1. Objectives and main impressions.

As part of the preparations for the report of the Lancet-University of Oslo Commission on Global Governance for Health, Commission member dr. Sigrun Møgedal, assisted by ambassador Bjørn Skogmo – a former Permanent Representative of Norway to UN offices in Geneva - undertook a series of consultations from 10-17 January 2013 with officials in Geneva-based international organizations on governance related questions rising from the mandate of the Commission. - Before and after this visit, we had conversations with relevant foreign ministry officials in Oslo to prepare the consultations and to sound out assessments on how the different mechanisms are working. The objective of the consultation was twofold:

- To gather experience from other key sectors within the multilateral system how they organize consultations across different governance domains and sectors that impact on health
- To explore how other sectors have organized the space for participation of non-state actors, in terms of knowledge and ideas, access to information, monitoring and policy dialogue.

To get a overview of the present situations, interlocuteurs were asked to give their assessment of the present situation, and to reflect on opportunities for reform.

Some impressions:

- Dialogues and partnership arrangements with civil society and private sector are expanding throughout the multilateral system. These arrangements have found different formats and structures, but are seen as indispensable to adapt international organization to global changes, both geopolitically and by the rapid rise in number and resources of civil society groups and the private sector.

- WHO seen to be hampered in approaching effectively broader issues of health by the insistence of its governing bodies on preserving its predominantly intergovernmental character, by its structure, and by a culture dominated by the medical profession. The health alliances and partnerships set up in a number of thematic areas represent an attempt to address this challenge, but do not fully satisfy the need for a dialogue on wider global health issues.
- The establishment of «Forums» for the opening up towards outside partners is now used in several areas of the multilateral system. Most of these were seen to be successful. The Rome-based Committee on Food Security, a Global Forum for Business and Human Rights within the human rights field and the Public Forum of the WTO in the field of trade offer particularly interesting examples for how more constructive dialogues with the private sector could be set up.

- The need for thorough consultations and building ownership with the key stakeholders in advance of setting up such mechanisms was underlined. The importance of having clear objectives and strategies for such an opening up was similarly highlighted.

- The threshold for establishing new institutional mechanisms in a period where international organizations face demands for budgetary cuts seems to be quite high. A Global Humanitarian Forum, established in Geneva from 2007-2010, was discontinued for financial reasons.

- Interagency cooperation within the multilateral system is increasing at all levels, driven i.a. by cross-sectoral challenges (example, access to medicin/intellectual property rights) which need joint approaches. At the global level, interagency coherence is promoted through a network of working groups within the overall structure of the Chief Executives Board (CEB). The operational agencies, particularly in the humanitarian field, are now giving increased attention to the partnership agenda at the regional, national and field level.

- As to global intergovernmental coordination, the mechanisms to ensure coherence are still weak. ECOSOC was seen to provide little added value for the humanitarian agencies, but may play a more useful role on social issues, including the broader challenges to health such as the non-communicable diseases (NCD).

- The present capability of the WHO to carry out consultations on a broader consultation mechanism or a multi-stakeholder committee such as the Rome-based Committee on Food Security seem to be limited. On the other side it was deemed important to assess the risk of having such a function independent of the WHO and that there is need to give WHO time to get the house in order. WHO hosted partnerships and WHO collaboration with NGO are on the table for the WHO Executive Board and World Health Assembly discussions this year.
2. **System-wide efforts on partnerships**

Although the UN is basically a global system for intergovernmental cooperation – owned and governed by member states - cooperation with civil society has been a factor from the very start. The UN Intellectual History Project has used the term «the third UN» to characterize the close interaction between civil society and UN bodies, through advocacy efforts to initiate and influence new global norms and standards in human rights and rights-based approaches, as implementing partners in humanitarian action, as watchdogs that UN member states fulfil the obligations they have undertaken, as participants and lobby groups in UN meeting and activities, and in many other ways.

Relations with business and the private sector are newer and more sensitive. For many years, there were opposition on almost ideological grounds from many developing countries for giving them a larger role within the UN system. Protecting national sovereignty and the role of the state are still important concerns within in the coordination groups of developing countries in UN bodies, for instance the Group of 77.

This gap has narrowed considerably, although the remains are still there. The private sector has accepted to take on larger public responsibilities, although there are exceptions for instance in the tobacco industry. Many large corporations now see it as in their own interest to include corporate social responsibilities into their business plans and corporate imagebuilding. Through initiatives such as the UN Global Compact and the Guidelines on Business and human Rights, the private sector has accepted to implement UN norms and standards.

In the 21st Century, the urgency of building stronger public private partnerships to deal with global challenges has become more evident. UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon has made it into one of his main priorities for his second term to scale up UN capacity to engage in transformative multi-stakeholder partnerships with the private sector, civil society, philanthropy and academia across a broader range of issue areas by creating a UN Partnership Facility which will catalyze commitments and promote accountability.

The UN system, encompassing more than 30 different agencies, funds and programmes, representing almost every public sector interest, has dealt with such partnerships in different ways. This means that experiences from one sector is not immediately comparable or transferable to other sectors, but lessons learnt and inspiration from one sector could nevertheless be useful for others. - This report can only focus on a handful of such sectors, based on our conversations in Geneva and with foreign ministry officials in Oslo.

3. **The point of departure- the Word Health Organizations (WHO).**

The WHO has been at the heart of the efforts to promote health for all in member countries ever since its creation in 1946. The WHO retains a crucial normative role in global health through negotiating and monitoring the adherence to rules, regulations and guidelines in international health matters. It has a unique credibility in ministries of health across the world.
Reform processes inside the WHO are continuing under the leadership of Director-General Margaret Chan, who was said to have more freedom to take bold steps after her reelection. The new approach for budgeting and funding – where the priorities determine the type and size of «pots» according to budget priorities - was mentioned as important to keep focus on WHO's priorities. The focus on WHO reform was seen as largely introspective, however, trying to establish focus, coherence and credibility within the organization. Challenges of broader cross-sectoral collaboration and different ways of working in a multi-polar, multi-stakeholder world do not for the time being seem to be very high on the WHO reform agenda.

The WHO now faces more competition for mandates and resources. Over the last 10-15 years, a number of new institutional mechanisms has been set up to promote global health, i.a. to enable a greater involvement of private sector actors and civil society organizations in the governance of additional funds, outside WHO budgets. GAVI and the Global Fund, originally hosted by the WHO, are now independent foundations. The Gates Foundation has become a major player in global health.

The WHO has tried to adapt to the need to enhance its cooperation with other actors in the field of global health in several ways. A number of alliances and partnerships on specific health related issues has been set up, often upon initiatives taken outside the WHO, but with active support from the organization i.a. through hosting arrangements. A strategy for hosted partnership, currently on the agenda of the WHO Executive Board, seeks to establish more uniform ways to manage these partnerships without losing their potential for adding value. The approach is largely restrictive and protective of financing and resourcing WHO's own priorities and functions, while also recognizing some added value of partnerships mobilizing a broader set of stakeholders.

There are several indications that the WHO may be struggling to adapt to a new situation, although some parts of the organizations is said to be adapting better than others. Among the factors mentioned in our conversation;

- The WHO is still seen as an institution dominated by the medical profession. Because of its structure and culture, it has not been very effective in its efforts to promote broader economic and social development, in spite of its large number of country offices and its membership in the UN Development Group.
- The WHO is still one of the most purely intergovernmental organizations in the UN system, both at the global and regional levels, and at country level where it is generally seen to be very close to national governments positions.
- The budget situation of the WHO in the wake of the world financial crisis was mentioned as factor to explain why the WHO has less flexibility than before in responding to new situations and to launch new initiatives. On the positive side, it was observed that the new financial environment has sharply reduced the tendency of member states to set up new mechanisms to deal with new challenges, instead of using existing mechanisms such as the WHO.
- The partnerships and alliances on global health issues which have been set up, partly in response to the need for an opening up for cooperation with outside partners on specific health issues, should be seen as important assets for the WHO. It was pointed out that they have also generated challenges in terms of dual governance (programme boards for each
partnership in addition to WHO's own governing bodies. There have been tensions related to administrative procedures, including adherence to WHO’s human resources policies and they have been seen as a drain on scarce bureaucratic resources within the organizations. There are unresolved issues on the follow-up of recommendations coming out of these partnerships and alliances.

- The processes and the constituency on social determinants of health now seem to be established as a special social determinants track, which is not primarily driven by WHO and does not at the moment seem to serve as a major driver for cross-departmental interagency work. Other determinants were mentioned; - political factors, conflict, trade agreements, commodity markets, environmental, etc. At least WHO should be more open to dialogues and investigation how such factors influence health in member countries and globally and be a repository of knowledge on how such factors impact on health.

- Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have recently come to the forefront, supported by the NCD Alliance. This also illustrates the need for going beyond WHO both in terms of stakeholders and arenas, perhaps through some sort of reporting mechanism to ECOSOC.

- Apart from the contacts with civil society and academia on specific and professionally defined issues, the WHO is not seen as very successful in developing a broader interface with civil society groups. It was pointed out, however, that this may be more demanding in the field of health than compared with for instance humanitarian action and human rights by the number of specific issue interest groups, yet at the same time a scarcity of major international NGO groups dealing with more comprehensive and strategic health issues.

- The attempts within the WHO to set up mechanisms to deal with partnerships on a more general base have so far not been very successful. Proposals to set up a Committee C under the World Health Assembly or a World Health Forum have not gathered sufficient support, although its was pointed out that this was partly due to factors outside the WHO- including the unwillingness of some NGOs to a closer relationship with private sector companies.

As for the need to promote a broader global dialogue on global health – which almost all agreed is necessary – there are two schools of thought. Initiatives might come from the inside of the WHO, or from the outside. One prominent interlocuteur argued that this is not a question of either or or, clearly there is a need for both. It was argued that WHO or health does not always have to be in the lead, - it could also contribute to initiatives led by other partners. It was argued strongly from an interlocuteur within the WHO that it would be a disaster for the organization of a new mechanisms for global health were to be set up completely detached from WHO. It was also noted that it is also important to get more clarity in what WHO can not and does not need to do.

4. ILO and the world of work.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is unique among global international organizations through its tripartite structure where representatives of trade unions and employers take part in negotiations about new conventions and recommendations alongside governments. ILOs core mandate is to adopt international labour standards through conventions and treaties, and to
monitor that members states live up to the obligations undertaken through a supervisory system. Over the 90 years of ILos existence, 189 conventions and treaties have been adopted, of which eight are defined as fundamental. ILO can also adopt less binding «recommendations» on issues within its mandate. Many of these conventions are directly related to protecting and maintaining health at the workplace.

Our interlocuteurs observed that over the last 20 years there seem to be less willingness among members states to ratify ILO conventions, and a certain drift towards less binding, «soft law» instruments to regulate labour standards and to promote social protection. The supervisory system developed by ILO, sometimes used as model for other parts of the system, was said to be under attack by the employers, possibly because it is too efficient.

ILO has cooperated with the WHO for many years on issues related to social protection, with an emphasis on health in the workplace. ILO is not focusing on the medical side of such relations, however, but on broader aspects of health, with the impact of unemployment on health as one example. ILOs approach to social protection is not linked to one source of financing, it can also involve private insurance.

There is a good complementarity between ILOs work on social protection and WHOs efforts to promote universal health coverage with protection against catastrophic expenditure. There are ongoing discussions on what concepts such as universal coverage, essential health services and social equity really imply. The ILO - for its part – has been trying to redefine its approach to social security for all in addition to its traditional focus on social protection.– These issues are now also on the agenda of the Chief Executives Board (CEB), which is the top body for interagency coordination within the UN. The ILO og WHO has receieved a mandate by the CEB to work with other agencies, some governments and some NGOs, to develop a global initative on social protection issues.

There is also cooperation with the WHO at country level, although the entry points are different, WHO working mainly through ministries of health while the ILO works through ministries of labour. In this way, the two agencies can also help promote a stronger social dialogue within the governments of host countries. The ILO has developed a sophisticated and broad system of collecting data and information on social protection issues, including legislation. WHO has, by comparison, a more sectoral approach, and has a tendency to accept data and informations only provided by ministries of health. There is a need to overcome barriers in access to quality national health information, and for capacity in countries to make use of and consolidate information from different sources.

How does ILO relate to those parts of civil society which is not formally a part of trade unions or employers? One answer was that ILO tries to reach out also to unorganized parts of society. There is an ongoing discussion about the increasing role of the NGOs, - for instance in dealing with child labour and with HIV/AIDS – but also questions related to their representativity. The discussion about social protection has taken place mainly within the tripartite structure, while a broader civic dialogue is more inclusive, but still involving the workers and the employers.

There is also a discussion how the ILO can deal with a globalized world where national states are losing economic power, where work is becoming more transient and transnational, where unions
are getting weaker, particularly in the public sector, and how it should deal with transnational corporations. In the wake of the financial crisis, there is more emphasis on employment, on programmes that can generate more work, and on capacity development programmes, i.a. through ILOs Turin Institute.

5. Food security and nutrition

Food security and nutrition are very relevant to global health in several ways. It has been the subject of cooperation between the WHO and FAO for many years, for instance through the Codex Alimentarius. It was not discussed in detail, however, since the organizations involved are based in Rome, not Geneva. The following is therefore based on desk studies and a conversation with relevant desk officers in the MFA in Oslo.

One of the most interesting constructs presently operating in the UN to deal with partnerships is the Committee on Food Security (CFS). The CF was set up in 1974 as an intergovernmental body to serve as a forum to review and to follow-up on food security policies. In 2009, a reform process was initiated to ensure that the voices of other stakeholders were heard in the general debate on food security and nutrition. Civil society organizations and private sector now participate with right to speak and to put forward proposals. The overriding objective of the CFS is to contribute to improved food security and nutrition.

CFS is a forum and an arena, but not an implementing agency. Responsibility for implementations rests with member states in cooperation with the private sector and civil society. Other UN bodies and financial institutions are invited to «listen» to the recommendations coming out of the CFS and to implement them, but detailed procedures for accountability and reporting are still not fully defined. The three Rome-based agencies – the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) – are members of an advisory group to the Bureau of the WFP. The Secretariat of the CFS is independent from existing organizations but is physically located in FAO. WFP and IFAD are co-owners of the secretariat.

Norwegian assessments of the CFS after its fourth meeting in November are largely positive. It was pointed out that the annual meeting over 5 days was well attended, 116 member countries, 15 non-member countries 111 civil society organizations, 2 academic institutions, 3 financial institutions, and 46 private sector organizations. In their opinion, the CFS is coming closer to its objective of becoming the central political platform in the UN system for food security and nutrition, and for a strengthening of coordination of measures at global, regional and national levels – even if there is still room for improvement in the management of the agenda and the debates.

It is interesting to note that the CFS also takes decisions, also on normative issues such as voluntary guidelines and strategic frameworks. Civil society and private sector organizations participate in debates leading up to negotiations(decision-shaping), but formal decisions are negotiated by member states.
6. **Humanitarian Action:**

The humanitarian sector in the UN has – over the last 20 years or so - been in the forefront of promoting partnership with NGOs and civil society organizations. Three major funds and programmes – UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF are main humanitarian operators, but humanitarian divisions in several other agencies including the WHO take part in the overall effort. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) - which is part of the UN Secretariat – is coordinating efforts both at the global level and at the country level. We had conversations with OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF, the IRCR and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).

The international community, multilateral cooperation and the humanitarian environment are undergoing a period of deep change. Countries of the Global South are demanding a larger influence in multilateral cooperation, also in areas which have been dominated by donor-driven groups from the North. They are strengthening their ambitions and capabilities to address humanitarian situations in their countries, sometimes reducing the space both for the UN and for international NGOs. The number of the number of NGOs and civil society groups, some of them faith-based, is increasing almost exponentially everywhere, also in the South. One example often quoted was Haiti, where the number of NGOs/CSOs has been very high, making coordination difficult also for national authorities, leading some observers to use the expression that the country risk becoming an NGO state.

A growing number of humanitarian groups come from Islamic countries and other countries in the South. Turkey and Gulf states are becoming important humanitarian actors, for instance in Somalia and Syria. Various initiatives are under way to widen humanitarian dialogue with Islamic countries, but these talks do not seems to be very advanced at present. Among the important issues to be discussed are their relationships to the UN coordination effort and acceptance of established norms and principles for humanitarian action, including standards of treatment and care. Their effort so far seem to have been mostly in service delivery. UNHCR has not registered problems arising from differences on UN normative principles or on important policy issues.

Our conversation confirmed that these partnerships are going through a period of strains. Some of these stem from developments in conflict countries like Afghanistan and Somalia, where UN humanitarian action are perceived to be part of the overall UN mission, which includes peace operations and political mandates. UN humanitarian agencies have therefore been perceived as less neutral than some NGOs. This may negatively affect staff security and access to certain conflict areas for delivery of goods and services. UN staff has been targeted by fundamentalist groups, necessitating stricter security measures which again reduces operational flexibility. For these reasons, some NGOs such as the Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) have advocated a somewhat greater distance between themselves and the UN. These challenges are not unique for the UN, however, and the trend does not seem to be universal. The ICRC and other humanitarian actors have also experienced abductions and killings of their representatives, and has had to withdraw international staff from high-risk areas.

Several mechanisms have been set up at the global level to strengthen cooperation and coordination between UN bodies and NGOs. The Interagency Standing Committee (IASC),
encompassing humanitarian agencies – including those working on health-related issues, the international NGOs as standing invitees, and with some representatives of the private sector as associate members. The IASC was described as an important instrument to promote cooperation and coordination, although it was also said to be somewhat dominated by Northern NGOs and somewhat heavy on process. It was pointed out that the very aim of «tranformative agenda» launched by OCHA Coordinator Valerie Amos is to strengthen cooperation with new humanitarian partners of the South.

Some of the interlocuteurs pointed to to the Global Humanitarian Platform adopted in 2006, which contains a number of operational principles that were considered to be still important to the NGOs. This Platform was created as an outcome of a dialogue between the UN and Non-Governmental Organizations, and contains principles of partnership that were held by ICVA to be still important. A Global humanitarian Forum, set up as a Swiss non-profit organization, existed between 2007-2010, but was discontinued for financial reasons. The forum adopting this framework had a much larger number of CSO participants than the IASC, and ICVA argued that it was therefore more representative. A proposal to reconvene a Global Humanitarian Forum at the global level under OCHA has been postponed for the time being. According to OCHA, the challenge of humanitarian action today is not the lack of arenas to meet. The problem may be the opposite, there are too many foras with the same people – mostly from the North - going to the same meetings discussing the same issues. Over the last 6-7 years, OCHA has instead developed annual humanitarian fora in Asia and the America. The last Asia Forum, held in China, was described as very useful. From the NGO side, it was argued that these regional fora are not yet very well established or well known.

The delivery of basic health services is an integral part of the humanitarian mission. Many references were made to the outcomes of the humanitarian reform process initiated by the UN in 2005. The structure of interagency cooperation and partnership with NGOs/CSOs has been reformed at the global level- with the reforms of the IASC, the adoption of humanitarian platform and principles, and ensuing reforms led by OCHA Coordinator Valerie Amos, including the transformative agenda.

At the country level, the cluster approach – with civil society organizations represented at the table and with agreed responsibilities - seems to be working well in most situations, although the sheer number of NGOs sometimes generates challenges. It was pointed out that it has led to much more integrated approaches than under the previous consolidated appeals system. Through this approach, - which is still evolving - health services are now much more closely linked to related issues such as food/nutrition, water and sanitation, shelter etc. The WHO is not generally seen as a strong operational actor in the field, but it participates in humanitarian coordinations such as clusters and the UN Country Teams and contributes also through its normative roles. The Red Cross movement and the MSF are among the lead operational actors in health, and has – according to the ICRC- developed a division of roles and responsibilities which was said to work well.
The private sector is not a partner in humanitarian action in the same way as in other fields. It is, however important in delivering goods and services such as food, medical supplies, shelter and communications equipment.

7. Human rights

The relationship between the UN system for human rights and civil society has been close from its very start, more than 65 years ago. The rights of individual human beings to peaceful assembly is in itself enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.- We spoke with representatives from several parts of the OHCHR, including the sections dealing with civil Society, treaty Bodies and special procedures. with a separate meeting on the issues of business and human rights.

The UN Human Rights system is regularly called upon to remind member states of their responsibility to respect human rights obligations which include the rights to peaceful assembly. The human rights system is thus also asked to help protecting the space of civil society in countries where these rights are under stress. - Civil society groups have on their side acted as pressure groups for the strengthening of human rights mechanisms to protect ever more vulnerable groups from discrimination and act as watchdogs that countries respect the obligations they have undertaken. – NGOs participate actively in the deliberations of the UN Human Rights Council.

The UN Human rights system has expanded rapidly over the last 15 years, with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) as the core secretariat body. Even here, important UN reforms took place in 2005 with the transformation of the previous Commission on Human Rights into the new UN Human Rights Council. Key changes were initiated also in its methods of work including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, where all member states has accepted to report periodically on how they respect and implement their human rights obligations. This has been seen as a pioneering approach to strengthen procedures for reporting and accountability in the UN system, which has attracted interest also from other parts of the system.

A large number of mechanisms and procedures has been established under the human rights system to supervise the implementation of conventions and other human rights instruments. The UPR process has now undergone its first round, and many- if not most countries – have involved civil society groups in the preparations of their country reports. – Under the special procedures system, there are presently 48 special rapporteurs, of which 36 are on thematic mandates.. The rapporteurs are independent experts, working i.a. through country visits. One interesting distinction was made on the differences in working methods between rapporteurs on right to food and human rights and the right to health The rapporteur on right to food – in addition to country visits - also takes parts in meetings of the Committee on Food Security in Rome. In contrast, regular participation in the work of the WHO does not seem to be the case for the special rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. There did not seem to be much reaching out from the WHO for interaction on human rights issues.
The digital revolution has dramatically increased the opportunities for contacts with civil society organizations. The UN human rights machinery is open and transparent, most information is available on the website and important meetings and UPR reviews are webcast. In addition to contacts at the country level during visits, the CSOs make good use of the opportunities to communicate and to interact through the Internet. This traffic puts quite a strain on the administrative capacity of the OHCHR, and the backlog by Treaty Bodies to deal with country reports is now up to four years. One interlocuteur in the Office observed that «So much is going on in so many different places». – This is basically good new, implying that the UN rights machinery is relevant and actively used by partners within the interagency system, by civil society – and increasingly also by the private sector.

Traditionally, the relationship between human rights and business in the UN Human Rights system was almost non-existent, human rights were seen as the responsibility of governments. Major steps forward – leading to the establishment of a set Guiding Principles and a first meeting of the Global Forum on Business and Human Rights in 2012 – have been taken during the last decade, following a process mandated by the Council on human Rights.

The contributions of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. John Ruggie – in overcoming mutual distrust through a very thorough consultative process on the principles and the mandate of the new mechanism – thus ensuring broad-based ownership to the process- was highlighted by everybody we spoke with. The process, which took place over a period of 3-4 years, involving consultation with with relevant stakeholders both at the global, regional and country levels, led to a consensus resolution of the UN Human Rights Council establishing the new mechanism. – The first meeting of the Global Forum in 2012 was described as a success. It was interesting to note that the mandate of the Forum is not geared directly towards reporting and accountability, but towards remedies and implementation of the guiding principles.

8. The World Trade Organization (WTO)

The WTO is not formally a part of the UN system, but has entered into an agreement of cooperation with the UN and has become an active partner in interagency cooperation. The Director-General of WTO, Pascal Lamy, has been an active member of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) led by the UN Secretary-General, which is the highest organ in the global intergovernmental system to promote coordination, coherence and cooperation.

The WTO has working methods which distinguish themselves that from other UN agencies, i. a. through the so-called global «rounds» of negotiations on international trade matters, and through its system of settlement of trade disputes through the establishment of panels. Information, agreed norms and expert advice from UN agencies are used as inputs by the panels in dispute settlement, but decisions from these panels are made strictly on the basis of international trade law. It was noted also in the WTO that world governments now seem to be somewhat less inclined to enter into binding, contractual obligations (The Doha Round is still stalled), and to favour less global approaches through regional or bilateral trade agreements.

Traditionally, the relationships between the GATT/WTO and other agencies were rather limited. This was said to have changed significantly in recent years. As more and more trade issues
become cross-sectoral and touch upon the competence of other organizations, cooperation has increased. Two examples were mentioned. The challenge of access to medicine vs intellectual property rights has been a sensitive and emotional issue also in the WTO, and was seen to have been one of the biggest issues in the history of the WTO. It has required a closer collaboration with WHO and the World Intellectual Property Organizations (WIPO). Our attention was drawn to a forthcoming study on this issue, to be launched jointly by the Heads of the three agencies. - The growing importance of food security and nutrition has changed the dynamics of one of the most thorny issues in the Doha Round of negotiations, concerning trade in agricultural products. In this field, the concerns of many food-importing countries for food security have added the issues of export restrictions in exporting countries to the traditional focus on important restrictions.

As regards WTOs relationship with civil society, this was, until the turn of the century, even more limited. This changed dramatically after the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle in 1999, which was to be the launch of a new global round of trade negotiations, but which became dominated by widespread protests from various NGOs and civil society groups. The Seattle meeting was described as a watershed moment for WTO, as it became apparent that the organizations could no longer live in a cocoon, that it had to reach out much more actively to to civil society and to the public to promote better knowledge and understanding of the issues at stake. It became the start of a process where the WTO opened itself up for briefings, for dialogues and for meetings with civil society groups, even for those who had been most active and critical in Seattle (Greenpeace was mentioned as an example). In response to a question of possible lessons for the WHO, it was observed that it may be useful to start with issues of conflict where the interests of different stakeholders collide.

It was strongly underlined that clear objectives and a strategy, including a more long-term perspective, was a decisive facor for a successful opening up. International symposia or seminars on issues of conflict can be useful to bring together the relevant stakeholders, to spread knowledge and to reduce distrust. This is a process which can take years. In the sensitive issue of environmental concerns the WTO started with back to back symposia on trade and development, and on trade and the environment. Too many such initiatives coming from the organization itself will often be regarded as suspect, however, it is often useful to make good use of initiatives coming from other quarters. It is necessary to talk to all stakeholders, also those who are consideres the villains or the enemy – re the tobacco and alcohol industry.

One of the most important experiences drawn from the WTO is the annual Public Forum. It started out modestly as an attempt to strengthen contacts and to provide a forum for dialogue with CSOs and the private sector, facilitated through voluntary financing from some member states (including Norway) but has now grown into the biggest event in the interface of the WTO with CSOs and the private sector. The Public Form is completely open to relevant participants for discussions on the themes chosen. No issues are taboo, even though they may be very critical to the work of the WTO. As an example was mentioned a panel discussion on the subject – Does the WTO kill babies? – where critics of the TRIPS agreement on intellecual property was given a platform to voie their views. Panels can be moderated by well-qualified international journalist (for instance from Financial Times) which also can pose critical questions to the critics.