

## **Summary of Chapter 10: Engaging civil society: NGOs and other non-state actors**

notes used by Nancy Dunlavy for her presentation of Joe Schwartzberg's proposals in Chapter 10, "Engaging Civil Society" in **Transforming the United Nations System: Designs for a Workable World**.

Importance of INCLUSIVENESS for the UN decision-making to be considered legitimate.

As we've discussed before – UN Charter begins with "We the peoples..", but deliberations take place between nation states, with their own vested interests and without the voices of individuals being considered.

In May we talked about the potential of the creation of a World Parliamentary Assembly, allowing people to have a voice through parliamentary representatives.

In this chapter, Joe shares proposals for two other non-state actors: NGOs (through what he calls "Civil Society Coordinating Councils), and corporations (through "Global Compacts").

**FIRST** .... global citizens can have a voice through CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOs) or NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOs).

Many of you know about the Global Challenges Competition that was conducted in 2017. Joe submitted two proposals – one of them covered the concept of Weighted Voting generally. The second one proposed one of the key topics in this chapter – CIVIL SOCIETY COORDINATING COUNCILS. He updated various statistics that are listed in the book. When appropriate I will be using those updated statistics.

Number of NGOs – over ten million

4,500 of them, mainly classified as INGOs, have been given various levels of accreditation within the UN.

Annually these organizations produce hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of pages of reports that no UN mission could possibly read, much less study and discuss.

There is no efficient method of maximize the use of this vast reservoir of knowledge and experience. Those NGOs that are financially endowed and are headquartered in or near the UN headquarters in NY receive much more attention than smaller NGOs from the Global South. Much of the on-the-ground field work taking place where human suffering actually occurs is lost in this massive amount of information.

As Joe says in the book, p.181: *"Only a small proportion – those with a strong membership base, ample funding and sophisticated PR capabilities – presently have a reasonable chance of winning out in the competition for attention."* Under this current system, the voices of politically marginalized groups, and the critical issues that are not on the mainstream political radar screen, are ignored.

Joe goes on to share examples of NGO coalitions that have had significant impact on crucial global problems over the last couple of decades:

- International Campaign to Ban Landmines
- International HIV/AIDS Alliance
- NGO Coalition on the International Criminal Court

- NGOs have had a tremendous impact, though not as much as is needed, on environmental issues, starting with the 1972 Earth Summit up to the current Paris Climate Accord

Strengths that NGOs bring to global decision-making:

- Kofi Annan – “They can lead and say things that I cannot say. .. They can lead and say things I cannot say. We cannot operate in the field without our essential partners, the NGOs.”
- Soft power, not decision-making power. In the Cardoso Report: “It is their capacity to argue, to propose, to experiment, to denounce, to be exemplary.”

Potential challenges to increasing the voice of NGOs: quotes from Joe p.186:

- “In all parts of the world there are NGOs whose bona fides are suspect. Some are led by unreasonable zealots, narcissists or corrupt charlatans. Others were created as vehicles for providing employment and funding for staff with little aptitude for and/or dedication to their organization’s ostensible purpose.”
- Establishment of GONGOs (government-organized NGOs).
- “The independence and integrity of NGOs may be compromised by their acceptance of contributions from corporations whose economic interests might be adversely affected by the adoption of specific policies that the NGO may, absent such funding, choose to promote.”
- “While NGOs are often touted for their alleged ability to bring expert scientific and technical knowledge to bear on major issues, the fact that individual NGOs often work at cross-purposes indicates that at least some of those positions are ill advised.”

Joe’s proposal:

creation of Civil Society Coordinating Councils – he proposes five, one each for the themes of: human rights, environment, development, peace and security, and democratic governance.

- Open to all NGOs
- Modest membership fee, pro rata in accordance with their financial resources (and NGOs headquartered in countries with a per capita GNI above the global average would pay an additional fee to subsidize the participation of those from poorer countries)
- must submit an annual report
- pledge to abide by codes of ethical conduct
- An NGO could be a member of more than one CSCC

Transparency, fairness, accountability and statutory legitimacy.

(p.187 – how to begin)

Membership on the council should be balanced in regard to both regional and gender composition. Recommends somewhere between 50 and 125 members on the council.

Councilors chosen based on a weighted voting system (Budget; Geographical Range of Activities; UN Consultative Status). (formula p.188-189)

Key benefits / features:

- Two way information flows
- Receive, discuss, harmonize and prioritize recommendations, acting in coalitions focused on promoting shared goals within the CSCC thematic area. Dissenting opinions of minority NGOs can also be indicated in the reports.

- Comment on debates that come up within the UN system. Respond to unscheduled ad hoc requests for its views from UN agencies.
- Relevant UN organ that receives the annual report would be required to discuss and comment upon the report. Shared with Secretariat and other relevant UN organs.
- No restriction is created to prevent individual NGOs or coalitions to share their views with countries, UN agencies, etc.

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## Joe's second proposal

Related to the private commercial sector

Strengths:

- Can infuse the global governance system with significant financial resources
- Guidelines for involvement can require corporations to conduct their business with human rights, labor standards, environmental protections considerations, not just their financial bottom line.

Great concerns:

- Lack of accountability
- Can leverage their financial power to bend programs and priorities to their own advantage.

Global Compact, launched during Kofi Annan's time as S-G.

- Participating corporations are expected – but not legally required -- to incorporate ethical principles and submit an annual accounting of their progress

Joe p.196:

“Many critics look with disdain on the whole enterprise, regarding it essentially as a UN sell-out to the business world, notwithstanding its demonstrable benefits to millions of people throughout the world. ... on the other hand ... some in the business community worry that the initiative is an attempt at global regulation.”

Joe suggests that an enhanced oversight capability is needed.

- Expand the mandate and resources of the UN Secretariat Ethics Office
- Require formal ECOSOC approval for projects exceeding specified budgetary levels and/or those affecting more than a stipulated number of people.