

LESSON 10 Engagement of Civil Society

Abstract

International institutions are struggling with the question of how to engage civil society organizations (CSOs) and non governmental organizations (NGOs) in a legitimate and representative manner. Providing for effective participation, enabling the voices of the many diverse interests in civil society to be heard, has proven difficult and contentious. Relevant experience is found in the model of the Arria formula, and in the activities of CIVICUS and Eurodad. The Forum International de Montreal (FIM) has made serious efforts to engage the officials who prepare the G8 Summit. A current related experience is the Russian effort, Civil 8, with respect to the St. Petersburg July 2006 G8 Summit.

Background

The appropriate role for civil society in governance processes is a controversial and divisive issue. Some argue there is a “democratic deficit” in many national governments and in international governance mechanisms. To remedy this democratic gap in global policy-making, it is suggested that civil society be given “a seat at the table”. Any entity or process will be more effective and legitimate if it has an acceptable means of including the voices of civil society. Conversely, some skeptics argue against the inclusion of civil society in governance processes, and believe that managing global issues is the responsibility of national governments who must ensure that they credibly represent the full range of opinion within their own countries. Skeptics also worry that the addition of special interest groups to an L20 process would inevitably lead to a bureaucratic nightmare. They fear that too much engagement with outsiders would erode the desired informality of proceedings or undermine established democratic structures. They ask: Which elements of civil society should be consulted and what would such a process look like? How should the L20 resist the “tyranny of the loudest”? How would voices from the South be included?

There are a wide variety of different models that currently exist for involving civil society in multilateral affairs. One of the most effective approaches is the Arria formula at the UN Security Council. CIVICUS and EURODAD are well known organizations designed to aggregate the diverse voices of civil society. The Forum International de Montreal (FIM) endeavours to arrange substantive conversations between the officials who prepare G8 Summits (Sherpas) and representatives of global civil society.

The Arria Formula (<http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/mtgsetc/ariatxt.htm>) is an informal ad hoc and flexible process/mechanism for incorporating the voices of civil society into discussions at the UN Security Council. The original intent of these informal meetings with representatives of CSOs was to bring relevant “on the ground” information to the members of the Council. Arria formula meetings take place whenever they are deemed useful by any member of the Council who undertakes to organize them. UN Security Council members discuss matters with invited personalities in an informal and

closed setting. Meetings are normally chaired by the delegation who takes the initiative of inviting the guests. Arria formula meetings never have written records. Other Security Council members do not have to agree to the holding of such meetings, nor on who will attend, and on the matters to be dealt with - everyone is free to decide whether or not to join in the meeting process. The Arria Formula has historically demonstrated flexibility regarding the rank and role of the invited guests.

CIVICUS (http://www.civicus.org/new/intro_new.asp) is an international alliance dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world. It occupies a unique position as the largest, most diverse and most broadly recognized cross-sectoral civil society alliance in the world. CIVICUS seeks *“to amplify the voices and opinions of ordinary people.”* They recognize *“that for effective and sustainable civic participation to occur, citizens must enjoy rights of free association and be able to engage all sectors of society.”* They want to break down barriers to effective collaboration within civil society and advocate for citizen participation as an essential component of governance and democracy worldwide. CIVICUS convenes civil society, galvanizes joint mobilization and activism by building bridges between trade unions, faith-based organisations, and service-oriented NGOs in order to influence governance, policy and the delivery of services to the poor. In September 2004, in Johannesburg South Africa, CIVICUS jointly convened the founding meeting of the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) <http://www.whiteband.org/about-gcap/what-is-gcap>

CIVICUS is responsible for managing GCAP Global Secretariat, currently housed at the CIVICUS offices in Johannesburg.

Eurodad (<http://www.eurodad.org/aboutus/>), the European Network on Debt and Development, is a network of [53 development non-governmental organisations](#) from 15 European countries working for international financing policies that achieve poverty eradication and the empowerment of the poor. The objective is to increase the effectiveness of the campaigns, outreach, advocacy and programmes, by coordinating knowledge and resources. A small Secretariat monitors existing policies and practices, coordinates cooperation, and promotes alternative policy frameworks. The work of the Eurodad staff is directly overseen by a [Board](#) of 7 elected at the annual General Assembly of members.

FIM (<http://www.fimcivilsociety.org/english/aboutFIM.htm>) was established in 1998 as an international NGO with the goal of improving the influence of international civil society in the United Nations and the multilateral system more broadly. FIM strengthens the interaction between civil society and multilateral institutions. It provides a neutral and impartial setting for holding meetings that favor dialogue, reflection and active learning about the interaction between civil society and the multilateral system. Since 1999, FIM has organized an annual forum of about 50 civil society practitioners from five continents, to review case studies involving an important role of civil society in the multilateral system. To date, FIM's annual fora have addressed the relationships between civil society organizations, on one hand, and the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the UN Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD), on

the other. It has also reviewed the role played by civil society in the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC). In 2002 FIM initiated an annual dialogue between representatives of global civil society and G8 Summit Sherpas.

The website of Russia's Civil G8 (<http://en.civilg8.ru/616.php>) lists the objectives of the G8 July 2006 agenda in St. Petersburg. They intend to initiate reports on NGOs' positions, conduct international discussions, and evaluate ideas. They promise to transmit all the recommendations, ideas, and evaluations to G8 representatives. They intend to monitor the implementation of G8 decisions. Participation of CSOs in their project doesn't restrict the right to directly contact the official structures of G8 countries using traditional means. The result of the monitoring stage and the process of the consultations with NGOs during the period of Russian presidency in the G8 are to be summarized at the November Russian NGO conference "*The Realization of the G8 Summit Agenda in 2006*". They expect participation of G8 officials who prepare the Summit.

Lesson Plan

To review the evolution of the idea of "global civil society", review the Mary Kaldor lecture found at:

<http://www.lijohn.org/Depts/global/Publications/PublicationsProfKaldor/TheIdeaofGlobalCivilSocietybyMaryKaldor.pdf>

The issue of the legitimacy of CSOs is always raised when they seek to engage international organizations. Legitimacy is especially prominent when CSOs form strategic partnerships. Review the Arria Formula experience, and the CIVICUS and Eurodad models, bearing in mind the questions:

Who do CSOs represent? Who decides the legitimacy of CSOs or whether CSOs are representative, democratic, transparent and accountable? Should CSOs determine this? If so, who polices the police? Who do international CSOs represent? Is there an unspoken hierarchy among international, regional, national and community-based CSOs? Who, among them, really speaks for the grassroots?

Review the history of the NGO Steering Committee on the Security Council, available at.

<http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/ngowkgrp/statements/statemt4.htm>

See the Civil G8 web site for the 3 stage process from consultation to dialogue to monitoring.

<http://en.civilg8.ru/616.php>

Review the FIM case study.

<http://www.fimcivilsociety.org/english/Civil%20Society%20and%20the%20G8.pdf>

Discussion Questions

1. In the 2002 FIM case study referenced above, the FIM Board set conditions for the dialogue with G8 Sherpas, including that “FIM would not present itself as a gatekeeper of global civil society”; and that FIM would concentrate on the means of improving the process of dialogue between civil society and the G8. (The premise was that other bodies are better equipped to discuss the G8 meeting content).

Question Is there a realistic prospect for a legitimate gatekeeper function? Can the Eurodad experience – using a Secretariat to coordinate knowledge and resources to increase the effectiveness of individual NGO campaigns – be broadened and deepened?

2. FIM indicates that one lesson learned while organizing consultations with G8 officials is that “it is not feasible to try to identify an organization or structure which ‘represents’, and is legally accountable to international civil society.” Additionally, FIM articulates that “the voice of Southern civil society is an important component for effective G8 agenda planning. It is essential that this voice be channeled directly, rather than via Northern-based ‘representatives’”. http://en.civilg8.ru/Civil_and_G8/1642.php

Question Do you agree with FIM’s opinions articulated above? Is there a method of organizing a process to combine voices from the North and South that would be both effective and legitimate?

3. The promise of informality is a prized characteristic of summits. A fairly small group of Leaders, unconstrained by officials and advisors, develop meaningful personal relationships. This informality makes breakthroughs possible. Michael Zurn’s observed that the days of “executive multilateralism” are probably numbered, as globalization wears away at the membranes separating the international from the national and the national from the local.

Question: How can the need for informality be reconciled with the need to provide a voice to the full panoply of non-governmental organizations? What does this imply for the best way for the L20 to provide for voice for civil society?

4. In February, 2006, GLOBE (Global Legislators Organization for a Balanced Environment) and COM+ (The Alliance for Communicators for Sustainable Development), jointly launched a 3 year “Climate change: Looking beyond 2012” dialogue, among the G-8 countries plus India, China, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Spain and Australia and international business leaders, civil society and opinion leaders. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTABOUTUS/ORGANIZATION/EXTESSDNETWORK/0,,contentMDK:20832422~menuPK:1287891~pagePK:64159605~piPK:64157667~theSitePK:481161,00.html>. GLOBE is a global network of legislators that seeks to educate parliamentarians on environmental issues and promote policies supporting sustainable development. COM+ Alliance is a partnership of international organizations and communications professionals committed to advance a vision of

sustainable development. The intent is to “shadow” the Gleneagles Dialogue. The first forum of this parallel group is scheduled for July 2006, and its conclusions are to be conveyed to the G-8 Summit at St. Petersburg later in July.

Question: Can this dialogue succeed in its intent to contribute to “...*the generation of a new space of interaction which will complement the intergovernmental process*”? Might national parliamentarians have a role to play? Can a venue for legislators, senior business leaders, civil society, and opinion leaders outside international structures effectively “discuss post 2012 scenarios without the restraint of a formal government negotiating position”?

Can the Globe Com + Dialogue be used as a working model for outside consultation which might eventually be applied to the L-20? Could a network of think-tanks from L-20 countries be established to ensure quality information is available to all participants?

Recommended Web-based References

On Civil Society in general refer to the many articles by Mary Kaldor and Helmut Anheier

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/staffprofessorkaldorpubl.htm#articles>

See the concise description by James Paul, “*The Arria Formula*”

<http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/mtgsetc/arria.htm>

“*UN System and Civil Society - An Inventory and Analysis of Practices*” Background Paper for the Secretary-General's Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations Relations with Civil Society, May 2003

<http://www.un.org/reform/pdfs/hlp9.htm>

Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations Relations with Civil Society

<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/376/41/PDF/N0437641.pdf?OpenElement>

“*Comments on the Report of the Cardoso Panel*”

Jens Martens and James Paul, Global Policy Forum

<http://www.globalpolicy.org/reform/initiatives/panels/cardoso/08gpf.pdf>

