THE ROLE OF NON-STATE ACTORS
IN MULTISTAKEHOLDER DIPLOMACY
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Recent developments in technology and better organisation have allowed non state actors (NSAs) to have a more active role in diplomacy, bringing new challenges to international organisations seeking to build partnerships with them. Different organisations and different actors have found ways to work together and reach a common goal. On a broader level, however, it remains difficult to incorporate all NSAs into multistakeholder diplomatic processes. Although previous experiences show that the participation of NSAs can facilitate communication with civil society while providing accountability and transparency to the process, their role is yet to be defined.

In general, the more stakeholders that participate on a task or issue, a greater likelihood of success is possible if a common goal is established. However, two questions need clarification even before participation in multistakeholder diplomacy is possible: Who can participate? and How can they participate? As NSAs take a more active role in diplomacy, challenges arise that must be faced. Communication between stakeholders requires improvement, flexibility in decision-making processes must incorporate all perspectives, and constant evaluation to advance in multistakeholder collaboration must be implemented.

The role of NSAs such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international businesses, and civil society groups in multilateral diplomacy has historically been an active one. In recent years however, several factors have influenced their participation, especially in multilateral diplomacy. These factors include the growth in numbers of NSAs, as well as the development of communication technologies. The latter, in particular, allow better organisation of NGOs, their co-ordination world wide, and more effective advocacy. Another factor contributing to the increased participation of NSAs is the recognition by governments and international organisations that these groups have vital information and can make a valuable contribution in global change.

Here, the efforts made by international organisations to incorporate NSAs in multistakeholder partnerships or networks will be analysed. Special attention will be given to efforts made by the UN to include NSAs in partnerships, since its various multilateral forums on specialised issues provide con-

siderable information on how the interaction between NSAs and governments has been developing. Because, to date, no single way of interaction between all actors or stakeholders has been defined, modes of participation and lessons learnt will be analysed as a way to identify what has been accomplished and, perhaps, to recognise what challenges lay ahead.

Efforts of the UN System to Build a Partnership with NSAs

Civil society organisations have long participated within the UN system. Some of the oldest forms of participation include the World Anti-Slavery Convention and the International Committee for the Red Cross, where citizen organisations co-ordinated their work on an international basis. Since its creation, the UN has recognised NGOs with consultative status at the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), because of their important role after World War II.

The 1990s saw a rise in the number of NGOs wanting a consultative status with the UN, which brought about an amendment to the rules governing the granting of a partnership with the UN. Consultative status is divided into three categories. *General* status falls to international organisations, giving them the right to put items on the agenda of ECOSOC, to present written submissions, and to address the meetings. Well established, national NGOs won the right to *special* consultative status, with more limited rights. NGOs in the third category were put on a *roster* of groups that might occasionally make useful contributions, but with limited access to the work of ECOSOC (Ottaway, 2001). Today over 2,500 NGOs have consultative status (United Nations, 2005), but, according to Ottaway (2001), "the number of those clamouring to gain recognition is much larger." Those who seek recognition are a diverse group, embracing a variety of causes.

Paul (2000) claims that "the UN system is the main focus of international rule-making and policy formulation in the fields where most NGOs operate." Therefore, UN conferences have recently been an important arena for actors to gather and form networks on global issues. In 1992, the Earth Summit in Rio marked the beginning of intense NSA participation in UN world conferences and parallel meetings. Since then, the World Conference on Women, the Millennium Forum parallel to the Millennium Summit, the UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, and the UN Conference on Financing for Development, have all seen an increase

in NSA participation and contributions. According to a report by the UN (United Nations, 1999), they have encouraged NSA participation, knowing that the support of a wide spectrum of society is required to implement the policies discussed at these global forums.

At the World Economic Forum in 1999, Kofi Annan declared "the United Nations once dealt only with governments. By now, we know that peace and prosperity are unattainable without partners' involving governments, international organisations, the business community, and civil society. In today's world we depend on each other" (United Nations, 2005). Another way the UN is reaching out to NSAs is through the Global Compact, an international initiative to bring companies together with UN agencies, labour, and civil society (Global Compact, 2005).

Efforts by Trade Organisations to Build Partnerships with NSAs

International trade organisations like the G8, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and regional trade associations have made different efforts to open communication and participation with civil society, after recognising that these groups can contribute towards their goals.

Since its creation, the WTO has acknowledged the need for interaction with NGOs. The first significant step, however, involving NGOs with the WTO required NGOs to attend ministerial conferences and to establish day to day communication with the WTO. By 1998, the General Council announced guidelines for closer interaction. This entailed that the External Relations Division of the WTO present a series of regular briefings for NGOs, while also communicating to all member countries position papers submitted by NGOs. Currently, in addition to allocating a section of the WTO website (World Trade Organization, 2005) for documents and information regarding activities that concern NGOs, the WTO also arranges a series of symposia for NGOs that provide informal opportunities for them to discuss issues with WTO representatives.

An example of G8 efforts to include co-operation with NSAs is the 2002 G8 Environment Ministers Meeting in Banff, Canada. As a lead up to the annual G8 Summit, the organisers worked to engage local stakeholders in the process of the meeting, intending to diffuse violence and protest. The strategy outlined two groups, the first composed of local residents concerned about personal and property safety; and the second, of activists who wanted

to voice their concerns. The G8 group meetings, since the "Battle of Seattle," have been seeking better communication with civil society. According to Risbud (2002) "citizen participation and contribution helps inform deliberations at the ministerial level and serves to diffuse the need for violent protests."

International trade organisations have also developed different ways of interacting with NSAs, in an attempt to improve knowledge and acceptance of their activities. The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), for example, has set up a Committee of Government Representatives on the Participation of Civil Society, which serves as a link with civil actors and receives their contributions for consideration. Examples of best practices for the involvement of civil society with the FTAA are creation of advisory bodies, organisation of public events and meetings with civil society, engagement of parliamentarians, and creation of public information material, electronic information networks, and media to inform the public (FTAA Committee, 2003).

The European Union (EU) is an entity that has special interest in developing a partnership with NSAs on various levels and issues. Through the European Commission, approximately 20% of EU yearly development assistance is managed by or with NSAs (Commission to the Council, 2002). The European Commission has realised the necessity of local NSA participation in development policies for them to be successful. The promotion of an effective dialogue with local NSAs, capacity building through northern NSAs, and the participation and ownership of civil society in the development process are all vital factors in effective aid.

The Commission seeks to improve the NSA role in policy dialogue on all levels of participation: planning, strategy development, policy dialogue, implementation, decision-making, reviews, and monitoring. An excellent example of EU implementation of NSA participation is the Cotonou Agreement; signed in June 2000. This Agreement aims to alleviate poverty and to promote sustainable development and the integration of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries into the world economy. The Agreement will last for twenty years and it contains a clause allowing mid-term review and revision every five years. This accord aims at fortifying co-operation between the EU and the ACP countries previously defined by the Lomé Convention. Three pillars hold the Cotonou agreement: development, political issues, and trade. While the central theme is poverty reduction, an essential, additional factor characterises this agreement: the involvement of NSAs on all levels of dialogue and negotiation.

Operationally, the Cotonou agreement defines National and Regional Authorising Officers (NAOs/RAOs) in the ACP countries, who work together with European Commission delegations to define on national and regional levels the priorities and sectors of intervention. NSAs have a contribution and consultation status in this process. The Cotonou agreement seeks to incorporate all stakeholders in the partnership: national governments, government institutions, northern and southern NSAs, and regional associations. Negotiation with and participation of all these actors occurs mainly through a process that begins with country strategy papers, designed at a country level to assess the national civil society and the needs in development, trade, and political issues. These papers are then analysed by Commission delegations and a consultation and assessment process called *programming* takes place with NSAs and NAOs. The on-going consultation, monitoring, and decision-making process reviews the partnership's work. The Cotonou agreement definitely sets a precedent for the incorporation of civil society into all levels of negotiation and decision-making, acknowledging the contribution of civil society in fostering healthy partnerships for development, poverty reduction, trade, and political issues.

Another example of EU collaboration with civil society is that of the European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC), which, in 1999, expanded its membership to include representatives of civil society. The EEHC Third Ministerial Conference in 1999 was organised under the theme of "Action in Partnership," acknowledging the importance of incorporating NGOs and the public for the success of EEHC projects. Partnerships were recognised as essential for communication, data, and information exchange, as well as for on-the-ground implementation of projects. The concluding document of this conference highlighted the importance of including NGOs in international decision making processes – to promote further effective participation by NGOs, to reach out to the scientific community, and to build more local partnerships with NSAs (EEHC, 2004).

One of the conclusions the EU has come to realise is that NSA participation is crucial for the effectiveness of development policies and that collaboration between stakeholders can improve implementation of these policies. However according to the European Commission, "with NSA involvement in the development process, a number of developing countries face two major problems, namely the lack of political will on part of national governments to involve NSAs and the poor structuring and capacity of NSAs" (Commission to the Council, 2002).

Conclusion

It has been widely recognised that NSAs have an important contribution to make to all international issues. The UN, WTO, and the EU, among other organisations, have recognised that their goals can be reached more efficiently with close co-operation with NSAs. Although each organisation has found a different way to work in partnership with NSAs, some of these collaborations need further development. Among the contributions NSAs can make, as active partners, are accountability and transparency, ownership of projects, with resulting empowerment and participation of civil society.

However, challenges still lay ahead. NGOs who collaborate with governments and multilateral organisations need to maintain their independence and neutrality. Other challenges are defining new frameworks for NSA participation without falling into too much bureaucracy or without stalling decision-making processes; therefore, frameworks need to be flexible to incorporate new participants and needs. Communication and information sharing between stakeholders, along with constant evaluation of the new networks, are further challenges that need to address if stronger partnerships are to be built.

The examples of organisations reaching out to NSAs are a demonstration that stakeholders create a better outcome when a common goal can be visualised and roles and tasks defined. The UN has done a great deal through conferences and agencies to promote partnerships and to serve as a platform for all actors to interact. The strength of NSAs lies in working in alliance and in co-ordination of their efforts. These strengths need translation to a multistakeholder environment where they can share their expertise. Evidently, NSAs are already a vital part of international issues and international forums; this role will develop, depending on the willingness of other actors to collaborate with them. Paul (2000) summarises the future importance of NSAs by saying, "globalisation has created both cross border issues that NGOs address and cross border communities of interest that NGOs represent. National governments cannot do either task effectively or as legitimately. In the globalising world of the 21st century, NGOs will have a growing international calling."

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