the description. The rudimentary provision of social services is a poor return for a community that has contributed an estimated 30 billion dollars worth of oil to Nigeria's treasury.

And to compound my people's misery, the activities of a reckless oil industry have jeopardized the future of the land. While the oil industry made vast profits on Ogoni resources, it paid little attention to the impact of their operations on my community until my father began to draw the world's attention to the industries record in Nigeria.

"Thirty-five years of reckless oil exploration by multinational oil companies has left the Ogoni environment completely devastated", my father wrote. "Four gas flares burning 24 hours a day over 35 years in very close proximity to human habitation; over one hundred oil wells in village backyards; and a petrochemical complex, two oil refineries, a fertilizer plant and oil pipelines crisscrossing the landscape above the ground have spelt death for human beings and flora and fauna."

My father accused Shell and the Nigerian government of genocide. Shell, the major operating company and partner in Ogoni oilfields vehemently denied the charge of genocide, claiming that the ecological situation in Ogoni cannot be described as devastation. But Shell had never carried out a proper environmental impact assessment, much less a social or cultural impact assessment of its activities in Ogoni. Nor had they ever facilitated or agreed to submit to an independent audit of their operations. Like many multinationals around the world, Shell took advantage of the democracy deficits in countries like Nigeria to exploit the natural resources, degrade the environment and abuse the human rights of local inhabitants.

In 1990 my community collectively agreed that we were not getting a fair deal from the Nigerian government nor the oil industry. That was when my father formed MOSOP (The Movement for

the Survival of the Ogoni People). In his vision of a non-violent grassroots organization, Ken Saro-Wiwa hoped that MOSOP would not only sensitize our people to what was happening to the land, the people and our culture, but MOSOP would also mobilize the community to stand up for our rights. So successful was MOSOP's work in the community that on January 4th, 1993, an estimated 300,000 Ogoni, that is three out of every five Ogoni, came out in support of the aims and ideals of MOSOP in a peaceful protest march. Shell was declared persona non-grata and served a quit notice to stay away from Ogoni until the company paid back rents and cleaned up its operations. Shell later pulled out of the area claiming that its workers had been attacked by the community.

In a normal civil society or democracy, one might have expected the governing authorities to step in to mediate between the multinational and the Ogoni. But Nigeria in the 1990's was not a civil society nor was it a democracy. In 1993, Nigeria was a kleptocracy administered by a military dictatorship.

A military dictatorship that depended on billions of dollars of oil revenues each year, these petrodollars afforded it the wherewithal to suppress internal dissent and buy immunity in the international community.

And that was what it did – sending in an internal security task force to suppress MOSOP to enable and I quote “oil production to resume”.

Now to cut a complicated and painful story short, MOSOP's leaders were harassed and repeatedly detained over the next year. In April, 1994, Ken Saro-Wiwa and scores of MOSOP activists were arrested, tried on trumped up murder charges and executed on November 10, 1995.

Now I want to come back to the role civil society in the North and South played in the genesis of this story taking it from a local concern to a global one, but we have to set the scene for that migration.

By the time Ken Saro-Wiwa formed MOSOP in 1990, it might have been his final tilt at the windmills of a cause he had been championing for 30 years. In that time he had written numerous letters, pamphlets, books and newspaper articles, yet nothing had changed in Nigeria. The Ogoni were hardly known in Nigeria, let alone the global context. Yet the end of the 1980's was a propitious moment to form a grassroots movement.

Let's go back to 1989. Nelson Mandela was about to be released in South Africa. The me decade was about to come to an end and the Berlin Wall was about to come down. The beginning of the end of the Soviet bloc gave hope that the Cold War that had locked the world in proxy wars, propped up all manner of kleptocrats in the name of détente, would give birth to a new world order, free minority peoples imprisoned in Communist and neo-colonial empires. It was the end of history we were told.

Moreover in Europe and to a lesser extent in North America, a green movement that had grown out of a public disquiet with the consumer excesses of the me decade, promised to deliver the acceptable face of capitalism. Some people even promised us a kinder, gentler America.

The Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 was the first social justice of Olympics of the modern era. As they converged under the Amazonian canopy, it was, as far as I can see, the first time that so many of the worlds champions of their various causes – fair trade, environmental protection, human rights, debt relief, indigenous rights – was gathered in one place. It was a time when networks and alliances were consolidated, the five ringed circus was formed.

I remember watching my father rush around trying to secure an invitation to Rio – there was some debate as to how we would present the Ogoni cause – was it a cultural survival crusade or an environmental struggle? Was it an indigenous rights issue?

It was all of that and more of course. The truth was that we were part of one world as we liked to say in the struggle, everything and everyone is connected. In this giant multilateral, interconnected network a butterfly flapping its wings in the Amazon can cause a tidal wave in

Tokyo. Is it still possible in our networked planet to characterize the Ogoni struggle or any other struggle for social justice as a single, isolated issue?

Around the same time as he was trying to get in on the Rio ticket, Ken Saro-Wiwa came to London looking for support. The list of organizations he visited was a testament to the one size fits all character of the Ogoni struggle: Ken Saro-Wiwa traveled to the offices of Greenpeace, Amnesty International, Cultural Survival. All of these organizations had a particular mandate that meant tailoring the Ogoni struggle to fit their briefs. I remember sitting in on some of the discussions and hearing different versions of the same story and wondering at what seemed to me like an unnecessary duplication of time and resources.

Ken Saro-Wiwa never did get to attend the Earth Summit but the meeting in Rio turned out to be a watershed for the world. Within a few years the optimism that had drawn musicians and film stars to Rio would be dissipated as the convention on bio-diversity got bogged down in bureaucracy and the multinationals began to fight back.

First it was the MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investment). Although the business agenda was defeated by a determined coalition of the kind of networks that had been connected at Rio and consolidated by the emerging new technologies, it was clear that neo-liberalism was on the march.

The murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa was an early warning that despite the impressive global campaign by an international coalition of organizations, NGO's and groups, [ad lib here about who came of board] despite all the interest groups and strong pressure of public opinion, the politicians did not act. They did not act because the business agenda was deemed more important than the human rights of minority people in the international community.

The defeat of the MAI proved to be a minor setback but out of the shadows of the MAI, the specter of the WTO emerged. While business was resolved to impose its agenda on the world, the largely underground movement and networks that had been mobilized by the campaign against the MAI, spilled out on to the streets of Seattle to shut down the WTO meeting in 1999.

For the next two years, globalization and its discontents fought a running battle that criss-crossed the globe from Quebec City, Gothenberg, Genoa and Cancun, meanwhile the dynamic between NGO's, government and business was being reconfigured by a Trojan Horse called CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility).

Lets step back a little and try to take a look at the relationship between NGO's, business and government. Lets take each in isolation first.

Now I gather that NGO's were invented in 1945; the phrase came into use with the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 with provisions in Article 71 of Chapter 10 of the United Nations Charter for a consultative role for organizations that are not governments or member states. The vital role of NGO's and other "major groups" in sustainable development was recognized in Chapter 27 of Agenda 21, leading to revised arrangement for a consultative relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations.

Governments on the other hand have been around for a long time and we needn't bother defining this item except to introduce the question whether an international order based on the notion of state sovereignty is still relevant in the 21st century?

I ask this because many feel that business which almost predates the State or at least the State as we know it, is clearly now more powerful than most governments. Of the largest 100 economies in the world today, 51 are corporations. The sales of Ford and General Motors combined are greater than the combined GDP of sub-Saharan Africa while those of the six largest Japanese trading companies are almost as big as all the nations of Latin America combined. Royal Dutch Shell's revenues are greater than Venezuela's gross domestic product – which means that on the same scale of comparison, Wal-Mart is bigger than Indonesia and General Motors is larger than Ireland, New Zealand and Hungary combined.

It is these kinds of power imbalances – much of which has occurred in the last 30 years – that has called into question the classic model with NGO's on one side, usually the left – government in the middle and business to the right of the political spectrum.

I suspect the reality has always been far more complex – especially in a world where corporations are not averse to funding their own NGO's, but for awhile, and for now, the classic model of interaction between NGO's, government and business still stands.

Then in the mid 1990's as the stand off between business and NGO's hardened, CSR was thrown into the mix.

The notion of business as good corporate citizen was not new in the 1990's, but some on both sides began to recognize that the standoff between business and NGO's was a zero sum game.

There are many examples of business working in partnership with NGO's – I think of Coca-Cola's initiatives on HIV/AIDS in South Africa. I am sure there are more but my mind is blank this morning. There are pros and cons to the arrangement for both sides: the danger that the concept is used simply to get businesses to stump up money, which is more like taxation than partnership. Companies risk wasting time and money, and possibly divulging sensitive information which could be misused. NGO's risk their reputation if a partnership goes wrong. For businesses, an NGO can bring knowledge and expertise, but also credibility. For an NGO, business brings money, but more substantially a chance to change the way that particular business, and possibly a whole industry, operates.

The big question for you is this:

What is the role of an NGO in the 21st century?

Should it be outside the tent, a watchdog for public opinion, a guardian of civil liberties against the growing power of the state and business interests? Or should it be a link in civil society, a

function of the networked society? Should we differentiate between GONGO's, QUANGO's and DONGO's? and if so, what are the implications for international, regional and local policy?

Now before I address these big questions, I want to just bring us up to date in the global context.

Let me just say for the record that I am deeply suspicious of CSR. I say this because I believe that while businesses must be encouraged to become good corporate citizens, the notion that businesses can self-regulate flies in the face of reality. The business of business is to seek competitive advantage and when coupled with the pressures of stocks and pension funds often means competitors are engaged in a race to the bottom. And in that race, the earth's human and natural resources are often regarded as collateral damage. Especially when corporations cannot be held accountable for their actions.

Naturally my views are influenced by my personal experience of business and I will admit that while many businesses exhibit good, even exemplary behaviour, I must insist that NGO's and civil society remain wary, skeptical and vigilant. The nature of competition means that only a tough regulatory framework and one with real teeth can prevent the kind of abuses that is all too routine around the world.

For NGO's that still means that naming and shaming is a good strategy, but more importantly, I think NGO's have to do some shape shifting because the current world order is becoming ever more hostile to civil society in the North and South.

9 – 11 really did change the world. I used to be skeptical of that phrase – like many people from the South, I found it unbearable that the loss of 3000 lives would be described in cataclysmic terms when a jumbo jet of children die every day in Africa from preventable diseases. But I had no idea back then that the United States and many governments would use 9-11 and security loopholes as cover to launch a sustained attack on civil society and civil liberties around the world.

And right in the cross fire of those attacks have been NGO's. Before I came out here I did some searching around on the internet and came up with a random selection of news items on the threat to NGO's this year:

Government Justifies Civil Society Probe (October 12, 2004)

The European Union questions the legitimacy of accusations in a Rwandan government ordered investigation on "civil society" groups and individuals with a "genocide ideology." Critics say the government enforces laws to suppress freedom of expression while the government claims these groups and individuals promote ethnic divisions. (*Integrated Regional Information Networks*).

NGO's Have Critical Role to Play in Development (August 26, 2004)

A *Financial Gazette* article criticizes a Zimbabwean bill that calls for increased regulation on NGO activity, including a ban on NGO's that have foreign funding, in order to comply with the "general well-being of the sovereign state." The author emphasizes the importance of NGO's in monitoring global justice issues and asserts the bill conflicts with citizens' constitutional rights.

NGO's Warned They May Be Next

On May 27 this year, *Moscow Times* reports that Russian President, Vladimir Putin, accused NGO's of serving the interests of "dubious group and commercial interests" while neglecting problems faced by the people. NGO's, criticizing Putin for curbing media freedom and trying to pass a bill banning most public demonstration, see the remarks as a warning to refrain from opposing the Kremlin.

New Restrictions Imposed on NGO's Working in the South

On May 28 (*Integrated Regional Information Networks*) reported that the emerging Sudanese government and local authorities are imposing ad hoc taxes and restrictions on work permits for NGO's operating in the country's South. The new limitations affect the organizations' budgeting and hinder their ability to perform effectively.

Officer Says Army Tried to Curb Red Cross Visits to Prison in Iraq (May 18, 2004)

On May 18, 2004, *the New York Times* reports that the US army tried to restrict International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) inspections of Iraqi prisons after the organization observed abuses on two unannounced check-ups in October, 2003. Following the visit, the ICRC submitted a report highlighting the abuses to which the military responded that inspectors should make appointments before visiting the prisons.

NGO's Attack Government on Restrictive Bill (April 20, 2004)

The Ugandan government pushes for a controversial new bill that requires NGO's to operate with a valid permit, but bars registration of NGO's intending to challenge government policies, plans or public interest. NGO's urge parliamentarians to reject the proposed law, arguing it will expose them to government censorship. (*Monitor*)

Amnesty Barred from Guantanamo Trials (February 24, 2004)

(*Guardian*) The US defense department has refused to allow Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Human Rights First to attend trials of al-Qaida suspects held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The defense department argues its decision was based on "limited courtroom seating and other logistical issues," while the NGO's insist the move is intended to "shut out experienced trial observers who could provide the public with independent analysis."

Clamp Down on Dissenters? (February 12, 2004)

(*Utne*) In a new move against activist organizations, John Ashcroft's Justice Department issued a subpoena requiring Drake University to surrender all records relating to an anti-war conference held on their premises. Critics argue that the government's move to investigate NGO political activities exceeds its authority and is designed to intimidate other activists.

Mossawa Center Opposes Measures to Restrict NGO Funding (January 15, 2004)

The Israeli government is to pass a law that restricts funding from foreign countries for Israeli NGO's and individuals. The *Mossawa Center press release* argues that the law gives authority to the NGO register to "ban funds for organizations which seek to change a position or public opinion in Israeli society."

Muddying the World's Conscience (January 9, 2004)

(*Guardian*) The “war on terror” reformulates many aspects of world politics and the international NGO sector. In the US and elsewhere, ultra-conservative think tanks have recently set up units to monitor and investigate the NGO sector. NGO’s operating in “war on terror” conflicts feel pressured to either act as “sub-contractors for the super power or pull out.”

The backlash against NGO’s is testimony in my mind to the fact that they have been growing stronger and more influential in the last decade. It has been suggested that the growth of NGO’s arises from what has been described as democracy deficit, that in an increasingly globalized world without effective or at least democratic global government, NGO’s have often stepped in to fill the breach. So are NGO’s leading us towards an “international civil society” or do they represent a dangerous shift of power to un-elected and un-accountable special interest groups?

The accountability argument has been the basis of a sustained attack on the institutions of civil society in the last five years. Last week I was at a conference where I heard one politician complaining about the Quebec riots, suggesting that those inside the tent were the elected representatives of the people, yet it was the people on the outside who were making all the noise on behalf of the planet.

I will come back to this issue of representation in due course, but let us consider the main thrust of criticisms of NGO’s for a moment.

1. Accountability: who do they speak for?
2. The Single Issue Problem: International civil society is not a homogenous forum of altruistic groups. For all their strengths, NGO’s are special interests, and they often suffer from tunnel vision – judging every public act by how it affects their particular interest. Not all single-interest groups may be the best guarantors of long-term success. They are rarely obliged to think about trade-offs in policy to consider broad, cross-sector approaches to development. They are often organized to promote a particular goal rather than the broader goal of development.

3. NGO's are human or at least they are full of human people with human strengths and weaknesses. They can be just as bureaucratic and corrupt as governments and business.
4. Some NGO's presence may inadvertently prolong or complicate wars, where they end up feeding armies, sheltering hostages, or serving as cover for warring parties.
5. Some aid groups propagate western values. NGO's that carry out population or birth control projects are particularly controversial: some are paid to carry out sterilization programs in the poor parts of the world, because donors in the rich world consider there are too many people there.
6. NGO's presence brings in western living standards and purchasing power, which can transform local markets and generate local resentment.

Now, despite all these attacks on NGO's, what I find interesting is that businesses and governments still find them useful as long as they are prepared to play ball:

Listen to what Colin Powell said in 2001: "just as surely as our diplomats and military, American NGO's are out there serving and sacrificing on the front lines of freedom – NGO's are such a force multiplier for us, such an important part of our combat team."

Those comments have since become official policy especially after Andrew S. Natsios, of USAID told relief groups last year that they were "an arm of the U.S. government if they received American financing." If aid organizations did not show a stronger link to American foreign policy, he threatened to tear up their contracts and find new partners.

And it is not just the US where aid has become tied to trade and foreign policy. Canada's new foreign policy review seeks the best way to integrate aid, trade and foreign policy. In short, the fears of what conspiracy theorists that AID was merely an arm of neo-imperialism seem to be coming true before our very eyes.

The consequences have been devastating for Aid organizations. Civilian humanitarian workers as never before have become fair game because their fiercely held neutrality – long enshrined in international law – is no longer taken seriously. Since then, nine aid workers of the United States Agency for International Development have been killed in the Darfur region of Sudan. Returning Taliban assassinated five relief workers of the unquestionably neutral Doctors without Borders in Afghanistan in June. A Taliban spokesman said they were killed because they were considered spies for the United States.

With all these critiques of the NGO system and attacks on field workers it is clear that the future for NGO's is now more uncertain and even hostile in both the North and South especially since 9-11. Setting up an NGO is now so fraught with bureaucracy and red tape. I am told that many of the NGO's that were incorporated and given charity status 20 or 30 years ago would not pass the draconian decrees that have been enacted to fight the war of terror. Governments that fear the whip of NGO's can now run red tape around organizations that don't approve of and audit them out of town.

Of course NGO's in the South have always faced official obstruction not to mention the ultimate sanction – actually I am aware that I am supposed to align my presentation to the issue of the differences between NGO's in the North and South, but I have to confess that I don't have the competence to do that nor do I see that as a primary area of concern.

What I want to speculate on though, is my sense that NGO's, like everyone else, have to do some introspection, have to re-configure their identities to adapt and survive in a world that has changed since the concept of the NGO's was invented.

Sociologists like Manuel Castells, political scientists like Saskia Sassens and Benedict Andersen have all confirmed in their different ways, that we live in a new world order. Whether you agree with the underlying premise of the Networked society or not, there is no doubt that the world in 2005 looks very different from the world in 1945. The death of distance, jihad versus MacWorld – voguish book titles speak to the perceived wisdom that the world has outgrown the institutions that govern it as well as the history that produced the map of the current globe.

Salman Rushdie predicted in 2000 that if the 20th century had been a struggle between communism and capitalism, the defining struggle of the new age would be between terrorism and security.

Rushdie's prediction of course came true on 9-11, but went on to take an unforeseen turn. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, how were we to know that fourteen years later, on February 15, 2003, millions of people around the world would come out to demonstrate for peace and protest the war on terror? In hindsight, there is a clear line from 1989 – 2003. By bringing down the Wall, we were actually dismantling the artificial borders that have described the world order since 1945.

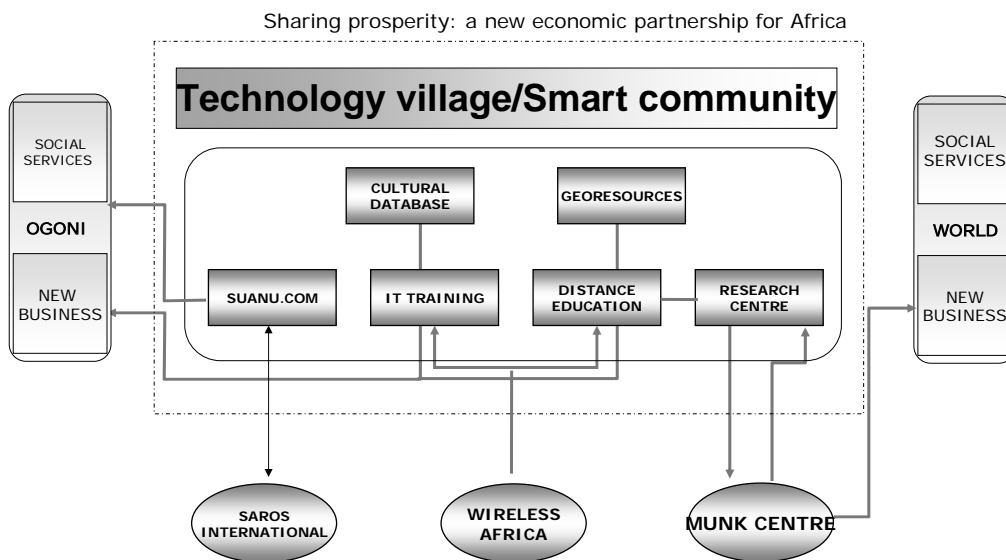
Whatever name you know it by - the other superpower - global justice movement – or civil society, is a reality that is still trying to find its identity and its place in the concert of global institutions and international law.

Now the question is, how does all this look from the ground? How do all these changes affect the way communities look and think and organize themselves? I think of myself as an Ogoni, both my parents were born in the community, I was not but that was an accident of war. However, my sense of being Ogoni, of being from a particular place is challenged by technology that enables me and many of my generation to travel more in one year than our grandparents did in their entire lives. Moreover, the shape of my life now means that it is possible for me to remain an Ogoni even if I live 6000 miles away for two thirds of the year. But rather than disconnecting me from my roots, technology also connects me in a way that was not possible five years ago. I can now talk to my grandfather just by dialing through to his cell phone in the village. He still doesn't have running water or electricity, but he has a cell phone. That is called progress.

Anyway, the fact that he doesn't have running water but he has a cell phone is actually important because he can communicate that to me and I can tell you. I can continue to connect you to what it means to be Ogoni in 2005, so that you can tell your friends and they can tell their friends. You get my point? Six degrees of separation.

Now, these pathways of information dissemination cut across national boundaries and are, to my mind, redrawing the map of the world in ways which mean that we have now entered a world in which the old borders, the old axioms, the old rules have changed. The world we live in is different yet the same. So how will these paradoxes that govern our lives affect institutions like NGO's? How can they adapt to remain relevant and in tune with the changing world?

I have some answers, or should I say observations, but they are mostly tentative and speculative. Some are being forged out of practical experience and I like to believe that we are all on a learning curve in this room – even those who have been invited to dispense the benefit of their alleged wisdom. So I hope that you will be able to provide me with some insights after your deliberations. But before we break for that, I want to share with you some of my ideas and vision.



NGO's, communities must reformat themselves, reinvent themselves to face the new realities. Nostalgia for a past that never was is only useful in terms of inspiring an idea. We have to engage with new realities, see ourselves increasingly as part of a MESH, of networks that stretch across borders, exist as virtual as well as physical entities. We need to build those alliances that cut across jurisdictions, work under the radar and security imperatives of the old

world order. Do as the multinationals do, not as they and their proxies in government say. We need to tap into the energy and ideology of the Internet, of groups like open source network. Because another world is not just possible – it is imperative.



Globalization, the Pervasive Business Agenda and Civil Society

With Ken Wiwa

Terminology

NGO — Non-Governmental Organization

GONGO — Governmental NGO

QUANGO — Quasi NGO

GRINGO — NGO with a symbiotic relationship with a government.

PANGO — Party-affiliated NGO (used mostly in relation to Latin America)

DONGO — Donor-organized NGO (by government, UN, or private)

BINGO — Business NGO that has taken on corporate trappings even if not directly backed by businesses.

INGO — International non-governmental organization

IGO — Intergovernmental organization (such as ILO)

CSO — Civil Society Organization