

one that runs through localities and is not predicated on the existence of global institutions. The engagement can be with global institutions, such as the IMF or the WTO, or with local institutions, such as a particular government or local police force charged with human rights abuses. Theoretically, these types of global politics illuminate the distinction between a global network and the actual transactions that constitute it: the global character of a network does not necessarily imply that its transactions are equally global, or that it all has to necessarily happen at the global level.

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At the same time, the new information and communication technologies are not automatically going in that favourable democratic direction. We should remember that finance also uses such technologies, and it succeeds in raising the level of concentration of wealth, which is not very democratic.

The technical properties of electronic interactive domains deliver their utilities through complex ecologies, not only through the technology itself. The particular social, political, economic aims of actors make a difference. And these aims may have little to do with the technologies used per se. Finance is not about these technologies, even though it is completely dependent on them. The logic of finance is not the same as the logic of the computer engineers and scientists who designed the hardware and the software that is used by financiers. Social networks such as Facebook are completely dependent on such technology although they are not about the technology itself.

Civil society and political networks vary enormously in their aims and uses of the technology. It is impossible to do justice to this enormous variability here. At this point, I just want to bring up two aspects. One is that, in the hands of civil society groups, the technology demonstrates to what extent it is a mutant – it gets used and combined with an almost a limitless range of aims. Just think of the variety of civil society networks in Berlin. Women in Kabul or women in Dharavi, Mumbai's vast slum, each have several networks, and so is the case across cities and neighbourhoods worldwide.

But there is a second critical feature of the lives of these technologies in civil society. There is a serious concern among some of these networks with the technology itself. This makes clear to what extent much of the development of such technology is now in corporate hands that have in mind, first of all, the interests of their clients – corporations, financial firms, and mass market firms. ■

## GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY IS A NEW PLAYER



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I believe that different nation states invariably look for situations where global arrangements can best harmonize with their nation's real needs. The failure of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to advance beyond its original agenda, particularly during the Doha Round, is a reminder that, in today's multipolar world, nation states are less willing to cede their national interest to global agreements that do not also advance their real interests.

Another example of this difficulty is the current status of negotiations connected with climate change. Most scientists and analysts around the world consider the Copenhagen Summit last year a failure, and things do not look any more promising for the upcoming Climate Change Summit in Cancun. If there is one issue that nation states should be rallying around and cooperating more closely on it is climate change, where a failure to reach a solution endangers everyone. Yet, it has been difficult to achieve consensus at the global level even on this issue.

**The civil society has an important role to play in this particular context, especially as state power becomes multipolar and not just centered in the United States of America.** When a global movement seems to be headed in a problematic direction, it will mobilize and influence the position of nation states. And when governments seem to be headed in an appropriate direction, movements in general will follow them, albeit critically, as was the case with the Earth Summit and all the different UN Summits of the 1990s.

This is exactly what happened at the Copenhagen Summit when the global movement known as 350 helped influence the outlook of dozens of nation states. And currently, different portions of global civil society are mobilizing against the geo-engineering solutions to climate change that certain scientists and business people are proposing in the wake of the failure of the Copenhagen Summit. ■

*An international campaign that's building a movement to unite the world around solutions to the climate crisis, see [www.350.org](http://www.350.org)*