



Lab

7 July 2011

1. The mission and objectives

Mission: The Smart CSOs Lab fosters a growing learning network of civil society organisation (CSO) leaders, funders and researchers aiming to build effective CSO strategies for the Great Transition.

The Smart CSOs Lab pursues its mission through the following objectives:

- Support CSO leaders and change agents in CSOs to develop cohesive strategies for CSO campaigns and projects for the Great Transition.
- Develop and test capacity building programmes that support and enable the new strategies.
- Catalyse strategically important research to increase understanding how CSOs can more effectively influence the social and political systems towards the Great Transition.
- Involve a growing number of CSO leaders across the globe in the debate about effective CSO strategies for the Great Transition.

2. The need

There is an ever-increasing understanding among Civil Society Organisations and experts in the field of civil society action that current CSO strategies are not commensurate to make any significant difference to the magnitude of the global environmental and social crises. CSOs need to urgently reconsider their strategies in support of a transition to a sustainable society/economy and should work towards a more holistic and systemic transition to a sustainable society instead of pursuing the narrow technical policy focus of many of today's strategies. Much more radical transformative change strategies, drawing on cutting edge thinking and practice in multiple disciplines and across disciplines, are required, if CSOs are to really play their role in helping humanity to successfully meet current challenges.

Over the last decade a range of initiatives, organisations, coalitions and networks have emerged that all have a research and/or campaigning focus aimed at a fundamental shift in the way the economy operates. The Great Transition Initiative initiated by Tellus Institute, the Great Transition Initiative initiated by new economics foundation, the de-growth research network, New Economics Network (US) all operate in this space. The Great Transition scenario (Global Scenario Group, 2002) offers a framework for such a systemic transition and calls for deep structural changes in the economic system in addition to shifts in lifestyles and cultural values.

It became very clear from our analysis and ratified in all discussions with CSO leaders and experts from across the globe that there is currently no initiative (globally) that supports CSO leaders to fundamentally rethink and redesign *how* CSOs can effectively work towards a systemic transition.

There is still a lack of understanding about alternative and potentially more successful strategies, but also a lack of support, processes and tools to help change agents in CSOs to overcome barriers for transforming strategies (e.g. capacity gaps in organisations, availability of funding).

3. The opportunity

What makes Smart CSOs unique is that it provides such a space to rethink and redesign how CSOs can more effectively work rather than developing another platform for campaigns or coalitions.

The Smart CSOs Lab emerged from a EU funded project WWF-UK were involved in during the last two years. In this project a space was created for a strategic debate involving leaders from civil society organisations, academics and funders to discuss insights from theory and practice and explore how CSOs

can become stronger change agents towards solving the global social and environmental crises. The focus of this work was on gaining a better understanding of how change happens and how CSOs can more effectively intervene in the social and political systems. The Smart CSOs Report lays out the thinking developed so far.

At the Smart CSOs Conference in March 2011 a number of participants committed to continue the work initiated in this dialogue. The general feeling was that the thinking developed so far is only the starting point and that the future work would need to further develop the practical implications and to support organisations to put the ideas into practice.

4. Work programme

The research and discussions in the Smart CSOs community over the last year resulted in the identification of five leverage points for CSOs to develop more effective strategies. There is strong interest to continue exploring the practical implications for each of these leverage points and to start putting them into practice. The initial working programme is therefore structured around these five leverage points. These are:

- Embedding systems thinking in organisational practice
- Developing a new narrative beyond environmental issues and beyond the dominant cultural values
- Working with radical change agents and support the radical innovations for a sustainable economy
- Supporting the emergence of a new global citizen movement
- Engaging funders in the new strategies for systemic change / Monitoring and evaluation

Among the researchers and CSO leaders involved so far in Smart CSOs there is commitment to support the development of a number of outputs during year one.

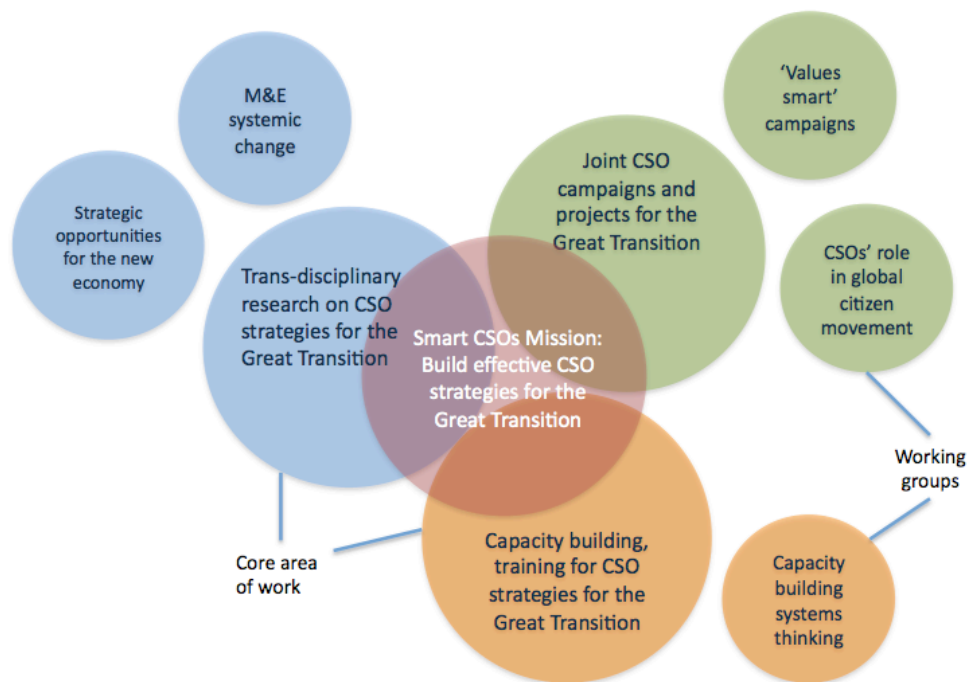
The action research (lab) character of Smart CSOs requires keeping the process flexible enough so that emerging ideas can lead to changes in the actual work programme including the structure of the working groups. In addition, depending on the available resources, the work programme will be phased and not start simultaneously during the initial phase.

Each working group will consist of a multi-disciplinary mix of researchers and CSO leaders. The current initial small core group will invite other Smart CSO members and collaborators to participate in the discussions and will design a longer engagement process.

The collaboration will happen through the Smart CSOs online platform, skype and phone conferences, working group meetings and through bigger workshops where all working groups come together.

Initial working groups are:

- **Working Group 1: Embedding systems thinking in organisational practice** – Capacity building/training on systems thinking has been identified as fundamentally important element to enable staff in organisations to develop systemic and effective strategies for tackling wicked problems.



- **Working Group 2: A new narrative beyond the dominant cultural values / value smart CSO strategies** – It seems that there is a clear need to bridge the gap between research pieces like the Common Cause report and the practical reality in CSOs. A working group takes a practical approach and starts to work out concrete ways that help Smart CSOs members to design their campaigns, projects and other CSO activities in ways that consider explicitly the need for a shift in cultural values and for a new narrative for the Great Transition.
- **Working Group 3: Developing strategic opportunities for the New Economy** – At the Smart CSOs Conference we started listing emerging innovations and building blocks for the New Economy. This working group will dig deeper into the questions of which of these innovations are high priorities as they might catalyse further systemic change and which of them are also real short-term (policy) opportunities. How can CSOs effectively work towards their realisation etc.
- **Working Group 4: CSOs role in the global citizen movement (linked to Widening Circles Campaign)** – The Tellus Institute is committed to coordinate a campaign called The Widening Circles (TWC). There is a collaboration opportunity here to be explored about the opportunities for CSOs to support the emergence of a global citizen movement towards the Great Transition. The discussion group will focus on these questions and counts on the support from Tellus Institute and other parties involved in TWC.
- **Working Group 5: Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for systemic change strategies (Great Transition)** –M&E has been identified as one of the levers to engage funders in CSO strategies on systemic/social change. The working group on M&E aims to develop approaches for M&E that address the need to monitor and evaluate effectively the more long term and risky nature of Great Transition projects/strategies.

5. How we will work

Smart CSOs will operate under a 'lab' philosophy. This means that it is an open place where people come together to learn, develop and test ideas for projects and campaigns in alignment with the Great Transition.

In short, the lab will work with the following structure:

- **The Smart CSOs Members** are individuals who are committing a considerable amount of time and/or financial resources to the initiative. Members are fundamentally interested in CSO strategies, have a high degree of shared understanding about the purpose of the Smart CSOs initiative and are aligned with the principles of the Great Transition. Also, members are committed to the spirit of emergence and collaboration in the Smart CSOs lab. The aim is to achieve a diverse balance among Smart CSOs members with regard to CSO sector, specialty area and geography. This includes CSOs working on global environmental and social challenges, think tanks, universities, research organisations as well as representatives from the funding community. Members will get actively involved in the lab's core work (core group) and/or will act as champions of Smart CSOs in their organisations.
- **The Smart CSOs Core Group** is the team responsible to lead, process-design, facilitate and support the work of the working groups and the overall learning process of the lab. Members of the core group will typically be members of Smart CSOs. The core group is multi disciplinary and will consist of individuals with knowledge and skills in facilitation and learning process design, action researchers and content experts.
- **The Smart CSOs Community** is the wider community of the lab and it consists of individuals who are committed to the purpose of the Smart CSOs lab. They participate in discussions, meetings and events and might collaborate on specific pieces of work.

6. The Smart CSOs Members

The following individuals are committed to contribute a significant amount of resources (in-kind and/or cash) to the Smart CSOs Lab to be the founding members of the initiative:

- **ANPED:** Leida Rijnhout (Executive Director)
- **Brook Lyndhurst:** David Fell (Director)
- **CSCP:** Neil Coles (Senior Consultant)
- **Forum for the Future:** Anna Birney, Head of System Innovation Lab
- **Friends of the Earth Europe:** Magda Stoczkiewicz (Director)
- **Fundación Ecología y Desarrollo (ECODES):** Victor Viñuales (Director) + Aurelio García (Research Director)
- **Generation Europe Foundation:** Elise Bouvy (GreEn Forum Coordinator)
- **Greenpeace:** Inge Wallage (Director of Communications, Greenpeace International) + Uygur Ozesmi (Executive Director, Greenpeace Mediterranean)
- **new economics foundation:** Tim Jenkins (Director Great Transition Initiative)
- **One Earth Initiative Society:** Vanessa Timmer (Executive Director)
- **Public Interest Research Centre:** Richard Hawkins (Director)
- **Schumacher Institute:** Ian Roderick (Executive Director) + Alastair Roderick (Head of Development)
- **Tellus Institute:** Orion Kriegman (Coordinator Great Transition Initiative)
- **Veblen Institute for Economic Reforms:** Wojtek Kalinowski (Director)
- **World Future Council:** Maja Göpel (Director of Future Justice)
- **WWF:** Sarah Bladen (Director of Conservation Communications, WWF International) + Michael Narberhaus (Leader Smart CSOs Initiative, WWF-UK)

In addition, Nick Perks from the Environmental Funders Network UK, Wolfgang Meyer (University Saarland, Centre for Evaluation) and Gill Coleman (Ashridge Centre for Action Research), Meike Fink (Climate Action Network, France) and Luke Wreford (WWF-UK) have all committed to support the work of the lab with in-kind contributions.