

IGO/NGO RELATIONS

EVOLUTION NOT REVOLUTION

Global politics has entered a new era in which international relations are no longer the monopoly of governments and the private sector but are being developed between societies and peoples. Simultaneously, increasing interconnectedness fuelled by technology has diluted the authority of states, while the United Nations (UN) has also become weaker. Attempts to conceptualise UN/NGO (nongovernmental organisations) relations within the framework of the UN Charter militate against the principles of the UN based on the Westphalian political order. The response of the international community to “world crises” has been evolutionary rather than revolutionary as manifest in the incremental and gradual expansion of NGO relations with the UN. This paper argues that NGOs will have to invest resources to strengthen the UN and engage with it as a partner in development. Both formal processes and informal practices will have to be considered including a theoretical framework encompassing actors above, below and beyond states.

SEEMA NARAIN

GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY, INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMS, SOCIETY OF STATES AND
WORLD ORDERS AND SYSTEMS

The world may be visualised through various prisms. For example, the world may be viewed as a “system” consisting of independent but interacting subsystems. An advantageous way of looking at it is through the concept of

“world systems” associated with the theoretical approach of the works of Immanuel Wallerstein (*The Capitalist World Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974, 1980, 1989) which focus on the modern economic system from 1450 onwards. An alternative way of looking at the global level is to picture relations between different forms of human governance as a “world order”, which may be defined as a logical set of practices, principles and rules regarding the interaction between states. The concept of world order embraces more than the economic and political organisation of human civilisation as a whole. The constitutive elements of any historical world order are its “deep structure” defined by basic organising principles, dominant ideologies, the main forms of institutions of global governance that produce order and political practices.

This deep structure is often synonymous with the Westphalian order that originated with the 1648 *Treaty of Westphalia* ending the Thirty Year War in Europe. This granted sovereignty to 300 German princes and at the same time reduced the authority of the Holy Roman Empire. This world order based on the “state system” spread from Europe to the rest of the world. Its fundamental

building block, the nation-state became responsible for imposing order, both external and internal defence as well as the civic arrangements and welfare of all citizens. These building blocks of world order cannot be disassociated from the rest of the world. Today, a system of international and supranational regimes and rules has emerged that governs issues that have to be dealt with at a level beyond individual states, such as air traffic, international trade, etc. World orders are historically evolved long-term processes, subject to transformations as they respond to external and internal issues. They are also subject to evolution and tend to respond to human governance concerns and the prevailing ideology of a certain historical period. The Westphalian order and its basic unit the sovereign and independent state are being challenged today by

The Westphalian order’s fundamental building block, the nation-state became responsible for imposing order, both external and internal defence as well as the civic arrangements and welfare of all citizens. The order and its basic unit the sovereign and independent state are being challenged today by globalisation, regionalisation and the emergence of sub-national engines of affluence and growth.

globalisation, regionalisation and the emergence of subnational engines of affluence and growth.

CHALLENGES TO THE WESTPHALIAN ORDER: FROM STATE TO HUMAN SECURITY

The Westphalian order defined by state-centricity is being confronted today by transformations taking place in the template of the international system. Increasingly, humanitarian, peace-building and peacemaking tasks are being delegated by inter-governmental organisations and states to NGOs with conflict resolution, developmental, educational, humanitarian and human rights orientations. These actors perform a vital role in the development of new

In the post-Westphalian system, human security issues and identity representation are given priority, displacing though not replacing, the hegemony of the state as the sole actor and authority. The understanding of the multiple natures of conflict and the need to address directly its many actors, issues and levels has become apparent. This has necessitated a move towards multidimensional approaches for ending conflict.

approaches for ending conflict, particularly in the context of their growing links with transnational organisations and their professed interests in human security issues. These interests appear to be constituted by their civic nature at both the local and international level and though they may express partisan interests, the eradication of the root causes of conflict appears to be their over-riding objective. There has been an increasing normative reaction in the conduct of both local and international politics relating to the wider existence of political

communities, “international society” and “global civil society” (Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society: English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Some analysts argue that the development from a Westphalian states system (in which it is assumed that states have access to all the tools required to manage all

aspects of security) to a somewhat idealised view of the post-Westphalian model (in which an array of actors (private and public) are involved in addressing different aspects of international social conflict) is visible in the contemporary environment. In the post-Westphalian system however, human security issues and identity representation are given priority, displacing though not replacing, the hegemony of the state as the sole actor and authority. Consequently, approaches for ending conflict are now more dynamic than ever before. The Westphalian system is characterised by inflexible versions of sovereignty, which block responsibility for humanitarian issues beyond state borders and focus on state sovereignty and interests in a narrow sense providing little space in which other actors (official or private) may address the roots of conflict. The Westphalian system often replicates conflicts over identity and representation by focusing on “states” rather than human security. Other analysts however, argue that the international system is in the mode of a late-Westphalian phase driven mainly by Western actors in which the understanding of the multiple natures of conflict and the need to address directly its many actors, issues and levels has become apparent. This has necessitated a move towards multidimensional approaches for ending conflict.

Humanitarian intervention of an official nature is clearly increasing. It is in this late-Westphalian context, with a focus on human security derived from a worldview provided by conflict resolution approaches, that NGOs derive increasing levels of legitimacy at both the local and global level. This legitimacy is also the basis on which they gain access to areas in conflict zones that would be normally marginalised or denied to formally constituted peacemaking actors. As the United Nations (UN) Security Council has pointed out, NGOs promote and provide access to a global civil society that may enable peace-building approaches to tap into the relative success that NGOs have had in micro-political environments and the ongoing macro-political changes. However, the post-Westphalian nomenclature gives a sense of the irrelevance or redundancy of the

NGOs promote and provide access to a global civil society that may enable peace-building approaches to tap into the relative success that NGOs have had in micro-political environments and the ongoing macro-political changes.

state whereas in a globalising world, institutional and political structures have developed around the “state” itself and therefore the post-/late-Westphalian debate remains inconclusive.

Two clearly defined models of activities have emerged so far for resolving or settling international conflict. First generation international mediation and classical forms of peacekeeping derived from traditional diplomacy operate at the level of the state in a Westphalian international system characterised by state-centric notions

First generation international mediation and classical forms of peacekeeping derived from traditional diplomacy operate at the level of the state in a Westphalian international system characterised by state-centric notions of sovereignty and self-interest via a communitarian worldview.

of sovereignty and self-interest via a communitarian worldview. Second generation conflict resolution/transformation approaches operate at the level of civil society and develop out of a need to find a process, which facilitates resolution, rather than just manages intractable conflicts. The models were derived from grassroots movements that decried the state-centric and power-political leanings of high politics as described by dominant theories of the

international system. It is in the context of conflict resolution approaches that a conceptual framework for NGOs is found based on their emphasis on norms relating to human needs and security derived from local and global emergent civil societies. Space has been provided for their activities because of the general realisation that conflict is multidimensional and therefore requires multidimensional responses, which have led to the development of peace-building approaches based on a hybrid of conflict management strategies.

First generation approaches include mediation, negotiation and peacekeeping, while second generation conflict resolutions include bottom-up peacemaking strategies and the contributions of NGOs, parallel to state, regional and international organisation based efforts. NGOs through their conflict resolution/transformation and peace-building approaches to conflict provide a crossover point between the forces of globalisation and fragmentation and between global and local civil societies. This takes the debate beyond the proposals for preventive diplomacy and peace-

building contained in the *Agenda for Peace* and subsequent UN documents on the reform of approaches for ending conflict. This approach represents a new generation of multidimensional peace activities that promote broad cultures of interdependence, negotiation and pluralism in civil society, operating at all levels (local, state, regional and global), including international and regional organisations, NGOs and states in the context of a more cosmopolitan view of international society. Therefore, beyond the “international system” and “international society” in the rendition of the English school one must look beyond the society of states at models of global governance, interdependence and transnationalism to address human security issues in this post/neo-Westphalian world (Martha Finnemore, “Exporting the English School?”, *Review of International Studies* vol27, no3, 2001, pp509–13).

THE NOMENCLATURE: WHAT IS AN NGO? DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

NGOs are not a homogenous group. A long list of acronyms has accumulated around the abbreviation NGOs—RINGOs (research and independent), BINGOs (business-friendly/big international), ENGOs (environmental), QUANGOs (quasi-autonomous), etc—and reflects a manifestation of the lack of coherence of NGOs as a grouping. A plethora of various types of NGOs has a consultative status with the UN. While the term NGOs is sometimes used interchangeably with “social movements”, “grassroots organisations”, “major groups” and “civil societies”—NGOs are not akin to any of them. Social movements are broader and more diffused than grassroots organisations. A social movement encompasses a broad segment of society, interested in challenging or stirring up change over particular topics such as disarmament or women’s issues. “Major groups” is a term coined at the time of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit as part of *Agenda 21* and encompasses societal sectors expected to play roles in addition to

Civil society is thought to be the necessary ingredient for democratic governance to rise. NGOs are a part of civil society both domestic and international. According to an early decision of the UN, international NGOs are international organisations that have not been created by agreements among governments.

intergovernmental organisations and nation-states as well business, development, environment and labour NGOs, among others. Finally, civil society is a term that became popular at the end of the Cold War to describe what appeared to have been missing in state-dominated societies—broad based societal participations in and concern for governance, but not necessarily government. Civil society is thought to be the necessary ingredient for democratic governance to rise. NGOs are a part of civil society both domestic and international. According to an early decision of the UN, international NGOs are international organisations that have not been created by agreements among governments.

FACTORS LEADING TO THE GROWTH OF INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY AND UN CONFERENCES DURING THE 1990s

Civil Society is a concept historically associated with Western history and political philosophy. Debates on civil society were open to new discussions in the 1980s, when democratisation efforts in Eastern Europe and Latin America revived the concept by utilising it as a tool for democratic struggles. Civil society refers to the non-economic and non-state space of social interaction (Kaldor, 'The idea of global civil society, 'international Affairs, volume 79. Issue 3, pages 538, May 2003) that seeks to articulate their values and represent their interests. Civil society channels its demands through cultural, economic and political societies and the media. Its *raison d'être* therefore is to voice demands to markets and states. It is not directly related to the control or conquest of power, but to the generation of influence through democratic associations and debates in the public sphere.

The 1990s witnessed a proliferation of international civil society, "from about 13,000 international nongovernmental organisations (INGOs) in 1981 to over 47,000 by 2001" mainly due to linkages to globalisation. The increase in capital, technology and trade flows, coupled with the subsequent interconnectedness between states made this expansion possible. International connections among segments of civil society focused on influencing policies of governments and international organisations. They found the processes of global conferences a fertile ground to achieve this and throughout the 1990s, these became new fora for global governance. One of the main causes of the sudden increase in UN conferences was the need to deal with problems that

could not be treated purely from a national perspective. For example, environmental issues traverse national/regional boundaries and as a result, nations have to address them jointly. The universality of the issues being dealt with made previous forms of cooperation inadequate and required other forms of negotiations (Reitano, R. 1999. "Summits, multilateral diplomacy and the United Nations." In J.P. Muldoon, Jr., J. Fagot Aviel, R. Reitano and E. Sullivan (eds), *Multilateral Diplomacy and the United Nations Today*. Westview Press, Boulder, CO). In other words, global problems needed global solutions (Jutta M Joachin, *Agenda Setting: The UN and NGOs*, Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007).

In addition, a variety of factors shaped the predominance of UN conferences during the 1990s. The end of the Cold War opened possibilities for cooperation between states and globalisation was a primary force in making nations identify problems that extended beyond their territories. Together these have had some success in catapulting recent changes in international relations. Also linked to the emergence of global conferences was the mobilisation of certain groups within global civil society into a position commanding public attention and demanding action on specific global issues. For instance, environmental and women's movements played significant roles in building momentum for the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

The most salient example is the key role played by the coalition of INGOs in the campaign to ban landmines. This put the issue on the international agenda, got like-minded governments and UN institutions on board and led to the *Ottawa Convention Banning Landmines*, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997. UN

The 1990s witnessed a proliferation of international civil society from about 13,000 international nongovernmental organisations in 1981 to over 47,000 by 2001 mainly due to linkages to globalisation. The increase in capital, technology and trade flows, coupled with the subsequent interconnectedness between states made this expansion possible.

conferences expressed the debates and dilemmas surrounding global problems and the responses of bureaucrats and states favouring or opposing a particular solution.

The process of globalisation questions the foundations of modern states, as resolutions are taken at the global and local level and these decisions have crucial effects beyond national territories. Hence, there is a need to restructure the international decision-making structure as globalisation has gradually disembedded the social contract between the state and society, a factor integral to social democracy and welfare capitalism.

Considering their political role and salience, these conferences provided arenas for the struggle for legitimacy between different claims, within the processes of structuring a response or lack of it to international issues. For example the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, saw the battle of two competing claims—the fundamental disjuncture between governments that wanted to strengthen UN human rights procedures and those that wanted to deal them a deathblow. As such, the key function of global conferences is now mostly to provide a source of legitimisation to seal the approval or disapproval of actions, claims and policies of participants.

THE PROBLEM OF CONCEPTUALISING UN/NGO RELATIONS

This section puts forward the problems of researching UN/NGO relations. Studies focussing on the role of NGOs in the “international system” suggest that the scaling down of summits and the scaling up of grassroots movements has pushed the state into irrelevance. Since there is little linkage between theoretical and empirical findings on the participation of NGOs at international meetings, there is a lack of knowledge on how to build or improve consensus.

The state-centred approach based on representational and territorial systems guided the studies of international relations through the Cold War and beyond. Within this framework, states were the basic units of analyses, while civil society was perceived as an outsider in the actual decision-making process. During the post-Cold War era, the growth of NGOs and other forms of international

collaboration prompted greater participation by non-state actors in international relations, leading to a re-examination of concepts that appeared inadequate to explain contemporary phenomena. The main debate of this re-examination is that the process of globalisation questions the foundations of modern states, as resolutions are taken at the global and local level and these decisions have crucial effects beyond national territories. Hence, there is a need to restructure the international decision-making structure as globalisation has gradually disembedded the social contract between the state and society, a factor integral to social democracy and welfare capitalism.

According to some scholars, this means that the sovereign state has become impracticable. Others contest this proposition and point out that the extent to which globalisation constrains state policies has been exaggerated, especially in relation to states of the North and that this discourse has the objective of drawing away political energies from national arenas to promote the globalisation of capital. The consequence of these debates has been the development of new societal approaches to relations between state and non-state actors, which assert that states are not the only actors to be taken into account and states and their societies are regarded as basic entities of analyses. By emphasising the multiple identities of citizens, societal approaches support systems of global governance where non-state actors become key and active collaborators side-by-side with states. Civil society is then viewed as the formal or informal insider of decision-making processes.

Another view sees international civil society as a factor for democratising international relations as the representative of world opinion and thus as a force that could create a more democratic and egalitarian world. The internationalisation process coexists with a simultaneous development that focuses on democratisation at the global level or the process that reduces the democratic deficit in the

NGO work related to the UN comprises a number of activities including awareness raising, collaboration with UN agencies, funds and programmes, development education, information dissemination, joint operational projects, policy advocacy and the provision of technical expertise.

governance of social relationships. Global civil society is seen by many as a key aspect of this democratisation force because it potentially offers important possibilities for reducing deficits by boosting the democratic legitimacy of governance structures, fuelling debates, increasing accountability and transparency, platform building and public education.

UN/NGO Relations

NGOs have been active in the UN since its founding. They interact with UN agencies, funds, programmes and the Secretariat and consult with member-states as well. NGO work related to the UN comprises a number of activities including awareness raising, collaboration with UN agencies, funds and programmes, development education, information dissemination, joint operational projects, policy advocacy and the provision of technical expertise. This work is undertaken in formal and informal ways at the national level and at the UN. Official UN


A multi-stakeholder approach to global policymaking enlisting support from a broad political spectrum would go a long way in evolving pluralistic studies engaging non-state actors and multilevel foci of analyses.

Secretariat relations with NGOs fall into two main categories—consultations with governments and information servicing by the Secretariat. These functions are the responsibility of two main offices of the UN Secretariat dealing with NGOs—the NGO Unit of the Department of Economic and Social

Affairs (available at, <http://www.un.org>) and the NGO Section of the Department of Public Information (*ibid*). Formal interactions between NGOs and the UN are governed by the *UN Charter* and related resolutions of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In February 2003, the UN Secretary-General appointed a high-level panel of eminent persons (*ibid*) to produce a set of practical recommendations for improving the UN's work with civil society. The final report of the panel was presented in June 2004. Broadly speaking, NGOs may cooperate with the UN system in at least four ways:

1. NGOs may receive accreditation for a conference, summit or other event organised by the UN. Such accreditation is issued through the Secretariat preparing the event and expires upon the completion of the event. It entitles NGOs to participate in the preparation process and in the event itself, thus contributing to its outcome.
2. NGOs may establish working relations with particular UN departments, programmes or specialised agencies (available at, <http://www.un-ngls.org>), based on shared fields of interest and potential for joint activities complementing the work of the UN office in a particular area.
3. International NGOs active in the field of economic and social development may seek to obtain consultative status with ECOSOC (available at, <http://www.un.org>).
4. NGOs that have at their disposal regular means for disseminating information, either through publications or radio and television programmes or through public activities such as conferences, lectures, seminars or workshops and are willing to devote a portion of their information programmes to the dissemination of information about the UN, may apply for association with the UN Department of Public Information.

Suggestions for further research

First, research on UN/NGOs relations has to be a two way process. Therefore, although literature on civil society at global conferences tends to emphasise the influence civil society has on UN summits it should also aim to cover the effects that global governance has on the structure of civil society activism. Second, although existing literature offers broad perspectives on the new role of NGOs in global governance, it does not offer a detailed examination of the interconnections between empirical results and theoretical debates on global governance. Third, a multi-stakeholder approach to global policymaking enlisting support from a broad political spectrum would go a long way in evolving pluralistic studies engaging non-state actors and multilevel (local, national, regional and international) foci of analyses (Dorothea Hillhorst, *The Real World of NGOs: Discourses, Diversity and Development*, London: Zed Books, 2003). 

This article is adapted from a paper presented at the Third Global International Studies Conference, Porto, Portugal, 17–20 August 2011