

# *United Nations Development Programme*



## **Towards a Peoples' Multilateralism: The United Nations, Development Networks and Civil Society**

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*A synthesis and literature review paper*

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*"We the peoples of the United Nations determined . . . to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples"*

**Charter of the United Nations, 1945**

*"Our mission recognizes a fundamental truth about democracy everywhere - that it is ultimately the product of a strong, active and vocal civil society. It is such a civil society that fosters responsible citizenship and makes democratic forms of government work."*

**United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, 2008**

## **UNDP “Platform HD2010”**

The year 2010 marks a number of key milestones in international development. It is the 20th anniversary of the launch of the UNDP Human Development Report, the ten-year review of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, as well as “Beijing + 15.” UNDP will develop Platform HD2010, leading to Vision HD2020, that will attempt to mobilize civil society and other stakeholders in an outward looking multilateralism for the next decade, that fosters civic engagement in the cause of human development. Platform HD2010 will aim to generate and catalyze momentum on the “new multilateralism” within UNDP, member states, civil society and other stakeholders. UNDP envisages a sequence of events, seminars and papers, involving academics, civil society representatives and development experts, stimulating and energizing a dialogue at multiple levels.

UNDP has commissioned this paper at the exploratory stage of the initiative, as an effort to capture and synergise thinking that could help support and define this process.

*The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of UNDP.*

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## **Abstract**

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This paper is an attempt to review and synthesise the main literature, arguments, theories and proposals coming from academia, civil society, politicians and commentators on the “new multilateralism”– a complex, multilayered process where non-state actors have become increasingly important players in global governance. There is growing consensus that the better participation of these actors, in particular civil society – NGOs, community groups, local action networks, social movements, faith-based groups – “philanthro-capitalists” and new foundations is fundamental to solutions to the key human development challenges of today. How the United Nations interacts with them is integral to the emergence of a more pluralistic, democratic, accountable multilateralism, and its ability to address human development. The moment is timely: during this period of global crisis there is a deep questioning of the role of multilateral institutions as seen from the perspective of a myriad of stakeholders. The paper goes on to look at key recent trends within civil society thinking and practice, and analyses the historical and emerging relationship between the UN and civil society. Finally it suggests principles for better engagement between the UN and civil society and funnels recommendations on which UNDP may commission further studies, start discussions or set in train processes that will create a better understanding of how to strengthen space for civil society engagement in global governance and what the role of the United Nations and of UNDP in particular can be in channeling civil society contributions to the vision of a revitalized multilateralism.

\* The author expresses his gratitude to the number of people (listed in Annex 1) who provided their inputs and insights. Particular thanks go to Bharati Sadasivam in UNDP whose inputs, comments and suggestions were fundamental to the production of this paper.

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# 1. Introduction

## The United Nations in a networked world

Globalisation has fundamentally changed the nature of global governance. Powerful global networks have sprung up in recent decades, facilitated by new technologies, and non-state actors such as NGOs, business groups, social movements, and religious groups are using these networks to achieve change and influence policy, laws and practices. Civil society is one such important group of actors which also has evolved into a powerful force in the multilateral arena.<sup>1</sup> Civil society organisations (CSOs) have founded and shaped many influential networks and are working with intergovernmental organisations bringing important changes to global governance. But civil society has become increasingly complex in recent years, and is often misunderstood and is sometimes misrepresented or treated as if it were a homogenous entity.

The United Nations has facilitated some networks and participated in others, with some success. It has worked closely with civil society in many processes, conferences and legal frameworks, especially over the last decade or so. The United Nations is both a participant in and a witness to an increasingly global civil society.<sup>2</sup>

The placement of UN programmes centrally in most countries' development landscape, and the role of the UN as a global gatekeeper of many universal rights and global guarantees means it is well placed to tap into global networks, and become, on issues of common advantage, a strategic ally of civil society, particularly in the area of human development, where opportunities for civic engagement are strong, but remain materially limited.

## Crisis and opportunity for human development

The coming period opens up an exceptional opportunity to transform global governance and re-prioritise human development. Three interlocking crises – of climate, food and finance – have further pressurized the possible realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), stunted the prospects for human development and led to calls for a fundamental rethink of the multilateral system, and of civil society's contribution to it. Proposals giving the United Nations a greater role in managing climate change adaptation and economic governance in particular are being backed and proposed by civil society.

The **climate crisis** has propelled powerful governments towards a realisation that they can't solve problems alone, either as a small group or without the help of other actors such as NGOs, community groups, business, scientists, and so on. Proposals from civil society have opened the possibility of an enhanced role for the UN in adaptation in **Global Climate Fund** to be set up under the control of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The **global food crisis** – with rapidly rising and now falling food prices (as well as other commodity price shocks) – emerged recently as another global spasm that has transcended national boundaries and exposed government frailties. Again the UN is central to proposals to tackle this and its own **Comprehensive Framework for Action** proposes working together with civil society and others.

More immediately, the **global financial crisis** has helped push governments further out of their comfort zones. The interconnectedness of the global financial system, and complexity of the institutions and investments

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<sup>1</sup> Civil society as defined by the Cardoso Panel refers to "the associations of citizens (outside their families, friends and businesses) entered into voluntarily to advance their interests, ideas and ideologies. The term does not include profit-making activity (the private sector) or governing (the public sector). Of particular relevance to the United Nations are mass organizations (such as organizations of peasants, women or retired people), trade unions, professional associations, social movements, indigenous people's organizations, religious and spiritual organizations, academe and public benefit non-governmental organizations." United Nations, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> CSOs engage with United Nations agencies in a range of issues and capacities, at headquarters and at the country level. NGOs are consulted on UN policy and programme matters. The UN organizes and hosts, on a regular basis, briefings, meetings and conferences for CSO representatives who are accredited to UN offices, programmes and agencies.

involved have proved that the old ways of doing global politics are increasingly defunct and new methods and approaches are needed to help democratize and deepen global governance.

The crises have led to calls for radical changes in global governance at the level of global political negotiations and solutions that are “transformative just, and innovative” – from civil society, political commentators and governments, among others.<sup>3</sup> Civil society advocates engaging with the process are not generally convinced that the G8 or the G20 represents a long-term solution to global governance failures of the past. Many of them have criticized the re-invigoration of an unreformed International Monetary Fund by the G20 with a massive new funding package; South Centre Director Martin Khor describes it as possibly “the most serious error” of the London summit.<sup>4</sup> Instead, civil society has called upon the United Nations to play a central role in the governance of the global financial system. These demands have been recently backed and strengthened by the recommendation of the **United Nations Commission of Experts** chaired by Joseph Stiglitz for a new Global Economic Coordination Council as part of the UN, to meet annually at the head-of-State level to assess development and serve as a “democratically representative alternative to the G20.”

The UN can and should seize this historic opportunity, and look for allies in civil society to enhance multilateralism and democratise global governance. In particular, UNDP should capitalise on its leadership role in **human development**, and champion key demands coming from civil society and from within the UN itself. UNDP has a longstanding reputation for promoting human development, which implies civic involvement, and advancing human rights, which includes meaningful participation of citizens and civil society. As UNDP approaches the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Human Development Report and concept in 2010, it should seize the moment, with allies in civil society, to help the UN fashion new multilateralism based on human development values and priorities, reconnecting with civic, inclusive and universal ideals perhaps now misplaced.

Further, UNDP, as stated in its 1997 policy on human rights, believes that sustainable human development and human rights are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Moving away from a narrow, economy-centred approach to development, sustainable human development places people at the core, and views humans as both a means and an end of development. The promotion of human rights is of particular relevance in the context of globalization and its potential for excluding and marginalizing weak members of the international community and people with limited resources.

## 2. The “new” multilateralism, civil society and human development

### Multilateralism in crisis?

The idea that multilateral governance is being challenged and has fundamentally changed is not new. Commentators and academics going back to the 1990s (e.g., Rosenau, 1990) have depicted the shifting shape of forces in technology, finance, trade and culture that have pushed multilateralism, which has always been a partial project, into crisis.

The end of the Cold war is particularly cited as a spur to changing the dynamics of the global order. At that time the United States seemed set for global dominance. But the ‘unipolar’ world described by commentators (e.g., Krauthammer, 1990) in the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union has quickly given way to new thinking about the limits of US power, and the increasingly diffuse and complex nature of global governance.

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<sup>3</sup> “What is required is strong, bold and innovative action: a solution which is developmental, transformative, just and innovative... A coordinated and comprehensive global response to the crisis is needed to maintain the progress made... The UN remains the sole universal body that provides a democratic voice of those non-consultable and those not represented.” Statement on behalf of G77 and China by Ambassador Lumumba Di-Aping of Sudan. Special High-Level Meeting of ECOSOC, New York, 27 April 2009.

<sup>4</sup> TWN Info Service on WTO and Trade Issues, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2009, ‘Reality behind the hype of the G20 Summit.’

While the US clearly remains powerful, newly emerging economies in the South have flexed their political and economic muscles. Regional blocs are asserting themselves strongly and regionalization is predicted to become a greater force in shaping governance, norms and standards. Groups of states form powerful alliances that focus around specific issues of common interest. Religion is also likely to play a stronger role, with more religious leaders destined for political leadership.<sup>5</sup>

According to some the concept of multilateralism is in itself not in crisis but the institutions which occupy the multilateral space are under serious challenge (Newman, Thakur and Tirman, 2006). A multilateralism based on nation-states that emerged in 1945, in what came to be known as the “multilateral moment”, has changed in character. New and emerging formations of global governance are more challenging for the United Nations, which remains largely beholden to the interests and wishes of nation states, especially the more powerful.

More germane to this discussion, the nature of globalisation has meant that while formal political representation has remained largely national in nature, business, technology and social forces such as philanthropy and advocacy have moved more rapidly to operate at the global level. In particular, say many theorists, transnational networks of professionals, bureaucrats, businesses, and civil society including NGOs have become important non-state actors in an increasingly globalised world. Some commentators have described deeper and more diverse configurations of global governance as “inevitable” and said that the UN in particular “needs to be incorporated into an increasingly variegated network of structures and arrangements – some functional in focus, others geographic; some intergovernmental, others based on systematic collaboration with the private sector, civil society, and NGOs” (Talbot, 2008).

There can be little dispute today that new non-state players in multilateral governance – have grown in sophistication, importance and authority and spread in influence through networks and alliances. Some of these networks and alliances are outlined below.

Two strands of thinking are discernible on the growing role of non-state actors in global governance. On the one hand, the rise of these multifaceted and diverse networks – many with civil society at their heart – is seen overall as a positive development. In the multilateral arena, particularly in the United Nations, the relationship with non-state actors has changed dramatically in recent decades, beginning with the global conference processes of the nineties. There is now a plethora of multi-stakeholder arrangements, mechanisms and partnerships active in and around the UN and other multilateral institutions. These are viewed by many as pragmatic, result-oriented alternatives to long-drawn bureaucratic and purely inter-governmental ways of working, and a means by which civil society can shape and be heard in global decision-making processes.

On the other hand, several commentators caution that such multi-stakeholder networks are also fraught with a number of risks and limitations for the UN. These include risks to reputation, fragmentation of global governance, replacing rather than complementing governmental efforts and responsibilities, weakening of representative democracy and allowing business and transnational corporations an undue role in agenda-setting (Martens, 2007).<sup>6</sup> Many networks are ridden by issues of power, accountability and legitimacy – putting into question their role in democratizing governance. Their complexity, diversity and natural limits of power and influence give important warning signs that engagement must be sophisticated and take account of wider imbalances and asymmetries of power (see Box 1).

Further, non-state actors in general are not easily classified and calibrated. ‘Civil society’ is perhaps the key group among them, but it is often little understood by those in government and with formal power, assumed to be homogeneous and, particularly in the UN ‘partnerships’ paradigm, often placed on a similar footing with business.

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<sup>5</sup> National Intelligence Council, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Martens cites as examples, among others, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM), Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI), Renewable Energy Policy Network (REN21), and Global Compact.

Despite these challenges, there is little doubt that to remain relevant into the 21<sup>st</sup> century the UN must strive harder to further reform itself and better understand the new landscape, deepening its engagement with key non-state actors, especially in civil society. This is essential given that, in many ways, the United Nations is at the nexus of this new multilateralism: the global gatekeeper of norms, standards and rights, it is also present at the national level, designing development programmes and working with national governments and other donors. UNDP, with its mandate to promote human, rather than purely economic development, has the opportunity to champion demands for a different kind of governance, with far stronger civic engagement, helping to meet substantive civil society objectives, as well as process-oriented demands.

### **Box 1. Global Networks and the new multilateralism: A concise literature digest**

Many authors have described an important new feature of global governance – Global Public Policy Networks (GPPNs). Most see this as a broadly positive move away from governance and power based on simple polarities, to a flatter, relational, more pluralistic structure. Some have, more recently, cautioned against over-optimism, pointing out that networks are limited by power relationships and wider interactions with economics and politics.

GPPNs have been described as “loose alliances of government agencies, international organizations, corporations, and elements of civil society such as nongovernmental organizations, professional associations, or religious groups that join together to achieve what none can accomplish on its own.” Examples include the World Commission on Dams, the Global Water Partnership, The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research and Roll Back Malaria. GPPNs are ‘trisectional networks’ that fulfill important functions of managing knowledge, overcoming market and intergovernmental coordination failures, and broadening participation. Their inherent weakness is that they can become dominated by powerful governments, large NGOs and big business, a danger that must be guarded against, by encouraging the “inclusion of less powerful yet important groups from the developing world” (Reinicke, 1999).

One study describes three major types of networks (Benner, Reinicke and Witte, 2003): some are ‘negotiation’ platforms that facilitate the setting of global standards and regulations. Others focus on coordinating resources and correcting market failures. Still others focus on implementing existing international treaties.

The IDRC’s *UN Vision Project on Global Public Policy Networks* sought to analyse the networks by assembling the lessons learned from existing networks. Its publication *Critical Choices: The United Nations, Networks, and the Future of Global Governance*, examined the changing global environment for public policymaking. The report urged the UN to become more strategic in its approach to GPPNs by strengthening and consolidating networks through focusing on implementation and learning, facilitating implementation to help galvanise weak conventions and launch new networks (Reinicke and Deng, 2000).

In the view of Anne-Marie Slaughter (2004, 2009), an international law and international relations analyst and now Director of Policy Planning at the US State Department, it is government networks (rather than other types of networks) – of legislators, bureaucrats and technocrats – that are the real powerhouse in global governance. These networks could provide solutions-oriented technical assistance to global governance problems.

Most recent thinking about global networks is more pessimistic about democratic accountability and participation in GPPNs. Global knowledge networks (KNETs) are experts based in academia, think tanks, research agencies or foundations, though such networks are not necessarily democratic, accountable or transparent (Stone, 2005). “Complex multilateralism” – the move away from simple state-based multilateralism – has not challenged the fundamentals of existing world order, but has incrementally pluralised global governance (O’Brien, Goetz, Scholte, and Williams, 2005). The question in analyzing such networks, in the view of some observers, should not be how they can be strengthened but rather: how can global problems be solved in a framework of democratic multilateralism and what is the role of cooperation between public and private actors in this process (Martens, 2007).

A new five-sided arrangement (the “golden pentangle”) includes institutionalised international and multilateral processes as well as transnational networks and groups (Cerny, 2001). A proliferating and fluctuating set of intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder arrangements with more assertive and diverse actors doing collective decision making and action across a range of global issues raises fundamental questions of effectiveness, accountability, legitimacy, and sustainability and poses challenges to the authority of existing IGOs (Forman and Segaar, 2006).



## **Human development and the capabilities approach: opportunities for greater civic engagement**

The concept of human development was developed, in many ways, as alternative discourse to orthodox economic development thinking. It has provided a way of putting people, rather than economic growth, at the centre of development thinking. It is about expanding the political, economic and social choices that people can enjoy, measuring their capabilities and potential.

Since 1990, UNDP has stimulated a debate about how to put people at the centre of development efforts through its *Human Development Report (HDR)*, written by a team of Human Development experts. The Human Development Index (HDI) is an integral part of the reports. It is a composite index which measures and compares the prospects for long healthy well informed lives at decent standards of living across countries (longevity, knowledge and a decent living standard)--rich and poor—using indicators of life expectancy, education and income. The global acceptance of these indices as a complement to income measurement has been increasing steadily. A series of complementary indices have also been developed.

The 1997 *HDR* introduced a human poverty index (HPI). It concentrates on deprivation in the three essential elements of human life already reflected in the HDI but takes a reverse perspective: a short life, lack of basic education and lack of access to public and private resources

Similarly, the 1995 *HDR* introduced two new gender-specific indices. The first – the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) – measures achievement in the same basic capabilities as the HDI does, but takes note of inequality in achievement between women and men. The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) evaluates progress in advancing women at the political and economic level. It examines whether women and men are able to actively participate in economic and political life and take part in decision making. While the GDI focuses on expansion of capabilities, the GEM is concerned with the use of those capabilities to take advantage of the opportunities of life. In the 1997 *HDR*, the GDI and GEM methodologies are applied at the global level to rank 146 countries according to the GDI and 94 according to the GEM. Indices based on revised methodology were first presented in the 2008 *Statistical Update* (UNDP2008).

More than 600 *National Human Development Reports (NHDR)* have been published since 1992 with UNDP support. These reports are prepared by national teams in consultation with the government, CSOs and other development partners. The reports bring national human development concerns to the limelight, advocating a more people-centered approach to policy making broadly and in specific areas. By providing comprehensive human development indicators and indices, the reports help to monitor progress and setbacks in human development and poverty at the national level.

The application of the human development model implies a greater civic engagement than more orthodox concepts of development. As the model proposes putting people's potential, rather than economics at the heart of the development paradigm, it signifies a need, or at least an opportunity, for a strong participatory element in how programmes and policies are designed and what their objectives should be. As a UNDP paper noted in 1992, the key to a human development approach is for "local people to identify their own priorities and to implement programmes and projects of direct benefit to them. That is, development should be seen as a process not just *for* people but organized, guided and undertaken *by* people. This in turn implies the active participation of people in the development process and the consequent need to construct institutions that permit and indeed encourage that participation. A vigorous civil society, in other words, is an essential component of a successful human development strategy (Griffin and McKinley, 1992). This has allowed UNDP in particular, which is seen globally as the 'superintendent' of the human development approach, to argue for a development paradigm which produces not only better human outcomes and capabilities, but also better participation of civil society.

Some have argued that the use of the report and data that could be improved. In effect, what is needed, they argue, is a more political approach to both the concept and application of the human development model in general and the Human Development Index (HDI) in particular. The index is far more useful when combined with

further enquiries about why key indices are low or high, and what allows them to change or be protected. This is a political and not a measurement question, they argue.

It is also argued that the concept is less useful than it once was because its language has been partly co-opted by the mainstream development political and economic discourse. The counter-discourse that the human development concept once provided was useful for challenging orthodox thinking. Now the coming together of the human development agenda with the inclusive growth agenda embodied in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) points to a need for a sharper analysis and re-politicised approach. At the same, this can also be seen the other way around, as the mainstream having been influenced by and absorbed key aspects of the human development paradigm.

For many civil society advocates, the Human Development Report and Index remain vitally important advocacy instruments at the national level. This is one reason why there is concern among some of them that the UN has not defended and promoted the human development paradigm as vigorously as it might have. In addition, some say that the Human Development Index should be more widely publicized among civil society actors and invigorated with greater civil society inputs. Some of the newest debates on social indicators of health aren't included in the index, nor is some of the newer work on environmental health of nations.<sup>7</sup>

Others have argued that the focus on measuring outcomes such as health and education – which many see as progress from older measurements of inputs and process indicators – leads to overconcentration targets and goals (the MDGs being the obvious example). This misses the bigger picture of looking at the causes of poverty and underdevelopment (e.g., Amin, 2006; Saith, 2006).

There is also a feeling that further elements of measuring inequality need to be built in to the index, to show, in part, why growth does not necessarily lead to better human development outcomes.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, many NGOs and social movements have moved 'beyond' human development, and now talk about 'a rights-based approach' to development. This, in some incarnations, includes a stronger implied focus on participation and a regard to issues of power (Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall, 2004). While it is true that human rights approaches underpin the UN and its development approach, this is not always the perception from outside the UN.

Another potentially important initiative is the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, created by President Sarkozy, which focused is on new ways of measuring of economic and social development. Its aim is to "identify the limits of GDP as an indicator of economic performance and social progress, to consider additional information required for the production of more relevant indicators, to discuss how to present this information in an appropriate way, and to assess the feasibility of alternative measurement tools" (Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, 2008).

The process of collating the report in countries, regions and regions within some countries, is a potentially powerful one which could be more widely and universally combined with, and involve civil society, following some existing good practice in this area (see Recommendations).

### **3. Civil society networks and trends**

#### **Globalization and multilateralism**

Recent years have seen the remarkable rise of civil society as a global phenomenon. The forces of globalization that have led to the opening of markets and borders, deregulation, transnational capital flows, and the spread of mass media, and information and communication technologies have also galvanized the emergence of civil society as an influential voice for citizen concerns on global governance. Civil society and citizen action have not only helped to open up a global public space for debate; they have also contributed to creating global public

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<sup>7</sup> John Cavanagh, personal communication, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2006.

<sup>8</sup> This was a perspective brought to the HDR in 2005 when Kevin Watkins was lead author.

opinion, which is shaping the political agenda and generating a cosmopolitan set of norms and citizen demands that transcend national boundaries. In this sense, civil society is as much part of today's global governance as are governments (United Nations, 2004).

Propelled by the power of organised public opinion, global networks of civil society and social movements have focused the world's attention on accountability and legitimacy failures in global and national governance through unprecedented mobilization across borders, skilful Internet-working, and savvy use of spokespersons, cyberspace, and "naming and shaming" devices. Campaigns have shaped and advanced many prominent issues of today – for example, debt relief, landmines, toxic waste, genetically modified foods, corruption, and privatization of basic services, the establishment of an international criminal court, fair trade and labour standards, gender equality, disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, corporate accountability, and universal access to generic drugs for HIV/AIDS, to name just a few.<sup>9</sup>

In the process, civil society organizations, coalitions and social movements have emerged as influential advocates and champions of issues of social justice, human rights, sustainable development, accountability, and equitable and inclusive globalization. The growing participation and influence of non-State actors is enhancing democracy and reshaping multilateralism. Civil society organizations are also the prime movers of some of the most innovative initiatives to deal with emerging global threats.

### **Economic size and influence**

The influence and credibility of CSOs in channeling and managing official development assistance (ODA) has also grown dramatically. In 2007, CSOs handled \$12-\$15 billion in development and humanitarian relief work, representing 12-15% of total ODA dispensed that year.<sup>10</sup> Net aid sourced exclusively from CSOs was reported to be \$7-\$10 billion.<sup>11</sup> Overall the estimate for total private philanthropy to developing countries in 2007 is estimated at \$49.1 billion.<sup>12</sup>

Civil society engagement with the United Nations has grown exponentially. At the UN alone, NGOs in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council mushroomed from 724 in 1992 to 3050 in 2007, representing an increase of over 400%<sup>13</sup> – still only a fraction of the estimated 40,000 civil society organizations that emerged in the 1990s at local, national, and international levels.

At the same time, the visibility and influence of civil society actors in governance processes have in turn raised questions from power-holders about NGO accountability and the legitimacy of their participation in global governance.

### **New challenges and perceptions**

There is a growing realization that civil society is no magic bullet and that "CSOs" often have uneven capacities and unspecified mandates. While civil society is accepted as a development partner, the euphoria of the 1990s has given way in the new millennium to more critical and realistic perceptions. First, growth in numbers has not necessarily strengthened civil society either as a form of representation or as a force for social justice, given the rise in "GONGOs" (government NGOs) "BONGOs" (business NGOs) "briefcase NGOs" (donor NGOs) and other formations perceived to be compromised by prevailing donor or government agendas – a trend that is widespread in but not limited to emerging democracies and fragile states. Second, the domination by large and

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<sup>9</sup> Examples of such global civil society organizing are too many to enumerate. To cite a few high-visibility and high-impact campaigns: the 'Battle of Seattle' when the WTO negotiators met, ICC, Clean Clothes Campaign, Fair Labor Association, Business for Social Responsibility, Calvert Principles, Transparency International, GCAP, Jubilee 2000, ICBL, GM foods, Treatment Action Campaign, Fifty Years is Enough, Women's Eyes on the World Bank, CorpWatch.org, Water campaigns.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics collected from OECD-DAC Database. 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Bilateral aid channeled through CSOs is estimated to be \$4 billion annually.

<sup>11</sup> Centre for Global Prosperity, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, [NGO Section database](#).

well-resourced INGOs of development resources and discourse has led to competition and strained their relations both with governments and civil society in the global South. Third, donor harmonization efforts, including direct budget support to governments, have restricted the policy space for civil society at the national level.<sup>14</sup> Fourth, and critically, while citizen mobilization on a global scale has made “corporate accountability” and “donor accountability” buzzwords in development discourse, the visibility and influence of civil society actors in governance processes have in turn raised questions about “NGO accountability” and the legitimacy of their participation in governance. These trends have led to greater introspection and attempts by civil society to strengthen their organizational capacities and legitimacy and analyze their strengths and weaknesses to position themselves better as credible development partners with governments and other actors.<sup>15</sup>

### **Civil society today**

Civil society in 2009 is a collection of varied, sometimes contradictory and increasingly influential actors. New frontiers are opening up for civil society. Southern networks are getting stronger and more vocal, although this is patchy and underexplored in the literature. The rise of advocacy (Price, 2003), increasing interest in rights-based approaches (Eyben, 2003) and a space for global civil society in the World Social Forum (and regional counterparts) has meant social movements are becoming more articulate and outspoken, if not necessarily more coherent.

The last decade or so has seen the flowering of Japanese civil society (Hirata, 2002) and a nascent, if politically constrained, Chinese civil society (Ye, 2003). Internationally, farmers' movements have come together more (Edelman, 2003<sup>16</sup>) and many other movements and groups – from indigenous peoples to trade unionists (Kaldor et al, 2004/5) and women's movements (Purna, 2003) – have moved towards greater cohesion and with a stronger voice on national, regional and global stages.

On the negative side there are signals that civil society 'space' is being eroded, especially in parts of Africa - in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, for instance – and that little attention is being paid to this.<sup>17</sup> The *Southern Voices* project of the Overseas Development Institute has found that there is often competition for resources between local CSOs and INGOs. Moreover, some of the same processes that have given birth to global civil society have also allowed unpleasant new forms of association and action. – from 'astroturfing' (NGOs funded by corporations) to organised crime and global terrorist networks. The structures and systems that allow civil society to flourish also allow a myriad of organisations to emerge that do not represent a progressive, rights-based, human development-focused vision of global governance.

Overall, while there is not clarity of agreement about the nature, power and definition of what constitutes civil society (see Box 2) there is consensus on some facets: that it is important, influential and growing in strength; that it is very diverse and difficult to pigeonhole; that overall it mostly reflects peoples priorities and concerns (Edwards, 2004); and that it often does not always manifest itself at the international level in ways that reflect local or grassroots issues. In addition, the UN and other IGOs often do not have good ways of answering questions of legitimacy that arise in relation to civil society (e.g., business interests organized as CSOs), even if there is general acceptance of the fact that non-state actors have a key role to play as checks and balances given the lack of direct democracy at the global level.<sup>18</sup>

It is the ability of civil society to represent and signify diverse forms of civic life, produce multiple accountabilities, set standards and norms, and deliver better overall governance outcomes that vindicates its role in democratising and strengthening global, regional and national governance (e.g., Edwards, 2004; Kaldor, 2003, Tandon 2008).

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<sup>14</sup> “[Rethinking Civil Society?](#)” 2008. Report from Seminar at Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) Civil Society Center.

<sup>15</sup> CSO voluntary codes of conduct tailored to missions and activities are now a rising trend. There are also joint codes or standards to demonstrate a broader agreement on principles of operation and transparency, i.e., [INGO Accountability Charter](#). 2003.

<sup>16</sup> in Kaldor et al 2003.

<sup>17</sup> From a conversation with Kumi Naidoo.

<sup>18</sup> From a conversation with Joseph Stiglitz.

Interacting with civil society and allowing civil society to flourish does not guarantee stronger democratic governance, but there is a strong associational link - civil society organisations help build social capital, shared values and trust (Putnam et al, 1994).

Despite the clear link between democratic, open and transparent states and the strength of civil society, it is sometimes also true that where civil society has emerged strongly, it is despite and not always because of the stances adopted by national governments and state authorities towards it. In addition, nation states are usually keen to retain what power they have at the international level, and can occasionally attempt to use and even co-opt civil society strategically to further national interests. So nation states and their apparatuses can block further enhancement of civil society power and influence, and may well resist further enhancement of such power at their own expense.

### **Box 2. Attempts to categorise and theorise civil society power and influence**

Before making assertions about how the UN might further support civil society and work together with it, is important to better understand its role, function and shape. There is a vast and growing literature about the sector, some of which is outlined below. Despite the breadth of work, the sector is still largely underexplored, especially in the South, partly because of its diversity and localised nature.

Salamon (2003, 2007) has suggested that a 'global associational revolution' has been underway for some years and that the growth of global civil society is both larger and perhaps more important than most analyses suggest. More recently his team at the Johns Hopkins University Centre for Civil Society Studies, working with the UN Statistical Division, has attempted to measure the size, diversity and economic importance of what they categorise as Non-Profit Institutions, finding a sector of overwhelming economic and social importance, especially at the underexplored community level.

Kaldor et al (2003, 2005 etc) also theorise and describe aspects of global civil society, providing a useful mapping of global, rather than local, civil society and undertaking case studies in key areas of investigation and interest. Key movements have risen to counterbalance the prevailing 'regressive globalisation' and networks, again, are increasingly important in a relational sense.

The CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) is a participatory needs assessment and action planning tool for civil society around the world which aims to create a knowledge base and momentum for civil society. The first phase of the CSI found several patterns emerging from the studies: Citizen participation in civil society activities is quite low, organisations are sometimes donor-driven, infrastructure is particularly weak in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the political context hampers the development of civil society, internal transparency and accountability mechanisms are rarely practiced in any region except Western Europe, but civil society upholds important progressive values, such as nonviolence, tolerance and gender equity (Mati, 2008).

Edwards (2000) helps to synthesise historical and disparate theories of civil society into a comprehensive framework. He says that civil society is essentially values-based collective action – in associations, across society and through the public sphere – but also points out that it is incredibly diverse and often contradictory in values and approach.

Other authors argue that civil society has begun to supplement global governance claiming that the world is "made up not only of states engaged in self-help or even rule-governed behaviour, but of dense webs of interactions and interrelations among citizens of different states which both reflect and help sustain shared values, beliefs and projects." When governments are unresponsive to civil society needs, local groups seek out international partners to bring pressure to bear what they have labelled the "boomerang effect" (Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

The rise of a new, more rooted global civil society, linked organically to communities in the South, has been outlined, although this only exists in certain sectors and needs to be encouraged and nurtured (Batliwala, 2002). Large swathes of civil society tend to get co-opted to some extent, while many local and peripheral movements left out by IGO-GPPN interactions (Herkenrath, 2007).

An explanation of the rise of civil society is that it has the greatest international effect when there is a hegemonic world order and that the rise of democracy and the unrivalled dominance of Western states explain a large part of global civil society's impact (Watson, 2002).

But there are clear limits to civil society power: the lack of a coherent overall agenda or platform, soft power limitations, the need for a sympathetic ear and the fragility of credibility (Florini, 2000). Others have pointed out asymmetries of access: some think tanks, relatively unconnected with communities and groups in the South have a good to deal of access and power, while other groups, far more representative, have none.

A skeptical view of global civil society is forwarded by those who say that global civil society not only doesn't exist but that the proxy for it – transnational and international NGOs – are best seen as a quasi-religious tendency pushing a human rights framework as a universal value-system (Anderson and Rieff, 2005<sup>19</sup>). Related issues of accountability and legitimacy are raised by many authors including Alan Fowler who prefers to look at '*Civic Driven Change*' as a more relevant phenomenon than the 'aided development'<sup>20</sup> discourse that he says dominates the international sphere (Biekart and Fowler, 2009).

Literature relating to the power and influence of civil society is frequently contradictory on the issue of what defines civil society and where its legitimacy stems from. This is an important factor when considering how to engage with civil society. Nevertheless most agree that civil society is powerful but diverse, and that civil society in some places in the South (especially Africa) is nascent, operates to some extent differently from Northern civil society, and is underexplored, but that it is also a potentially potent partner in deriving a new kind of sustainable human development and needs to be nurtured, supported and given space.

## 4. The United Nations and civil society

### An emerging relationship with civil society

The United Nations, in many ways, has struggled to keep up with a changing world.<sup>21</sup> As we have seen above, non-state, transnational actors have become increasingly important in global governance. As an institution built in an age of nation states, the UN has had to adapt and adjust itself to these changes, without the necessary backing to bring the institutional and governance arrangements that would make sense in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The UN mainly has softer forms of power at its disposal: it has convening power, moral authority and standard setting abilities, but little coercive power, no army and little money.<sup>22</sup>

These traits do make the UN a natural strategic ally of civil society and vice versa in terms of reaching objectives and broader goals. This was increasingly recognised in the UN in the 1980s and 1990s as a wave of global conferences brought civil society more into discussions and conversations, and sometimes even the negotiations themselves. It has been widely noted that CSOs not only bring a range of standard-setting, power-checking and scrutiny-bearing attributes to multilateral governance, but that, in fact, they are crucial partners for delivering and refining sustainable human development goals (e.g., Popovski 2008). As Kofi Annan's 1999 address to the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum recognised: "The United Nations once dealt only with governments. By now we know that peace and prosperity cannot be achieved without partnerships involving governments, international organizations, the business community, and civil society ... the United Nations is well suited to such informal coalition for change."<sup>23</sup> This was also noted by the 2004 Cardoso Panel (see Box 3) which said that "enhancing dialogue and cooperation with civil society ... will make the United Nations more effective."

But the natural limits of the UN's appeal to civil society groups – the lack of coercive or legislative power – meant that the UN was often of less interest to groups who want to change something, especially advocacy groups who have concentrated mainly on nation states, powerful inter-governmental organisations like the WTO, IMF and the World Bank and, increasingly, regional organisations, blocs and unions.

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<sup>19</sup> In Kaldor et al, 2004/5.

<sup>20</sup> Development ideas and practice driven by aid and charities.

<sup>21</sup> A good overview of UN-civil society engagement is to be found in *UN System Engagement With NGOs, Civil Society, The Private Sector, And Other Actors: A Compendium* (UN-NGLS and German Federal Ministry For Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> The UN has also been undergoing a reform process, though a central part of it – a change in the structure of the Security Council – is stuck.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Barrett, 2008.

Hill (2004) sketches out three 'generations' of UN-civil society relations: a mostly formal or ceremonial relationship up to the end of the Cold War; a closer and more cooperative relationship in the 1990's defined by a series of set-piece UN conferences where the UN reached out to a reinvented civil society; and third, an emerging set of conditions in recent years (and possibly for the future) where civil society and the UN work together in partnership, often with the private sector.

### **Box 3. The Cardoso High Level Panel on UN-Civil Society Relations**

In 2002 Kofi Annan proposed a high level panel with a mandate to consider UN relations not only with NGOs but also with other actors: parliamentarians, think-tanks and even businesses. The Panel issued its report in June 2004 when it called on the UN to become an outward looking organisation, focusing convening and facilitating civil society. It should "embrace a plurality of constituencies connect the local operational work with global goals, and ensure that these reflect local realities; and help to reshape democracy for the 21st century through a more explicit role in strengthening global governance while tackling its own democratic deficits, emphasizing participatory democracy and deeper accountability of institutions to the global public" But despite good intentions, the report's recommendations suffered multiple internal log jams and a general lack of political will to be implemented comprehensively. The endorsement of many of its recommendations, by the Secretary-General in his response to the report, helped the United Nations Development Group to move forward some of the proposals such as the nomination of civil society focal points and piloting civil society advisory committees to United Nations Country Teams.

Willetts (2006) called the paper "intellectually incoherent", as it drew from conflicting theoretical backgrounds. Civil society critiques centred on too much voice given to business, a confusion of business, parliamentary and civil society modus operandi, and an increase influence of what Johannesburg WSSD summit called "Type 2" outcomes, i.e., voluntary initiatives that let governments "off the hook." There were also complaints that the report represented little original thinking on how to bring more Southern civil society groups into UN and reach beyond the large NGOs and "usual suspects."

Nevertheless most people recognise that the essence of the report – that the UN should reach out more to civil society and other non-state actors – is a project that still needs championing and implementing, and many of the recommendations remain valid.

### **Business partnerships at the UN**

During the last ten years or so the UN has spent a lot of time engaging in arrangements that put business into structures and systems of dialogue and standard setting, sometimes, regulation and delivery. Numerous and varied 'public-private partnerships' and 'multi-stakeholder dialogues' have been forged in recent years. Proponents believe that they are a key driver in solving multilateral problems including in the areas of human development and poverty.

An excellent survey of these types of UN-business partnerships is to be found in recent paper by UNRISD (Utting and Zammit, 2006). The report, while generally not hostile to the concept of partnership, identified a lack of critical thinking in most UN agencies, in terms of weighing up the agendas of businesses, and the relative added value of different partnerships in different contexts (Martens, 2003, 2007).

One main business-UN partnership is the Global Compact which is a principle-based framework for business on human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption, and brings companies together with UN agencies, labour groups and civil society. The Compact has been credited with increasing business understanding of basic standards and values and providing a global framework for business to work with.

The move towards such partnerships has met with critiques and stiff opposition from some parts of civil society. Businesses may not have overwhelmingly constructive reasons for joining such partnerships, including wanting to short-circuit or avoid formal regulation or wanting to explore new markets and tend to favour technocratic approaches to solving problems. Business is also often perceived to have greater access and more resources than civil society: it is treated as a priority area, while other areas of UN interactions are sidelined (Martens, 2003).

Maude Barlow, recently appointed as Senior Advisor on Water to the President of the United Nations General Assembly, is critical of the UN's approach to large water companies and has said that the Global Compact initiative wraps the United Nations good housekeeping seal of approval around bad corporate behaviour.<sup>24</sup>

The debate on business at the UN mirrors that on the benefits of the rise of philanthro-capitalism in relation to civil society, multilateralism and global governance. Foundations and philanthropists now use business models to underpin their giving and some hold global sway over policies and international initiatives like never before, especially in the field of international development. One in particular, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has a particular place in global decision-making, having attained a seat on the board of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. One of the key proponents of the virtues of philanthro-capitalism, Mathew Bishop, is keen to stress the benefits of a concentration on business modalities such as leverage and impact (Bishop, 2007). A critique comes from Michael Edwards who claims that such activity is overhyped, anti-democratic and unaccountable (Edwards, 2008). The Gates Foundation's seat on the board of the Global Fund is seen as one example of philanthro-capitalism's over-extended political reach.

### **Some emerging fault lines**

Overall the UN, along with its related agencies and bodies, has had significant engagement with civil society. But these mainly successful collaborations are fairly limited in number and often represent civil society reaching out to the UN rather than the other way around.

Some civil society representatives have complained that UN officials have a rather complacent and sometimes negative view of civil society, and in many cases would rather talk to parliamentarians, bureaucrats, academics or business leaders, than to civil society actors, especially if they are from social movements or grassroots organisations. More worryingly, there is some indication that space for civil society at the UN has been shrinking. Recent UN conferences, for instance those on the Millennium Development Goals, have allowed civil society less access and input compared to previous conferences.

Some Southern governments are not at all keen to see civil society emerging as a strong player, either globally, or on their national turf. It is sometimes these governments that block proposals to allow civil society groups greater influence and access, for instance at the UN.<sup>25</sup>

Another trend at the UN that has troubled some I spoke to is the perceived loss of impetus in the many UN agencies for an alternative human development and human rights-based approach in favour of an 'inclusive growth' approach. There is a sense that UN development agencies on the ground have simply backed World Bank strategies on national development and at the international level thinking has increasingly begun to mirror multilateral and donor thinking. The 'revolving door' between the World Bank and the UN was also raised by some as part of the "problem of the depoliticisation" of the UN.

## **5. United Nations-civil society engagement**

It is difficult to summarise the large number of sometimes complex interactions between the UN and civil society. I shall look now a few (mostly) positive examples of UN-civil society engagement, mainly in the development arena, drawing out some lessons and good practice. These range from the way civil society was organised, to the strategic role of UN agencies, to process-oriented points about civil society access and speaking rights. It is worth noting that in the vast majority of the literature, the 'lessons learned' part of the paper or report is generally aimed at civil society groups themselves, rather than at the UN or other multilateral bodies. This partly reflects the feeling

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<sup>24</sup> Press Conference by General Assembly President on Water-Related Human Rights, 9<sup>th</sup> December, 2008. Ms. Barlow is national chairperson of the Council of Canadians, founder of the Blue Planet Project, and author of *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water* (2007).

<sup>25</sup> Partly from a comment by Sunila Abeysekera.



amongst many in civil society that the main effort in these interactions came from their side rather than from the UN.

It is important to note that some civil society leaders emphasize that the substance of what civil society is asking for is as important as the process. In the past, they argue, they have seen too much instrumentalisation of civil society for regime changes in various "revolutions" in Eastern Europe and the Caucuses. What looks like a genuine 'people power' movement can lead to an unviable and non-progressive social and economic model. The form (what kind of popular participation and democracy supports a process) cannot be separated from the content (what kind of development model, including environmental, social and gender policies) this process is aimed at achieving.<sup>26</sup>

One often referred to example of successful collaboration between the World Bank and other agencies, NGOs and business is the **World Commission for Dams (WCD)**. The WCD's relatively short life was conceived at a meeting brokered by the World Conservation Union and the World Bank. The final report, which criticized most previous dam building as unsustainable and set guidelines for future dam projects, was generally well received. Lessons learned from civil society side included having a wide and representative membership, local consultation at community level and well organised opposition in the face of a not well organised (in advocacy terms) industry.<sup>27</sup> The legitimacy of the process has been questioned by some but it remains viewed as an overall success (Dingwerth, 2005, among others).

The campaign for and subsequent setting up of the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** is often cited as a successful example of the new multilateralism. Although not formally inside the UN system the ICC does have close links with both the Security Council and UN agencies. Crucial to civil society success in lobbying for and influencing the set-up of the ICC was the ability to develop common positions which, together with like minded-governments, helped form a strong coalition. The access of NGOs to delegations at key meeting is also considered important (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Not only does the ICC arguably have civil society to thank for its form and existence but civil society groups can actively participate in the process of bringing evidence to and helping investigation of the ICC (Human Rights First, 2004).

A much cited successful example of international civil society-IGO collaboration is the **International Campaign to Ban Landmines** and the signing by many countries of subsequent anti-Landmine Convention. Most authors describe the process of advocacy and alliance-building as positive<sup>28</sup> but the legitimacy of the coalition was questioned by some (Anderson, 2000). The method whereby the campaign was actively involved in the drafting process and 'like-minded' small and medium-sized governments supported the process, was both innovative and complex. Many feel that luck, invention, risk and brinkmanship played a role. Some believe that the process is unrepeatable or at least unlikely to be repeated (Cameron, 1999).

Another recent phenomenon in UN-civil society co-involvement is the creation of two related platforms: the United Nations **Millennium Development Goals Campaign** (Millennium Campaign) and the **Global Call to Action Against Poverty** (GCAP). The Millennium Campaign was set up by UN Secretary General in 2002 to create public and political momentum behind the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and reach to civil society. There is little literature analysing the way the Campaign has interacted with civil society (an evaluation of the Campaign is currently underway) but it is active on many national stages in the South, where it has been successful in mobilization terms through, for instance, its **Stand Up Against Poverty** days of action. Some national civil society platforms have felt that their funding relationships with the UN suffer from over-bureaucratisation and asymmetrical power relationships (Manning, 2009).

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<sup>26</sup> From a conversation with Roberto Bissio.

<sup>27</sup> See Sanjeev Khagram in Florini 2000; Imhof, Wong and Bosshard, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance Mikata, in Florini, 2000.

A report by for the Danish Institute for International Studies has outlined the usefulness of the **MDG framework** for engaging with civil society and the public at large (Manning, 2009). It found that in some donor countries the MDGs are very well known and that campaigns on development-related issues had used the MDGs as a way of framing campaigns. Something similar has happened in some developing countries, although the study acknowledges that it lacks evidence to make an overall analysis. The report also observes that much of civil society is skeptical about what they see as the partial nature of the goals and that the future effectiveness of the goals is dependent on, amongst other things, the ability to of donors to engage with civil society.

The Millennium Campaign is close to **GCAP**, which is an interesting construction in itself, as a civil society platform funded in part by the UN. Created by several large NGOs along with civil society networks such as CIVICUS, GCAP has had strong and diverse civil society backing in some Southern countries and has successfully held together its constituency in the face of considerable skepticism. It has also connected constituencies globally to address issues of poverty and inequality and mobilised significant numbers of people in countries across the world to take action. It has also created spaces for civil society to have a voice in addressing these issues, particularly in countries where civil society is nascent. GCAP is not, however, yet considered globally powerful and also suffers from being dominated by those with most resources at the expense of grassroots networks and social movements (Chapman and Mancini, 2009). Criticisms of this type of broad platform have come from others, who have suggested it leads to a type “lowest common denominator” politics (Bond, Brutus and Setshedi, 2005).

I cannot find evidence that the official **national MDG reporting process** itself is particularly useful for engaging civil society. The reporting on the goals is done by governments, often by external consultants, and rarely with any civil society inputs. In fact there is evidence that the reporting process has become a negative force. Manning (2009) notes: “It is not clear that the expanding number of surveys and data collection exercises has had a positive and sustainable impact on local capacity.” Shadow reports have been undertaken by GCAP platform in some countries which have apparently been useful processes.

The UNDP sponsored **National Human Development Reports** (NHDR) seeks to place human development as an integral part of the national political agenda. They are designed as tools for policy analysis reflecting people's priorities, strengthening national capacities, engaging national partners, identifying inequities and measuring progress.

To be considered at UNDP supported National HDRs the report development progress should adhere to six principles defined in the UNDP corporate policy on NHDRs. They include “national ownership”, participation and inclusive preparation, independency and quality of analysis, flexibility and creativity in presentation and sustained follow-up. The principles pave the way to engage civil society and other local or minority groups in each stage of the development and follow-up.

Around 40 NHDRs have included civil society issues in a substantive or central way in their subject matter and in some cases civil society organisations actively took part in the writing of the report (e.g., Kosovo NHDR 2007 on energy, and Serbia NHDR 2005 on cultural diversity). The Egyptian report is cited as being a particularly useful example of engaging civil society throughout the report preparation.<sup>29</sup>

As advocacy tools designed to appeal to a wide audience, the reports can spur public debates and mobilize support for action and change. They have helped to articulate people's perceptions and priorities, and have served as a source of alternative policy opinion for development planning across varied themes.

An internal UNDP evaluation of NHDRs in 2006 found that they have increased the ability of CSOs to influence national policy-making agendas, hold governments to account or have helped civil society organisations engage

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<sup>29</sup> <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/nhdr/>

in national policy debates in some of the countries studied including Bulgaria, the CIS-Europe region and Tanzania. In Senegal, the report was a reference point for civil society (UNDP, 2006).

As noted above the UNDP annual **Human Development Reports** based on the **Human Development Index** are in themselves considered a useful tool by many in civil society who use the statistical analysis as a counterbalance other agencies overuse of economic growth statistics. The human development attributes allow diverse forms of civic engagement and dialogue and underpins broader debates on economic versus social outcomes from development. This has been especially important in a period where certainties about economic growth and private sector, export-led development has dominated much of the sector's thinking and permeated the international financial institutions and most bilateral donors.

A recent twist on the relationship between civil society and governments in the South has been the training and capacity development of governments by CSOs on technical **trade negotiations**, especially in the context of the WTO. The Latin American Trade Network is an interesting example of trade-related capacity development involving the UNCTAD, civil society, donors and think tanks. UNCTAD itself has a long history of working with civil society, especially through its Civil Society Forums and other forms of dialogue. It is often considered a 'friendly' UN agency by civil society groups working on trade, and much of its analysis is used by NGOs and others (UNCTAD 2001). Third World Network has helped developing country trade officials navigate the complexity of international and regional trade negotiations<sup>30</sup> and the South Centre (an intergovernmental organisation, but one that is close to some Southern CSOs) helps developing countries negotiate treaties at the technical level on trade and other issues, although it is formally an inter-governmental organisation.

Again the failure of the talks at the WTO Ministerial at Cancun in 2003, with the wider problems in the Doha round, was seen generally as a success by some civil society groups who claimed that 'no deal was better than a bad deal.' This speaks to another tension within civil society – that of having a watchdog or 'social critic' role versus having a closer insider role, being directly involved in negotiation, delivery or drafting. Both types of civil society groups clearly exist (and most in fact straddle both camps) but arguably the mode with which civil society engages is more to do with the opportunities and opening available than the 'maturity' of the movement. In other words, in cases where civil society is reached out to by governmental organisations and legislators, it will usually reach back.

The work of civil society inside **climate change negotiations** at the UN is significant in terms of UN-civil society dialogue. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, an international environmental treaty dating back to the Rio Summit in 1992. The ongoing negotiations have had a checkered relationship with civil society organisations, of which there are many now engaged in the process and debate. The UN has recognised the fundamental importance of civil society in climate negotiations<sup>31</sup> and engages with them in the process mainly a coalition called Climate Action Network (CAN).

While CAN is very vocal in the climate negotiations, some have complained that the network is dominated by larger, science-based, Northern NGOs and that Southern CSOs struggle to have their voices heard. The key difference, argue some Southern networks, is that Southern civil society is more concerned with overarching development and environmental concerns while Northern groups tend to be far more narrowly focused (Alcock, 2005). Some also argue that the treatment of civil society as a homogenous group allows more powerful actors to dominate. While trade unions and business groups have their own spaces within the negotiations, civil society, with its massive diversity, has only a very few opportunities, leading to a partial and limited civil society input into the negotiations.

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<sup>30</sup> [Ghana: Ghanaian MPs Adopt GSP-Plus as Alternative to EPAs](#), Jonathan Adabre, AllAfrica Global Media, 30 April 2007.

<sup>31</sup> 'Cooperation with civil society crucial to tackling climate change, UN officials say,' United Nations News Centre, 5 September 2007.

The UN **Commission on Sustainable Development** was considered in the 1990s to be a strong process in terms of civil society participation. A civil society steering committee was a key factor in honing and organizing civil society input. The key factors for success for such a committee, according to a case study done for Forum International Montreal, include clarity of purpose and function, collective and transparent decision-making and recognition of diversity (Howell, 1999).

An example of helpful environmental legislation can be captured by looking at **banning of chlorofluorocarbons** and the role of UNEP. Scientists doing independent research who discovered the problem and civil society was very involved in mobilizing governments to pay attention to this. UNEP started convening workshops with policymakers around the world to point out to them what the evidence was, playing a catalytic and convening role (Florini and Tessoro, 2009).

Another interesting historical example in the literature of civil society interaction with an IGO, this time with the OECD, was the negotiations for a **Multilateral Agreement on Investment**, which collapsed in 1998. This is seen, depending on perspective, either as a monumental failure of process or a success of civil society activism. Some believe that a lack of a created public policy network on the issue, left NGOs 'out in the cold' and led to mistrust and, ultimately, collapse of the proposed agreement (Tieleman, 1999). Others found that networks of activists aided by new technology were crucial to the failure of the talks, and that the internet has changed the nature of global governance (Kobrin, 1998) and that the perceived collusion between the WTO and big business left a democratic deficit that undermined environmental, labour and other social values (Walter, 2001).

The UN **Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** uses a system of **shadow reports** whereby civil society groupings can highlight key areas and help influence the final report in each national context. The shadow report is popular, it seems (at least anecdotally), though I can find little in the literature to support this.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (**CEDAW**) also incorporates shadow reports. When there is access to the government report that is to be sent to the CEDAW Committee, NGOs can critique it. The Shadow Report is meant to give emphasis to the prevalence and magnitude of the critical issues women in a country face and of which the government has downplayed or failed to highlight. The CEDAW Committee read all reports sent and use it for validation during the sessions with respective governments. Another treaty-based body, the United Nations **Human Rights Council**, has had a good deal of close contact and cooperation with CSOs, some of whom enjoy participation in sessions and many of whom have consultative status.<sup>32</sup>

**The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** has its own particular way of interacting with civil society. Civil society organizations, including international non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, are closely involved in UNICEF's work in 190 countries where UNICEF is active. NGOs are also consulted at headquarters in the formulation of policy. Currently, UNICEF has formal agreements with hundreds of NGOs and individual leaders in 160 countries around the world, ranging from large networks such as the Save the Children Alliance to village water committees.

There is also literature on the many other **UN conferences and summits** that have led to engagement from civil society, including the World Summit on the Information Society, the Financing for Development Conference, The World Summit on Sustainable Development, The World Conference Against Racism, and The World Conference on Women. There are many more conferences of varying shapes and sizes and the interactions are helpfully captured on some websites.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Bloem at al, in Walker and Thomson, 2006

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, [www.ngocongo.org](http://www.ngocongo.org), [www.globalpolicyforum.org](http://www.globalpolicyforum.org), [www.un-ngls.org](http://www.un-ngls.org)

A leading civil society network which has been tracking governments' progress on commitments made in promoting UN rights and targets is **Social Watch**, created in 1995 to promote the political will required to make United Nations promises come true. Since then it has published yearly reports on progress and setbacks on poverty and discrimination, and more recently on the progress towards the MDGs, which have been used as tools for advocacy at local, regional, and international levels.

The Social Watch international network currently includes citizens' groups in around 60 countries from all over the world. Its national groups report on the progress towards internationally agreed commitments and goals. The Social Watch country files also include indicators on the progress towards these goals, compiled from the latest available authoritative statistical sources.

The Social Watch Annual Reports are not commissioned from external writers; rather, each national Social Watch chapter is the result of the work of organizations and movements that are active year-round on social development issues. They work together every year to write reports assessing governments' policies, actions and outcomes. These findings are used to draw the attention of the authorities to these issues and help shape better pro-poor and pro-women policies. Thus, the priorities and emphasis of each country report are decided by the reporting countries themselves. To make the report possible, each group raises its own funds, most of which are invested in consulting with social movements to gather evidence and validate their findings.

There has been a good deal of engagement at the **regional level** between civil society and inter-governmental bodies, blocs and groups. The UN's economic commissions, such as ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America) and UNECA<sup>34</sup> (Economic Commission for Africa) have a long history of cooperating and coordinating with civil society on research. And, increasing, regional bodies such as SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), the African Union, NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development), SADC (Southern African Development Community), ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) have become the focus of civil society attention, though not all of it positively framed. Many commentators and CSOs see these regional and sub-regional structures as increasingly important fora for engagement, in a world retreating from full-blown multilateralism, where regional trading and other arrangements represent major potential threats and opportunities for sustainable human development.<sup>35</sup>

International organisations commitment to accountability, transparency and inclusivity can be patchy. The **One World Trust** has since 2006 surveyed over 90 organisations (including INGOs and businesses) in its Global Accountability Report, finding that many organisations do not meet standards expected or espoused. The project reflects a trend of increased awareness and scrutiny of the openness and accountability of IGOs, INGOs and TNCs. Although some UN agencies did quite well in the survey, the Global Accountability Report found that "moving self regulatory initiatives towards developing compliance mechanisms, which ensure implementation of principles and standards" is more difficult (Lloyd et al, 2008).

## 6. Governance proposals and demands

Many demands and proposals on reforming the governance of international institutions and global public goods have emerged from civil society in recent years and some key ones are explored below. Support from the United Nations in the form of researching, backing and facilitating the execution of these proposals would generally be welcomed by civil society.

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<sup>34</sup> Some commented that the ECA could be more engaged with civil society in dialogues and roundtables, and also was experiencing somewhat of a mission creep by working on governance and development and less on economics.

<sup>35</sup> Partly from a conversation with Rajesh Tandon.

It is important to note that civil society is not always united in calls for governance arrangements that include a strong civil society influence at the international level. Many groups advocate for a stronger role for national governments, especially those underrepresented in current governance fora, with the assumption that civil society should play a strong role at the appropriate (usually national) level. In addition some groups actively oppose civil society engagement in multilateral institutions on the grounds that these are and will remain for the foreseeable future, illegitimate.

One interesting and emerging debate in civil society and amongst some at the UN is around the call for **global climate fund** to be set up under the control of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The proposal, made by a combination of national and international civil society groups, envisages incorporating local civil society and affected groups into the process. It suggests democratic, transparent and accountable governance which is “especially” open to communities most affected by global warming. While “Developing countries should have strong, direct equitable representation in decision-making and technical bodies”, civil society groups, social movements and indigenous peoples “must be formally represented within all governance structures.” It also suggests that the fund assists countries with financial and technical support to carry out “national climate action plans designed by countries through a sovereign and democratic process that ensures the full participation of climate impacted peoples.”<sup>36</sup>

On the financial and economic system, a number of key groups and people have made proposals. Most recently the **Commission of Experts of the President of the General Assembly on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System** headed by Joseph Stiglitz has sought to offer suggestions on how the GA and ECOSOC could work with civil society and academia, including making specific reference to ‘social movements.’

The suggested reforms include creating a panel to offer consultancy to the General Assembly and ECOSOC, but also to other international organisations to “enhance their capacity for sound decision-making.” At the same time, such a panel would contribute to foster a “constructive dialogue and offer a regular venue for fruitful exchange between policy makers, the academic world and key international organisations.” The panel, says the Commission, should comprise well respected academics from all over the world, appropriately representing all continents, as well as representatives of international social movements. The panel would in the long run offer support to a new Global Economic Coordination Council, a globally representative forum “to address areas of concern in the functioning of the global economic system in a comprehensive way must be created.”

The General Assembly process was considered to be far more open to civil society input than the parallel G20 process. Numerous stakeholder consultations and interactive dialogues were held, with over 100 CSO submissions made and subsequently published.<sup>37</sup> The suggested reforms have been widely backed by civil society. The Women’s Working Group on Financing for Development, for instance, has called recently for the UN and not the IFIs, to be responsible for economic governance.<sup>38</sup> The Secretary General has, however, backed away from publicly endorsing the recommendations, causing some to point to a missed opportunity in terms of civil society alliance-building and enhanced multilateralism.

The panel’s recommendations coincided, more or less, with the recent **G20 meeting** in London, which among other measures, struck a deal that would massively increase the funds available to the **IMF**. For many civil society groups, which have long criticized the governance arrangements at the IMF and applications of conditionalities tied to loans that often impact heavily on human development, such a deal is something that the UN should be challenging? But reforms to the financial system proposed by Germany and France – in the main rebuffed by the US and UK – were arguably a sign that fundamental changes to global governance are gaining widespread

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<sup>36</sup> [Over 160 citizen groups call for the establishment of a major new Global Climate Fund](#). Declaration by International Forum for Globalization Climate Strategy Working Group. Institute for Policy Studies, December 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Bretton Woods Project, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2009, Update 65

<sup>38</sup> Women’s Working Group on Financing for Development, ‘A call for structural, sustainable, gender equitable and rights based responses to the global financial and economic crisis’, statement, April 27, 2009

support, including on the centre-right of the political spectrum. This feeling was reinforced by a group of NGOs meeting in Prague at the same time as the G20 who found that “Long, hard struggles by progressive movements have brought the world to a point where a change of paradigm and reform of key institutions appear closer than ever”<sup>39</sup>. The G20 recognised the need for global solutions to global problems and, partly taking their cue from this the **UN General Assembly** adopted resolution (document A/63/L.66) which mandates it to hold a conference “at the highest level” at United Nations headquarters in New York from June 1-3 “on the world financial and economic crisis and its impact on development.”

The G20 did increase the powers and broaden the membership of the Financial Stability Forum to become the Financial Stability Board, which in turn led to Transparency International to call for more input from civil society in such matters.

Long standing demands from civil society on the international financial and economic system generally revolve around three central principles: transparency<sup>40</sup>, accountability and ownership. These principles particularly emanate from those groups demanding fundamental reform of the **Bretton Woods Institutions**.<sup>41</sup> The proposals coming from civil society do not necessarily push further civil society involvement, perhaps because these institutions are viewed as so unrepresentative at the level of governments, that proposals to let in civil society are heard less loudly.

In addition to and linked to these principles is the relationship between **aid, recipients and donors**. Call for a greater citizen say in the way aid is delivered is paramount in campaigners’ demands in this general area, where governments tend to end being responsive to donors rather than citizens.<sup>42</sup> There has been some criticism of the lack of an attempt by the UN to bring more inclusive planning and consultation mechanism into the **UN Development Assistance Framework** (UNDAF), on a national basis, and it has been accused of “largely overlooking the voice and experiences of civil society” (Grady, 2005, Sunila Abeysekera, Personal communication).

The OECD-led **Accra Agenda for Action** (2008) has promised that donors will deepen their engagement with civil society, although this process seems to be as much about strengthening CSO accountability, in situations where they are significant development actors or donors themselves, as well as fostering the accountability of state donors to civil society. Donors will “deepen our engagement with CSOs as independent development actors in their own right whose efforts complement those of governments and the private sector. We share an interest in ensuring that CSO contributions to development reach their full potential. To this end: a) We invite CSOs to reflect on how they can apply the Paris principles of aid effectiveness from a CSO perspective. b) We welcome the CSOs’ proposal to engage with them in a CSOled multi-stakeholder process to promote CSO development effectiveness. As part of that process, we will seek to i) improve co-ordination of CSO efforts with government programmes, ii) enhance CSO accountability for results, and iii) improve information on CSO activities.” Most CSOs remained skeptical, however, that their ongoing substantive agenda for reform of aid delivery mechanisms and processes will be met by the OECD plan. In the words of Aid Watch Philippines: “The AAA fails to address the most essential concerns with the greatest impact on development in the Third World: democratic ownership of aid, policy conditionalities, tied aid and the foreign debt burden.”<sup>43</sup>

A new **UN agency on women’s rights** has been supported by some women’s rights groups in what has been called a “gender equality architecture reform” campaign. The idea has been backed by Stephen Lewis, the former U.N. Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa and was suggested by the UN panel on system-wide coherence. UNDP, as

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<sup>39</sup> ‘Transforming the World In Crisis’, Prague Ngo Declaration, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, <http://www.ifitransparency.org/>

<sup>41</sup> These are well documented so I won’t go into the specific demands; see EUROADAD, AFRODAD, or Bretton Woods Project websites.

<sup>42</sup> See Reality of Aid, 2008, for example.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Aid Watch Philippines’, 5<sup>th</sup> September 2008, ‘Accra Action Agenda on Aid: Little Progress in Changing Deeply Flawed Global Aid System.’

host to UNIFEM, could play an important role backing the creation of such an agency.<sup>44</sup> So far the G77 have effectively blocked the proposal.

Civil society has long called for **global taxes**, especially on currency transactions, the proceeds of which should be harnessed for poverty reduction, with a strong input from civil society (Simms, Tibbett and Willmott, 2001). Such proposals have sometimes been historically difficult for the UN to back because of US Congressional opposition to any global taxes that might be used to support the UN (Paul and Wahlberg 2002).

A UN meeting in April 2008 decided to establish a **High Level Task Force**, chaired by the UN Secretary General, whose aim was to promote a unified response to the **food crisis**. The Task Force produced a plan of action, known as the Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA). The CFA has built in a number of principles to guide the process of adaptation including that while governments have primary responsibility addressing the food crisis, civil society and the private sector are key partners: "These key stakeholders should be engaged in assessing the needs, formulating implementation plans and mobilizing local resources. The contributions of national and local farmers organizations and other civil society and private sector organizations are of particular importance in sharing their assessment of the situation, designing delivery mechanisms, ensuring transparency and contributing to reaching out to those in need, especially in remote areas."

A wider and more fundamental call for reform has come from **UBUNTU** (World Forum of Civil Society Networks) which convenes a multi-platform campaign for a stronger, more democratic UN, "placed at the centre of a consistent, democratic, responsible, effective system of international institutions. More specifically", they say, "we need to democratise the composition and decision-making procedures of UN bodies and agencies to ensure that they are effective and democratic. And we need to reform and integrate within the UN all other global multilateral organisations (IMF, WB, WTO, etc.)."

An assortment of other demands and ideas include that for an **Economic Security Council** (Dervis, 2004), for the UN to systems continually reassess its partnerships<sup>45</sup> (Utting and Zammit, 2006), for a **second General Assembly** made up of societal actors (Bruhl and Volker, 2002) and for a **UN parliament** (Rasmussen, 2003). These proposals are unlikely to be adopted in the medium term, but it is worth noting their direction and spirit.

While I have been able to talk somewhat about Southern perspectives on UN and other global governance reforms it is instructive to note that the Southern Voices project of the Overseas Development Institute has found that: "There is no clear strand of discourse that has reached us from Southern CSO partners on this subject, nor for that matter on the narrower issue of the reform of the UN's own development mission and its internal organisation" (Menocal and Rogerson, 2006). There may be multiple reasons for this, but it is clear to me that overall there is a problem with resources for articulation of positions, access to information and discussions, or coherence of platforms and networks, or perhaps, all three.<sup>46</sup> By the end of 2005, only about 250 of the 1,550 NGOs associated with the UN Department of Public Information came from developing countries, and developing country NGOs accounted for an even smaller share of those in consultative status with ECOSOC (Welch and Nuru, 2006). There have been calls for a **standing UN fund to facilitate the participation** of Southern groups in UN and other international process and conferences.<sup>47</sup>

There are also many national and local level initiatives that foster meaningful and substantial state-civil society links. Two that stand out as particularly interesting are the setting of and role of civil society in the **Nepal**

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<sup>44</sup> See "Q&A: Time Has Come for a New U.N. Women's Agency". IPS News, 6 March 2009.

<sup>45</sup> "Devoting greater resources and energies to developing and applying methodological tools that facilitate ex-ante and ex-post assessments of the immediate or direct development impacts of partnerships, as well as of their wider development implications" – Utting and Zammit, 2006.

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of the problems of funding 'non-traditional' civil society in the South, see Tembo and Wells, 2007.

<sup>47</sup> Eurostep, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Global Policy Forum, North-South Institute, Social Watch, Third World Institute, WEDO, World Federalist Movement, March 28, 2006, 'Paper on NGO Participation at the United Nations', Submission to the President of the General Assembly.



**Constituent Assembly** and civic participation in budgeting in the Brazilian City of **Porto Alegre**. Both these cases have been reviewed by Forum International de Montreal<sup>48</sup> in recent years.

Some commentators, including some of those I have interviewed, have argued strongly that now is a key time to push for fundamental reforms in global governance, especially in economic, financial and climate change-related governance. They stress that the UN should be at the forefront of these demands. **UNDP** in particular could play a strong role in some areas: backing and helping to flesh out proposals on climate change adaptation and financial and economic reform; redefining the concept of sustainable human development and broadening MDG processes to become more inclusive of civil society demands and concerns. Not doing so, they argue, represents a missed opportunity for democratising global governance, enhancing human development and strengthening the role of citizens and civil society in development.

## 7. Conclusions: some key motivations for civil society engagement

Drawing on the above, the wider literature and conversations and interviews with a range of civil society actors and academics, there are some key principles, trends and ideas that start to emerge from the debate which may help inform the UN(DP) in better understanding and harnessing the new multilateralism. These trends include:

1. Engagement based on **substance** is key: UNDP should consider publicly and vocally **backing civil society demands** on economic and climate governance, and other key civil society demands of the kind set described above, as appropriate.
2. Civil society groups appreciate UN agencies as their considerable **convening power** to bring them in to debates and processes.
3. **Transparency and openness** is crucially important: the application of higher standards of these principles in the UN system could lead to greater engagement, build trust and mutual respect.
4. Engaging and allowing space for INGOs is not a proxy for civil society: respect the call for a **deeper, more sophisticated engagement**, including talking more to Southern networks, grassroots organisations and social movements, getting beyond the 'usual suspects.'
5. Support and **protect civil society space** at the national level and the regional level, including speaking out and acting when civil society space is under attack, and civil society actors are harassed or imprisoned.
6. Support (both financially and politically) to allow **access to meetings and negotiations** at the international level, with speaking rights and inputs that allow a diversity of groups and opinions to come across.
7. Recognise the overall **mistrust** of initiatives that put **business on a footing with civil society** or assume equal power within a process or initiative.
8. Civil society is generally positive about UN agency **economic and statistical analysis**, which is widely used in lobbying the IFIs, regional bodies and national governments, but would doubtless prefer a greater role in design and methodology of such research, and would appreciate **more joint strategisation** about informal advocacy around the results of such research.
9. Understanding that previous examples of good practice – say the ICC process or the ICBL - come out of very specific circumstances and **might not be easily replicable**.
10. More effort to be **less bureaucratic and be nimble** in funding and other working relationships, especially in national circumstances.
11. In funding relationships, respecting **local ownership** in objective-setting is key to equitable outcomes and important for building ongoing trust and mutual respect.

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<sup>48</sup> A research-based think tank which undertakes case studies on civil society interactions with governments, amongst other activities.

12. It should be civil society itself, and not governmental agencies, that **decide who represents them** at specific forums and initiatives, although this raises obvious questions about legitimacy and self selection raised above.

Somewhat controversial or contested principles, trends, demands and ideas include:

1. Helping **redefine, strengthen and reinvigorating key concepts** in development, including human development and sustainable development. Reclaim the counter-discourse and the proposition of alternative models of development.
2. Those parts of civil society that are under-resourced and that lack technical skills are often keen to receive **technical support**, policy analysis training and help with designing research methodology.
3. Recognise the importance of affording a stronger **legal status** for CSOs at the UN, including allowing enhanced speaking rights in key processes.
4. **People are key** – UN agencies should strive to employ people at all levels who come from or understand civil society especially from the South.

## 8. Suggestions/recommendations to UN(DP)

A number of practical suggestions for further papers, processes and discussions have come out of the literature, interviews with civil society actors and academics, as well as those implied by the above.

### Engaging civil society on substance

- **Redefining sustainable/human development**

UNDP (and the UN in general) should try to refocus around a better definition of sustainable human development. A good definition will necessarily include relations with civil society, and will indeed need to emanate from civil society, but in a context of transformation.<sup>49</sup> Its design and implementation should include civil society voices and inputs. Sustainable development is therefore not about technology but about a political framework, which will devolve power and give people rights over natural resources. The involvement of local communities in environmental management is a prerequisite for sustainable development.<sup>50</sup>

- **Human Development Report and Index**

The 2010 HDR will take stock of experiences with people-centered development during the past two decades and consider how broader aspects of 'development as freedoms' and enlargement of choices can be integrated in the human development concept and its measurement through the Human Development Index or complementary instruments. The development of the 2010 report will involve an extensive series of consultations with stakeholders, including those from civil society – some of whom would like to see the HDI take account of recent debates on social indicators relating to health and the environment.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Partly from communication with Roberto Bissio.

<sup>50</sup> Partly from Narain, 2006.

<sup>51</sup> For the 2009 report the HDRO has begun an extensive series of consultations with stakeholders in different regions.

<sup>52</sup> From a conversation with Eva Jespersen.

UNDP could invigorate the Index and Report by inviting more comments from civil society on how to update and upgrade it. One idea would be to assemble a set of leaders from civil society groups along with experts on social and health and environmental indicators for a brainstorming session.<sup>53</sup>

- **MDG+10 review**

The goals are to be reviewed in 2010 and this could be an opportunity to strengthen their relationship with civil society. The MDGs hold strong potential for engaging grassroots civil society. As part of the review, civil society representatives would like to see concrete commitments on the part of the UN and national governments to include more civil society voice in implementation and monitoring on a national basis. An immediate action in the context of the 2010 review would be commissioning a study from a civil society perspective looking at revitalising the reporting and implementation of the goals.

- **Open “call” to civil society**

One advantage of working with civil society groups is that suggestions and proposals for changes are easily spurred and can be of high quality. If UNDP formally launched a call for proposals for suggested changes to UN-civil society relations some useful proposals are likely to be forthcoming. UNDP could institute a funding mechanism for Southern networks and grassroots group who need assistance with research proposals. The proposal round could end in a conference or seminar which would attempt to synthesis and funnel proposals into a set of recommendations for UN(DP).

- **Local-global ‘conversations’ on the financial and other global crises**

In the context of the current crises, UN(DP) could play an important role in channeling the informed views of citizens and organizations from the national to the global level by organizing regional and national dialogues to generate discussion and feedback on global proposals. By creating space at a national and /or regional basis to discuss multilateral concerns, UNDP could bring local civil society into conversations with international institutions, including the IFIs and others.<sup>54</sup>

## **Developing a better strategic understanding of civil society and GPPNs**

- **Mapping existing key global public policy networks**

Does the UN know, comprehensively and systematically, which networks it is in, how important they are and which are the key ones for civil society? Which ones require funding or convening support would also be helpful to know as would which ones are dysfunctional or controversial. It would also be helpful for civil society to have a mapping of existing networks of powerful governments, agencies and individuals, as a means of power mapping at the international level.<sup>55</sup>

Linked to this is the suggestion that the UN conduct impact assessments and independent evaluations of partnerships and collaborative arrangements entered into so far before launching new ones (Martens, 2007).

- **Scoping potential political allies**

Bearing in mind the country agreements upon which UN national presence is based it might be worth looking for allies in key states. A scoping study would look at who might be sympathetic to civil society networks playing a stronger role in the UN systems and global governance arrangements more generally.

Anne-Marie Slaughter, who has written on multilateral networks, has become the director of policy planning in the U.S. State Department, and may be looking for ways that the United States can help to develop

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<sup>53</sup> Partly from communication with John Cavanagh.

<sup>54</sup> Partly from a conversation with Joseph Stiglitz.

<sup>55</sup> Partly from a communication with Jan Aarte Scholte.

networks, both governmental and nongovernmental. Cass Sunstein has talked about a second bill of rights. Samantha Power has written extensively on the UN.

Other key states and thinkers within their administrations – in e.g., Brazil, India, South Africa, Argentina and others – may well prove useful allies in terms of human development and the new multilateralism in years to come, though, as noted above, some developing countries are not keen on giving CSOs more voice.

- **Case studies**

UN(DP) could commission case studies from organizations such as Forum International de Montréal (who have a good deal of experience in this area) on relevant subjects including possibly one of the following: the role and impact of the UNDP Civil Society Advisory Committee [UNDP conducted an external evaluation in 2008]; one (or more) National Human Development Report processes to examine the nature and extent of national level civil society engagement.<sup>56</sup>

- **Mapping study of southern networks**

In researching this paper and through past experience it has become clear to me that Southern civil society is not well represented and networked, and in particular, much of what is going on in the South, in terms of thinking and connecting grassroots with wider processes, is not captured or easy to access. UNDP could commission an independent mapping of Southern-based networks (broadly on development related matters) which would act as a kind of guide to the UN (and to others) as to who does what, where they are based, what specializations they have to offer and where their politics lie. The mapping could recommend a set of actions that could be taken to support Southern networks participation in global networks. This could then be made widely available.

Once the mapping is done it may be worth adopting a sophisticated international market research agency (or specialised consultant), using participatory methods, to convene CSOs in the South and discover what their views are at the national level of the UN and of UNDP in particular.

- **Insight interviews**

A series of off-the-record 'insight' interviews with key ex UNDP and UN staff where they are asked: what would they have done more of, or differently if they could in terms of civil society engagement and what blockages there are, and how can such blockages be addressed?

- **Using existing sources**

Lester Salamon asks that the UN makes better use of the work by UN Statistics Division and the Center for Civil Society Studies at Johns Hopkins University, which have produced the *Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts* (2003) designed to provide a more comprehensive picture of the economic contribution of non-profit institutions.

## **Practical suggestions for a better working relationship with civil society**

- **Scoping ways of strengthening national level civil society through UN country offices**

A comprehensive paper exploring the myriad of ways in which UNCTs could strengthen their links with civil society including:

- Training for all staff on 'civil society awareness' or similar
- 'Social audits' – opening up UNCT offices/papers and inviting civil society once a year to scrutinise and ask probing questions.

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<sup>56</sup> Partly from a conversation with Nigel Martin.

- Overhaul of staffing and HR procedures to prioritise recruitment of people from civil society backgrounds (although this may be double edged sword as there will doubtless be complaints of the brain drain, which is already a factor in many places).
- UN staff could be measured partly against their ability to broaden their partnerships to include a range of CSOs. Weaknesses in their programmes can be addressed by UN agencies clearly identifying their appropriate niche, by mainstreaming human rights into staff training and programmes, and by placing more emphasis on rooting UN programming as relevant in the existing experience of CSOs (after Grady, 2005).
- Ensure that UN communications, papers and documents are available in relevant local languages.
- Streamline bureaucracy in order to be able to rapidly respond to changing civil society demands and needs (including in funding processes), timely payments of funds and ensure that local ownership is apparent in funding processes.
- Support programmes that aim to institutionally strengthen grassroots NGOs, helping them to link global and local issues<sup>57</sup>

(It has been pointed out that some of these suggestions may have limited scope if national governments are unsympathetic.)

- **A handbook of UN-civil society good practice**

By scanning UN agencies for elements of successful interactions with civil society including UNIFEM, UNFPA (advocacy funding in donor countries), UNICEF, UNPFII, ECOSOC, etc, as well as at the level of UNCTs and regional cooperation, a handbook for sharing current good practice (as distinct from 'best' practice, which would imply less diversity of interaction and definition) across the organisation would help UN agencies learn from each other. The designation for good practice will need to come from civil society itself and could build on work by Keck and Sikkink (1998), Reinicke and Deng (2000) and, to some extent, Utting and Zammit (2006). It should be noted that this could be controversial if the process is too instrumental and civil society is viewed as a homogenous entity. Best practice should take account of demands and objectives of civil society as well as process-oriented goals.

- **Explore ways of creating fora at national level between national governments and CSOs**

The UN should take leadership at the national level in creating fora that help government policy makers to engage substantively with civil society on national development plans, including PRSPs and MDGs. The UN could use its considerable convening power to set up policy dialogue opportunities between governments and citizen groups, particularly those that do not have access to such opportunities. This could take the form of meetings, publications, media debates etc. The MDGs are one entry point to engage CSOs on substance, and the UN system at the national level can build on the spaces that the Millennium Campaign and others have already created.<sup>58</sup>

- **A stronger legal status for civil society, more formal 'space'**

Some civil society groups complain of being legally constrained at the UN, with no formal speaking rights and ad hoc involvement in processes and consultations. A review of civil society legal status could help to enliven civil society space.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Partly from a communication from Nancy Kachingwe

<sup>58</sup> Partly from a conversation with Salil Shetty.

<sup>59</sup> I have to add there are contradictory views on this – some see the formalisation of CSOs at the UN as akin to co-option or, perhaps worse, the 'bureaucratisation' of CSOs.

<sup>59</sup> From a conversation with Rajesh Tandon.

- **Engaging in other existing conversations**

There are also significant and developed conversations going on between national NGO platforms at the international level which could be further built on and engaged with by UN agencies. Representatives from 82 national NGO platforms in 82 countries and NGO regional coalitions from Africa, Latin America, Europe and Oceania have decided to create an international forum of national NGO platforms (see [www.ong-ngo.org](http://www.ong-ngo.org)).<sup>60</sup>

- **Using regional and other governmental structures**

UN(DP) offices in many of our countries, especially in Asia, are beholden to central governments to the extent that they cannot always effectively convene meaningful dialogues where civil society may take on critical engagement stances vis-à-vis the government of the day. One suggestion is to consider using regional offices of UN(DP) to engage with such multiparty dialogues as a regional platform.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, UN(DP) may seize existing forums that bring together both governmental and non-governmental actors around the same set of issues – such as the Commonwealth, the Francophonie, the Organization of Islamic Countries – for catalyzing such dialogues as well. Sub-regional/regional political groupings – e.g., ASEAN, AU – may serve as useful platforms for convening such dialogue, which should be designed to elicit the broadest possible range of responses, and be seen as a credible and serious exercise.

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<sup>60</sup> From a conversation with Sam Worthington.

## **Annex 1: List of people interviewed, who gave input by e-mail, made comments, or gave suggestions**

*Thanks to:*

**Sunila Abeysekera**, Director, International Women's Rights Action Watch (by e-mail)  
**Roberto Bissio**, Executive Director, Third World Institute, Uruguay, and Coordinator of Social Watch  
**Renate Bloem**, CIVICUS UN Representative in Geneva; former president, CONGO  
**John Cavanagh**, Director, Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, D.C.  
**Michael Edwards**, Distinguished Senior Fellow at Demos in New York; Visiting Senior Scholar, New York University Wagner School of Public Service; Visiting Senior Fellow, Brooks World Poverty Institute, Manchester University  
**Alan Fowler**, President, International Society for Third Sector Research (by e-mail)  
**Marta Garrich**, Project Coordinator, UBUNTU Secretariat  
**Arunabha Ghosh**, Oxford-Princeton Global Leaders Fellow, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford  
**Jesse Griffiths**, Coordinator, Bretton Woods Project  
**Nancy Kachingwe**, International Policy Manager, ActionAid International  
**Nigel Martin**, President-CEO, Montréal International Forum  
**Babu Mathew**, Country Director, ActionAid India  
**Ezra Mbogori**, Executive Director, Akiba Uhaki, Kenya; former Executive Director, MWENGO  
**Kumi Naidoo**, Honorary President, CIVICUS  
**Sunita Narain**, Director, Centre for Science and Environment (by e-mail)  
**Meena Raman**, Third World Network, and Friends of the Earth Malaysia  
**Lester Salamon**, Director, Centre for Civil Society Studies, Johns Hopkins University  
**Jan Aart Scholte**, Director of the Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation, University of Warwick  
**Martin Sime**, General Secretary, Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations  
**Ramesh Singh**, CEO, ActionAid International  
**Gus Speth**, former Administrator, UNDP and Dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies  
**Ingrid Srinath**, Secretary-General, CIVICUS  
**Joseph Stiglitz**, University Professor, Columbia University; Chair of the Commission of Experts of the President of the UN General Assembly on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System; Winner of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences (2001); Former Senior Vice President and Chief Economist of the World Bank.  
**Rajesh Tandon**, President, Participatory Research in Asia  
**Sam Worthington**, President and CEO, InterAction

### **UNDP:**

**Bruce Jenks**, Partnerships Bureau  
**Eva Jespersen**, Human Development Report Office  
**Thierno Kane**, Civil Society Division, Partnerships Bureau  
**Bharati Sadasivam**, Civil Society Division, Partnerships Bureau  
**Salil Shetty**, United Nations Millennium Campaign  
**Lia Sieghart**, Environment and Energy Group / Bureau for Development Policy

### **UN:**

**Kevin Watkins**, Director, UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report; former director, UNDP Human Development Report Office

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## Annex 3: Selected general resources of use and interest

- Centre for the Study of Developing Societies <http://www.csd.in/index.php>
- Centre for Science and Environment [www.cseindia.org](http://www.cseindia.org)
- Choike - portal on Southern civil societies [www.choike.org](http://www.choike.org)
- CIVICUS Civil Society Index and website <http://www.civicus.org>
- CONGO <http://www.ngocongo.org> Social
- Council on Foreign Relations <http://www.cfr.org/thinktank/iigg/>
- Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation: <http://www.dhf.uu.se>
- DAWN [www.dawnnet.org](http://www.dawnnet.org)
- Forum International de Montreal [www.fimcivilsociety.org](http://www.fimcivilsociety.org) - case studies in particular
- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung [http://www.fes-globalization.org/new\\_york/index.htm](http://www.fes-globalization.org/new_york/index.htm)
- Global Civil Society Yearbooks, Centre for the Study of Global Governance, London School of Economics
- *Global Governance* (journal); Lynne Rienner Publishers
- Global Policy Forum Website [www.globalpolicy.org](http://www.globalpolicy.org)
- Institute for Development Studies <http://www.ids.ac.uk/go/home>
- Institute for Policy Studies <http://www.ips-dc.org/>
- International Gender and Trade Network <http://web.igtn.org/home/>
- National NGO Platform portal <http://www.ong-ngo.org/>
- Social Watch Website and Reports <http://www.socialwatch.org>
- Society for International Development [www.sidint.org](http://www.sidint.org)
- Third World Network [www.twinside.org.sg](http://www.twinside.org.sg)
- Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-profit Organizations
- UBUNTU <http://www.ubuntu.upc.edu/>
- UNDP Human Development Reports <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/nhdr/>
- UN NGLS <http://www.un-ngls.org> (see also <http://www.un.org/dpi/ngosection/index.asp> and <http://esango.un.org/civilsociety/login.do>)
- Women in Development Europe <http://www.wide-network.org/>