

MULTISTAKEHOLDER DIPLOMACY IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL DIPLOMATIC SYSTEMS

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The multistakeholder approach to negotiation is a new perspective and approach in addressing, solving, and dealing with an increasing number of issues at local, national, regional, and global levels. Most state and non-state entities, including governmental constituencies, multinational firms, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and international organisations are establishing, or have established, or are otherwise involved in multistakeholder practices.

The aim and the essence of the multistakeholder approach is formidable – to ensure that through dialogue and consensus building the views of the parties who have influence over or are likely to be affected by a particular policy, project, or decision are expressed, understood, taken into consideration, and integrated at all stages of a project. The overall objective is to promote better decision-making processes. The essential point of the multistakeholder approach is that everyone involved in the process has a valid view and relevant knowledge, resources, expertise, and experience to bring to decision-making.

Currently, diplomats involved in the multistakeholder environment are experiencing a number of substantial and significant changes in their job: they are actors involved in diplomatic activities with issues that are more complex and diversified than in the past. In this respect, Cooper (2001) has claimed that “in the new environment, the classic political and strategic matters are no longer the preponderant element on international relations” (p. 12). Likewise, national interests now need to take into consideration the global economy, international migrations, environmental crises, terrorism, drug trafficking, arms proliferation and cybercriminality (Brown and Studemeister, 2001). To say the least, in the complex, modern environment, “diplomacy will be more complicated” (Hocking, 2001) and will need expertise from other sectors.

The purpose of this paper is to report on one aspect of the Multistakeholder Diplomacy Research undertaken under the auspices of the DiploFoundation with the support of the Global Knowledge Partnership. This research program encompassed various topics, of which multistakeholder practices within national diplomatic systems worldwide was one. The author conducted the

research reported here during a three-month internship at the DiploFoundation from October 1 to December 31, 2004.

Objective, Tools and Methodology of the Research

The main objective of this particular part of the Multistakeholder Diplomacy Research was to examine multistakeholder practices or arrangements in the foreign services of some national diplomatic systems, with a focus on:

- identifying major domestic stakeholders involved in foreign policy shaping;
- identifying foreign ministry offices or departments in charge of relations with domestic stakeholders, their functions and responsibilities;
- mapping forms of interaction between national diplomatic services and domestic stakeholders;
- examining modalities of interaction between national diplomatic systems and domestic stakeholders. The research was based on identification, analysis, and summary, in the form of briefcases, links, and annotations, relevant information related to multistakeholder practices or arrangements within diplomatic systems.

Forms of Multistakeholder Practices within National Diplomatic Systems

Multistakeholder practices are visible in a number of processes within diplomatic systems: for example, in decision-making, in decision implementation, in negotiation, and in foreign policy formulation and conduct. Surveying a range of national diplomatic machineries' organisational charts, activities, and outlines of departmental, official, and bureaucratic responsibilities permitted the mapping of various forms of multistakeholder practices and arrangements. Multistakeholder practices take many forms, including:

- the creation within Foreign Ministries of departments or offices charged with liaison with domestic stakeholders (other domestic governmental agencies, parliaments, academia, businesses, media, churches, NGOs, trade unions, the private sector);

- permanent and/or periodic consultations between Foreign Officers and domestic stakeholders;
- dialogue with domestic stakeholders on both a formal basis (seminars, conferences) and an informal basis (meetings between Foreign Officers and members from NGOs, academia, media);
- the inclusion of personnel from NGOs, academia, business, in official delegations to international conferences;
- multidimensional supports (financial, material, and institutional) to NGOs or other stakeholders in their actions;
- the development and delivery of humanitarian assistance through NGOs and the creation of actor groups on particular issues.

Outcome of the Research:

Benefits of Using a Multistakeholder Approach

The issues and concerns with which national diplomatic services worldwide are currently dealing are complex and diversified. Addressing local, national, and global issues requires engagement with a number of changes, notably opening to other professional sectors and setting up new types of professional culture. This context also calls for greater transparency, governance, and participation by a wide range of local and national actors. Foreign policy can no longer be considered solely the responsibility of diplomats.

Yet, adopting a multistakeholder approach within a diplomatic system is not only a demand from national citizens; it is also necessary for better efficiency and effectiveness within national foreign policy procedure. Using a multistakeholder approach gives national diplomatic machineries the opportunity to benefit from resources, experience, and expertise from other stakeholders. Other stakeholders' inputs (opinions, views, thoughts, ideas, and information) can significantly improve the formulation of the perspective of national interests and can improve the negotiation process. This is particularly relevant because other stakeholders bring different points of view, leading to a better perception or vision of all policy facets. Adopting a multistakeholder approach helps to gain support from significant stakeholders, leading to a national consensus regarding foreign policy and its implementation.

Recently, governance has become an important value within political, economic, and social processes. National governments are urged to apply governance principles. A multistakeholder approach ensures better governance

because all main stakeholders feel a greater sense of ownership over foreign policy decision-making.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Mauritius Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During this research, the author surveyed a number of national diplomatic systems, looking for representative multistakeholder practices and arrangements. Several of these are presented here.

The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), as in other ministries studied, seeks to open to other UK stakeholders (local and national). This attitude is fuelled by the will “to tap into the expertise and experience of a range of groups and communities throughout the UK, from trade unions to faith communities, and from ethnic minorities to business and the voluntary sector” (FCO, 2004).

To carry out this objective, a particular unit has been created: the *Partnership and Network Development Unit*. This unit is responsible for encouraging involvement of other stakeholders in the work of the FCO. To date, the FCO, through this Unit, has been involved in dialogue and consultations on various issues with a number of communities and groups throughout the UK, including local communities, minority ethnic communities, faith groups, and the voluntary sector (FCO, 2004).

The Mauritius Ministry of Foreign Affairs Trade Policy Unit. Within the Mauritius Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Regional Co-operation section, the overall mission of the Trade Policy Unit consists of “formulating Mauritius Trade Policies and to ascertain that its concerns are adequately reflected in Multilateral and Regional Trading Arrangements and global trade rules” (MFA, 2004a). The unit is charged with the strategic task of elaborating negotiating positions of Mauritius in the context of global (World Trade Organisation) and regional (COMESA, Southern African Development Community, African Economic Community) trade negotiations.

In order to efficiently and effectively ensure the interests of Mauritius, as well as those of the Mauritius business sector, the Trade Policy Unit works closely with other Ministries, the private sector, academia, trade unions, and NGOs. This collaboration occurs through consultation and the dissemination of information to relevant stakeholders on a timely basis.

As well, within its Regional Co-operation Agenda, the Mauritius Ministry of Foreign Affairs seeks “to promote national inter-sectoral consultations on issues of regional interest” (MFA, 2004b).

Conclusion

This research has permitted the identification of stakeholders involved and has analysed the most frequently encountered forms of practice and arrangement within some diplomatic systems. It also has permitted the mapping of and analysis of the benefits that diplomatic services, and particularly national foreign policies, could gain using a multistakeholder approach.

Clearly, this approach is relatively new and only a small number of diplomatic services has implemented it; nevertheless, considerable work remains in order to systematise and generalise this perspective in contemporary diplomatic services. It would be important and interesting to assess already existing multistakeholder practices as well as their difficulties and outcomes. We should “give the floor” to national stakeholders, so that they could offer their views and assess efforts and initiatives to get them involved in foreign policy making and in foreign ministries activities.

References

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Part IV

MULTISTAKEHOLDER NETWORKS

