

WHAT SHOULD BE ON THE AGENDA OF THE WORLD  
ECONOMIC FORUM—OR WHATEVER REPLACES IT—  
A DECADE FROM NOW?

DAVOS  
2015  
A PIVOTAL DECADE

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Value will only be created in sustainable forms in an era of globalization if there are global governance mechanisms worthy of the name. Worryingly, with challenges like terrorism and climate change pressing in, and with the United States eroding its much-vaunted “soft power” by the arrogant and—perhaps even worse—often incompetent use of “hard power,” the world now faces an increasingly dangerous governance vacuum. Various institutions, organizations, and countries are manoeuvring to fill the gap, among them the World Economic Forum, which in 2006 convened world leaders once again in Davos from 25 to 29 January. There is no doubting the extraordinary impact WEF makes, as the selection of initiatives in panel 1 suggests. But, despite all this moving and shaking, WEF cannot fill the governance vacuum. That, in bald headlines, is the conclusion of a survey we have carried out of experts in such areas as corporate responsibility and sustainable development<sup>1</sup>.

Significantly, our respondents also place environmental challenges ahead of such issues as the control of both nuclear technology and weapons of mass destruction. At a time when a

recalcitrant White House has had to be bludgeoned back into the UN climate-change conference negotiating Kyoto II and seems determined to play a disruptive role in such forums, this finding underscores the bankruptcy of much of what passes for foreign policy in the current Bush administration. It also raises the question of what sort of hangover we will all be suffering from in 2008 when Bush II—a regime which has shown astounding cynicism in its willingness to outsource and offshore torture and to risk the destabilization of other people’s climate patterns—finally reaches its expiry date.

While our survey shows real interest in how WEF can build more effective bridges to a range of social and environmental initiatives in the pivotal decade through to 2015, there is a clear sense that the Forum faces a number of key challenges in helping to create coherent global governance processes and institutions. The first risk is that certain major countries—notably the United States and perhaps China, too—will turn their backs on the deliberations of the Davos elite. The United States, intentionally or not, may well be coaching China in how to play the unilater-



alism game. The second risk is that the Forum's growing attempts to embrace a wider universe of stakeholders will dilute the original, highly exclusive "spirit of Davos" and, as a result, persuade key actors to peel off and form less inclusive, stealthier 'clubs' and cabals.

While Forum insiders will counter that huge progress has been made, and I would agree, the problem is that the global problematique has been mutating faster than the capacity of such institutions to respond. But before digging into the detail of our survey responses, I should perhaps own up. This isn't the first time I have been asked to critically assess the Forum. Five years ago, in 2000, when I was still very much an outsider, I wrote a fairly challenging evaluation of the emerging agenda for WEF and its annual Davos summit series. The article was published in the now-defunct magazine *Tomorrow*—and, whether or not the article contributed to my popping up on the WEF radar screen, I eventually found myself invited to the 2002 summit, helping to facilitate several sessions. Because of the 9/11 attacks a few months earlier, however, the event, for the first time in WEF's history,

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turned its back on Davos. This time it was held in New York, as a means of shoring up the Big Apple's badly shaken morale—and possibly also as a means of extracting better terms from the Swiss government next time around.

In the event, I found the New York summit less forbidding than I had expected.

One reason was that many long-standing Davos habitués were totally off-balance. That didn't necessarily make them more welcoming, but it did undermine their confidence in until-then-conventional wisdom. For a short time, a window of opportunity opened to drive new thinking deep into the WEF community. It wasn't simply that participants had to negotiate streets full of protestors and anti-suicide-bomber barriers rather than their accustomed ski slopes, but that their entire world had shifted on its axis.

I began by reminding readers that, "For global movers and shakers, the annual Davos meeting is a secular Mecca. If you want to consort with the super-wealthy and mega-powerful, partic-

ularly with CEOs and board members from top companies, this is the place to be. You could even see it as the annual board meeting of Planet Earth Inc.” Then came the stinger. “That said, the reviews have been decidedly mixed this year. Davos is ‘the leading event in the global problem-solving calendar,’ Britain’s *Sunday Telegraph* noted, ‘heavily attended, say cynics, by those who cause them.’ The *Financial Times* agreed, adding that: ‘During the Davos weekend, roughly 70 percent of the world’s daily output of self-congratulation is concentrated in one place.’”

My conclusion? “Behind the scenes, another global governance institution is on the brink of profound change.” So how far have those changes run—and what does the future hold in store for WEF and the Davos elite? Unless the fates intercede, or the doors are barred as a result of what follows, the Davos summit in early 2006 will be my fifth incarnation as a WEF faculty member. This time, however, the theme I am helping to address is the one I spotlighted five years ago: global governance. And to get my own thinking into some sort of order, I have looked back at the past five years of WEF’s activities, before looking ahead to the challenges of 2015. Short of some miracle, that will be the year when the world wakes up to the fact that it has failed to live up to the ambitions of the Millennium Development Goals, launched at

2000’s Millennium Summit.

To help assess where we may be headed and to work out what role WEF might play, I asked leading pollsters GlobeScan to include some extra questions in their latest Survey of Sustainability Experts<sup>3</sup>. Before we look at the survey results, though, it’s worth recalling how thinking about our global challenges has evolved in recent years.

## FISH OUT OF WATER—AND IN

To influence the future, WEF argues, we must “adequately appreciate changes in values, society and technology and be better equipped to address the key global challenges, the geopolitical, economic and environmental dilemmas. The global political landscape is in flux. As the world’s preeminent power, the leadership of the United States is critical for tackling many of the world’s problems. In Europe, there is concern over identity and job creation. Both India and China continue to move ahead, raising the question of how they may eventually come to dominate the global system. Latin America faces increased backlashes of populism, and a new deal for Africa is being constructed, challenging business to play a greater role in the continent’s transformation.”

Nor is that all. “The global economy has proven resilient,” WEF notes, “but for how long? Economic risks are rising everywhere. Can existing institutions handle these challenges? Most significantly, there is a massive need for new jobs in all parts of the world.” And then there are the issues that the activists of the late 1990s helped drive on to the Davos agenda. “The global environment remains at risk. The G-8’s emphasis on Climate Change has created some scope for policy initiatives but we remain a long way from any consensus on a new direction to tackle the issue.”

WEF hasn’t been alone in scanning these horizons. For example, in 2000 the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency published *Global Trends 2015*, a report based on a dialogue process with leading NGOs around the world<sup>4</sup>. Interestingly, part of the process involved looking back to an earlier study, *Global Trends 2010*, produced in 1997. And the CIA had to admit that this earlier assessment had failed to accurately forecast the subsequent impacts of trends like globalization and the spread of information technology. Nor, significantly, did the study foresee the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98.

So how did the CIA fare in 2000, with 9/11 just around the corner? The answer, within the limitations of the art, is quite well. The agency noted that a key issue would be global reactions to the emergence of the U.S. as the “preponderant power.” More tellingly still, the CIA noted the growing risks from “states with poor governance; ethnic, cultural, or religious tensions; weak economies; and porous

PANEL 1

## WHAT VALUE DOES WEF ADD?

Founded in 1971, the World Economic Forum is the premier annual convening of world leaders dedicated to addressing global challenges. Visit WEF’s Website<sup>2</sup> and you will find extensive information on a surprisingly wide range of initiatives designed to help tackle such problems. Among the programs most directly linked to the current discussion:

**CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP\_** Among other things, WEF and its partners have explored the business case for corporate citizenship. Among the key value drivers: reputation management, risk profile and risk management; employee recruitment, motivation and retention; investor relations and access to capital; learning and innovation; competitiveness and market positioning; operational efficiency; and, critically, licence to operate.

### DISASTER RESOURCE NETWORK\_

The Network’s vision is to make it easier for businesses to donate talent or in-kind goods and services to disaster relief and recovery operations in developing countries—and to ensure that their help is delivered in a coordinated and effective manner.

### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY INDEX AND ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE INDEX\_

One of the most interesting WEF partnerships of recent years, this is described in greater detail in Panel 2.

**GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS\_** Through its reports and activities, the Global Competitiveness Program identifies barriers to growth and helps stimulate the development of relevant strategies to achieve sustained economic progress. Some reports offer global coverage, including the Global Competitiveness Report, while others are regional and topical, such as the Gender Gap study, the Arab World Competitiveness Report, and the Global Information Technology Report.

### GLOBAL GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE\_

This promotes accountability by monitoring worldwide efforts to deal with the problems on the global agenda. WEF’s second annual report,

released 24 January 2005, provided comprehensive analysis of the world’s progress toward realizing the UN’s Millennium Declaration Goals, endorsed by leaders of 189 countries in 2000. The report was the culmination of a year-long independent analysis by seven groups of some of the world’s leading experts in peace and security, poverty, hunger, education, health and environmental protection. The latest round concludes that the world has improved its performance slightly in relation to peace and security, poverty, hunger, health, and education. But the environment and human rights were judged to have slipped backward during 2004-5.

**GLOBAL HEALTH INITIATIVE\_** The GHI was launched by Kofi Annan at the 2002 Annual Meeting in Davos. The Initiative is now the largest public-private sector network in health, aiming to engage businesses in public-private partnerships to fight HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria.

**GREENHOUSE GAS REGISTER\_** The Global GHG Register enables multinational companies to measure, monitor, and compare their GHG emissions across different regions of the world. Participating companies can reduce the cost of fragmented reporting. In addition, it potentially provides stakeholders with a global picture of a company’s worldwide GHG emissions.

**THE WATER INITIATIVE\_** The purpose here is to support multi-stakeholder partnerships in addressing sustainable water resources management in order to secure access to water in sufficient and reliable quality and quantity. The Water Initiative aims to facilitate the private sector’s participation in sustainable water resources management.

### WEST-ISLAMIC WORLD DIALOGUE\_

This WEF-convened community promotes understanding and cooperation between Western countries and countries with predominantly Muslim populations. It convenes senior political, religious, business, media, and opinion leaders in an effort to better understand their differences and act on their commonalities.

borders will be prime breeding grounds for terrorism. In such states, domestic groups will challenge the entrenched government and transnational networks seeking safe havens.” Nor was that all. The agency spent much more effort in the 2015 study than in its 2010 counterpart on the growing importance of natural resources, including food, water, energy, and the environment. So, for example, it zeroed in on “the over three billion individuals who will be living in water-stressed regions from North China to Africa and the implications for conflict.”

2000 also marked something of a turning point for Davos, with issues like climate change given more attention. In my *Tomorrow* piece, I talked in terms of the trumpet blasts of activists shaking the exclusive world of Davos very much like the walls of Jericho. Some of those who had first ventured into the WEF world in the 1990s say they found it very hard going to start with. “Davos was never designed to be transparent,” explained Molly Harris Olson, who directed the U.S. President’s Council on Sustainable Development and now runs the Australian consultancy Eco Futures. 2000, when I interviewed her first on the subject, saw her third trip to Davos. “In 1996,” she recalled, “the environment and sustainability were just not on the Davos agenda. I felt like a fish out of water. In 2000, however, there were over a dozen sessions on various aspects of these subjects. At the Opening Plenary, climate change was voted the most important issue out of all the issues raised by six speakers, to many people’s surprise.”

No one who has attended the Davos event over the years can have missed the seismic shifts in the WEF agenda. “What really interested me was how CEO sentiment on leadership had shifted to a much broader appreciation of the ‘softer’ aspects of leadership,” London Business School professor John Stopford told me in 2000. “The same opening of mental doors was going on for many of the environmental issues.” So how does he feel about Davos today? He is blunt in his assessment. “WEF is getting so media-corrupted I despair of it as a forum for serious discussion,” he said. “WEF has now little to offer other than grandstanding—and I suspect much hypocrisy.” He noted how Enron’s Ken Lay had made annual speeches on social responsibility before the company imploded in ignominy.

So much for the diagnosis: what about his prognosis—and his prescription for remedying any such ills? “How about thinking of ways to get companies—even governments—to commit to specific actions and then to measure what they have actually achieved?” he suggested.

Another critic is Peter Goldmark, who first attended Davos when president of the Rockefeller Foundation and now runs the climate-change side of the Environmental Defense Fund. He



recalls that “I found it very socially and celebrity-oriented. There were moments when I was not sure whether I was at a hot New York dance club or a serious conference. It was more reflective than generative in setting the international agenda. Overall, it was a fascinating sociological microcosm of the upper strata of (primarily) Western late-twentieth-century society.” He also challenges WEF’s pricing policy. “I find the prices they charge to attend outrageous. There is something wacky about a place that purports to be focused on the great problems of our time, including poverty, charging admission fees that would pay for clean water installation for an African village.”

More upbeat is Ed Mayo, whom I quoted in 2000 and who is now chief executive of the UK National Consumer Council. “I think we are seeing that the constituency engaged in genuine global policy agendas is deepening,” he told me in December 2005, “in the sense that there is more participation, more academic input, more partnership, and more sensitivity to issues of legitimacy, plus more of an opening to global issues through the security agenda.” Interestingly, though, he notes that “one thing that the protest movement still has, which WEF has never achieved—and perhaps will never achieve—is humour. WEF, above all, aspires to be serious, whereas the protest movement is often more in tune with a culture of consumers and society that is characterized by

irreverence rather than deference. Yet I think WEF has both deflected a challenge to its own legitimacy and reached out in ways that, as a European, I feel offers something distinct and inclusive to the global agenda.”

**AND NOW THE RESULTS ...**

So how do international experts see the challenge evolving in the next, pivotal decade? Having never opened the envelopes at the Oscars, I am not going to try to build up the drama—so here are the findings of our survey of some 250 experts at the end of 2005. They fall into five main areas: the key issues for the world and WEF; the most (and least) effective institutions in addressing the linked global governance challenges; the opportunity for WEF to reach out to an even wider world; the likelihood that WEF will effectively address emerging global governance challenges; and the greatest risks for its own future survival and effectiveness. Let’s take each of these in turn.

**THE ISSUES**

The environment—particularly climate change—stands out as the most important governance issue, with 90% of respondents thinking it either “Important” or “Very Important.” In second place, at 75%, is the control of nuclear technology and weapons of mass destruction (Figure 1). Environmental issues are seen as having long lead times, which suggests that their significance is likely to grow substantially through 2015. In this respect, WEF’s partnership with Yale University and others on the Environmental Sustainability Index and the evolving Environmental Performance

Index (Panel 2) is likely to be critically important.

Other high-scoring issues were: combating the illegal trade in people, drugs, arms, and counterfeit goods (72%); developing the capacity to stop genocidal movements early (68%); preventing and/or minimizing the effects of pandemics and diseases (68%); controlling international corruption (67%); and organizing more effective international responses to natural disasters (57%). All of these, incidentally, were ranked ahead of combating terrorism, which came in at 44%. Among “Other” issues flagged were addressing poverty (via such approaches as micro-enterprise), clean water and sanitation, the opening up of trade regimes, the introduction of incentives for sustainable technologies and products, and the provision of public sustainability education.

Figure 1\_ **KEY GLOBAL GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES**

|   | IMPORTANCE |
|---|------------|
| Addressing global environmental issues / climate change               | 90%        |
| Control of nuclear technology / WMD                                   | 75%        |
| Combating illegal trade in arms/drugs/people/counterfeit goods        | 72%        |
| Developing global capacity to stop genocidal movements early          | 68%        |
| Preventing/minimizing effects of pandemics and diseases               | 68%        |
| Controlling international corruption                                  | 67%        |
| Organizing more effective international response to natural disasters | 57%        |
| Combating terrorism   | 44%        |

SOURCE\_ GLOBESCAN/SustainAbility 2006

**THE COMPETITION**

Next, we asked whom respondents saw as WEF’s main competitors—or at least as other key contenders in the global governance space (Figure 2). The European Union—some might feel oddly—is rated as the most effective (at 47%), while the governments of developing countries (7%) are rated as the least effective among our listing of actors contributing to global governance. Interestingly, the World Social Forum scored higher here (18%) than WEF (13%). Among the organizations written in under the “Other” category were the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), Sweden’s Tällberg Forum, a range of NGOs and some parts of the UN, including the Global Compact.

On the basis of this “dipstick” competitor analysis, WEF seems to have little to fear, but what if a real competitor emerged in a country like China by 2015? That risk could take a big leap forward if the unexpected happened and there was a major security breach in Davos by terrorists—although (at 3%) our respondents ranked this way down the list of probabilities (Figure 3). However, in off-the-record conversations with long-

Figure 2\_ **EFFECTIVENESS OF KEY FACTORS IN TACKLING GLOBAL GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

|   | EFFECTIVENESS |
|---|---------------|
| European Union  | 47%           |
| National governments of developed countries             | 26%           |
| United Nations  | 24%           |
| International institutions (e.g., World Bank, IMF, WTO) | 24%           |
| World Social Forum                                      | 18%           |
| World Economic Forum                                    | 13%           |
| Clinton Global Initiative                               | 12%           |
| National governments of developing countries            | 7%            |

SOURCE\_ GLOBESCAN/SustainAbility 2006



standing Davos participants, the competitive threat did surface and is currently seen as most likely to come from regional forums such as the Clinton Global initiative (in the USA) and China's Boao Forum.

Figure 3\_ **BIGGEST RISKS TO WEF**

|  | TOTAL |
|--|-------|
| WEF being ignored by influential governments                       | 51%   |
| Seclusion of key influencers in separate, "closed clubs"           | 32%   |
| Younger generations of leaders develop alternative channels        | 24%   |
| Competition from other emerging forums                             | 15%   |
| Departure of WEF's first generation leaders / loss of momentum     | 13%   |
| Terrorist breaches that undermine WEF's reputation as a safe haven | 3%    |

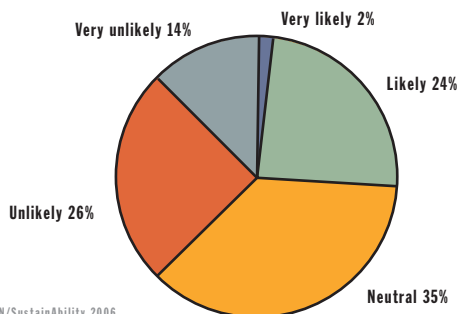
SOURCE\_ GLOBESCAN/SustainAbility 2006

## THE BIGGEST RISKS

So what are the things that should be keeping WEF's top team awake at night? In first place came the risk of being ignored by influential governments, a threat mentioned by half of the responding experts. Quite some way behind came threats like that posed by the evolution either of "closed clubs" in parallel to Davos or of novel communities by a younger generation of leaders—a risk that WEF has sought to defuse by developing its Global Leaders of Tomorrow, Young Global Leaders and Technology Pioneers networks. Interestingly, though, some involved are skeptical about the extent to which WEF has succeeded. One interviewee who had been a GLT, argued that, "These programs remain too thin on content and the selections seem somewhat haphazard, rather than carefully calibrated to bring in strong next-generation perspectives."

Perhaps surprisingly, the eventual retirement of WEF founder Professor Klaus Schwab ranks low on the list, perhaps an indication that WEF is seen as an established institution rather than of any detailed knowledge of succession plans among our respondents. In non-attributable interviews, however, I was told that this would likely be a much more significant transitional threat than our survey results indicate.

Figure 4\_ **CAN WEF SOLVE OUR GLOBAL GOVERNANCE PROBLEMS?**



SOURCE\_ GLOBESCAN/SustainAbility 2006

## PROSPECTS OF SUCCESS

If we are to have any chance of achieving global stability—let alone sustainability—then we are going to need a new set of global governance systems and processes. That was the assumption that underlay our next question. WEF has moved energetically in recent years to map out some of this opportunity space and, with a proliferation of initiatives (some of which are listed in Panel 1), to posi-

tion itself as a leading—if not the lead—actor. So we asked respondents whether they thought that WEF itself was likely to fill the gap.

The question, whose answers are shown in Figure 4, was designed to assess the extent to which WEF might be able to address the global governance agenda in coming decades. To be totally transparent, the question was unusual in being prefaced by a paragraph noting that some critics of WEF allege that it is little more than a playground for the ultra-wealthy, while others argue – like Einstein – that it's more or less impossible to rescue a system in crisis using the same mindsets that caused the problems in the first place. Hardly a neutral phrasing, but designed to force respondents to think out of the box.

Given those facts it is perhaps not surprising that only a quarter of our respondents thought it likely (24%) or very likely (less than 2%) that WEF will effectively address the most important global governance issues over the next five years.

## THE OPPORTUNITY SPACE

What we did not explore with respondents was how future global governance systems might best be designed, developed, and operated, though elements of the answer come through in the responses to our last question (Figure 5). WEF, however, was seen as having a crucial role to play in helping to create the processes that would evolve the necessary thinking, plans, and calls to action.

Few of those involved in planning the WEF meetings would argue—even in their moments of wildest ambition—that the Forum could ever solve our global governance challenges. But the previous question was worth raising because the answers under-

Figure 5\_ **POSSIBLE FUTURE ROLES FOR WEF**

|   | EFFECTIVENESS |
|---|---------------|
| Convening/supporting new consortia to address major challenges                        | 59%           |
| Building closer links to major environmental/social forums                            | 58%           |
| Sponsoring substantial research into global governance                                | 49%           |
| Developing a multi-stakeholder blueprint for global governance beyond 2010            | 48%           |
| Boosting the role of civil society in key emerging economies                          | 48%           |
| Publishing annual progress reports assessing contribution to global governance        | 44%           |
| Making invitations to WEF/Davos meetings contingent on contributions towards the MDGs | 43%           |

SOURCE\_ GLOBESCAN/SustainAbility 2006

score the fact that, while WEF may have tremendously valuable convening and catalytic roles to play, we now need to be thinking in terms of a much wider blueprint for twenty-first-century governance. Unfortunately, however, history suggests that massive dislocations are necessary to prepare the ground for new global governance regimes. The League of Nations, for example, followed World War I; the United Nations, World War II.

More positively, though, our respondents flagged a number of key things WEF could do to advance this agenda. Top of the list (just) was convening and spurring new consortia dedicated to addressing critical challenges, followed closely by building bridges with other social and environmental initiatives, such as the World Social Forum. Other roles suggested were boosting the role of civil-society organizations in emerging economies like China and India—and, perhaps most interestingly of all, making invitations to Davos and other WEF events contingent on participants' making real progress each year towards the Millennium Development Goals. Also scoring fairly well was the notion that WEF should lead a process of evolving a global blueprint for ensuring that the

PANEL 2

## CAN WE MEASURE SUSTAINABILITY?

One of the most interesting WEF initiatives of recent years has been the Environmental Sustainability Index (ESI), which is now paralleled by an Environmental Performance Index (EPI). To get a sense of where all this began—and how it's evolving—I spoke to the man who has played the starring role in building the indexes, Dan Esty, professor of environmental law and policy at Yale's Law School and School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

"The Environmental Sustainability Index grew out of the WEF's Global Leaders for Tomorrow Environmental Task Force in 1999," he recalls, "led by Canadian philanthropist Kim Samuel-Johnson. A number of these 'young leaders' felt that the WEF's emphasis on economic issues in general and competitiveness in particular was too narrow—and that governments should be held accountable for their ability to address other critical issues, including the environment. Those of us with some environmental experience also felt that the issue of sustainability was floundering a bit because of the lack of concreteness around the term—and the inability to gauge who was making progress on this front. I had long dreamed of a single metric for environmental performance that would be a counterpart (and perhaps even a counterweight) to the emphasis placed on GDP growth in governmental circles.

"So my Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy took up the challenge of managing this project (with support from the Samuel Family Foundation of Canada and the WEF). We convened a series of expert workshops, drawing on environmental policy and sustainability experts from around the world, to explore methodologies. We concluded early on that 'environmental sustainability' would be the focus rather than a triple bottom-line metric, as we feared that

pollution control and natural-resource management issues might get lost in a broader index that included economic and social concerns.

"We introduced a pilot ESI in 2000 and a first full-blown ESI in 2001. We refined and updated the index most recently in 2005—and are now on a three-year cycle for new editions of the ESI. The 2005 index includes a number of significant methodological advances from the earlier editions, including better data on a number of issues, a new imputation methodology, a sensitivity analysis undertaken independently by the European Commission's Joint Research Center in Ispra, Italy, and a new emphasis on tracking performance against relevant 'peer groups.' The 2005 ESI has been downloaded more than half a million times and the ESI Website has had nearly two million hits. Many governments from Mexico to Belgium to Taiwan and South Korea are using the ESI as a benchmark to gauge progress within their Environment Ministry. So we feel that the ESI has gained some real traction.

"In response to the critique, which we accept, that the concept of 'sustainability'—with its emphasis on underlying resource endowments, past pollution, as well as present results and future prospects—is too all encompassing to provide a useful policy metric, we are now working on a pilot Environmental Performance Index that will track more narrowly results in seven core categories of pollution control and natural resource management, with about twenty underlying indicators. This new EPI will gauge the 'distance to target' for each issue, thereby providing a better way to evaluate governmental performance, particularly in the context of the Millennium Development Goals emphasis on environmental sustainability. The pilot EPI will be released in Davos in January 2006."

MDGs are met—and the wider goals of sustainable development embraced by the world's top decision-makers.

### 2006 TO-DO LIST

So, to conclude, what do I take away from all of this—apart from a considerable sense of gratitude to GlobeScan for the survey and the 250 experts who responded? There are just three bullet points on my to-do list for Davos 2006 and beyond:

**Environment.** The environmental agenda—particularly climate change—really must be driven higher up the agenda. It is worth noting that when 2005's Davos participants voted on the world's most urgent priorities, climate change came third with 51%, down from top position in 2000, below poverty at 64% and equitable globalization at 55%. Global governance, incidentally, came in sixth place, with 43%.

**Bridge-building.** This theme surfaced repeatedly in our survey results. WEF has made considerable progress but is acutely aware of the danger of overloading the Davos process. Indeed, there are signs of a considerable pruning back on non-conventional participants in 2006, to meet the demands of core sponsors for a greater business focus. Hopefully this trend won't last. Among positive signs, meanwhile, participants were asked to contribute to a Davos blog for the first time this year ([www.forumblog.org](http://www.forumblog.org)), with key sessions also both Webcast and podcast. One way to pull in external views more effectively would be to evolve a blueprint for change with a wide range of external stakeholders, with the results reported into the annual events. Another would be to open up the WEF scenario-building process to external stakeholders, taking the 2015 time-horizon of the Millennium

Development Goals as a framework.

**Leverage.** Bridges, however, only take you so far. As we focus increasingly on solutions rather than just on problems, the spotlight will be on innovation, on creativity (indeed, the theme of the 2006 Davos event is "The Creative Imperative"), and on scale. Interestingly one of the most interesting initiatives of all those taken in recent years by Professor Schwab wasn't a WEF venture at all but his own Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship<sup>5</sup>. Headed by Pamela Hartigan, the Foundation identifies, celebrates, networks, and otherwise supports social entrepreneurs around the world—and increasingly aims to help these entrepreneurs achieve scale.

But, in the spirit of New Year's resolutions, the two ideas I would underscore from our survey and interviews are these:

First, there is the central issue of whether WEF remains largely a platform—and "a megaphone," as one interviewee put it—or whether it continues to evolve as a content developer in its own right. Several people who had worked with WEF on the content front cautioned that this approach could take the Forum out onto "thin ice." And there is a sense that WEF will need to become much better at crediting inputs made by others.

Second, there is the option of requiring future participants to come prepared to

say what they and their organizations have done in the previous year to address the Millennium Development Goals—or equivalent targets. Some might argue that WEF should make invitations to Davos and other Forum events contingent on people and organizations either having made real progress in this direction or having interesting proposals for doing so, but the experience of the Clinton Global Initiative is instructive. The commitments made by CGI participants this year were very much a case of "apples and oranges," as one leading figure who took part told me. The almost inevitable result was that they were included and summed in ways that considerably overstated their likely effectiveness.

Anyone who has had the privilege of taking part in the Davos summits knows that these are extraordinarily powerful networking events. And considerable progress has been made in mutating the agenda toward sustainable development, whatever labels may be used. But the net conclusion of this brief survey must be that WEF itself faces a challenging transitional era. Furthermore, while it may serve as a crucial catalyst, it is no substitute for an effective global governance system. How we get there is still wide open for discussion. ■

#### SURVEY METHODOLOGY

A total of 3,213 GlobeScan survey invitations were sent out to sustainable-development experts from mainly OECD countries. Of these a total of 246 qualified respondents completed questionnaires by the closing date of December 14, 2005. The respondents came from five sectors: corporate (22%), government (13%), institutional (28%), voluntary (13%), and service, including consultancies (26%). Two-thirds (64%) have more than ten years of experience working on sustainable-development issues, with only 2% having less than three years of experience.



The global governance survey was carried out by GlobeScan for Sustainability and Value magazine. Globescan URL: [www.globescan.com/](http://www.globescan.com/)

**"WEF ITSELF FACES A CHALLENGING TRANSITIONAL ERA. WHILE IT MAY SERVE AS A CRUCIAL CATALYST, IT IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR AN EFFECTIVE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE SYSTEM."**

