



PENN: CURRENT RESEARCH ON SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

More than Window Dressing? Stakeholder and Participants in the UN Global Agreements on Sustainable Development

An Exploration of Agreements to Move toward Pluralistic Global Governance

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INTRODUCTION

It was a crisp, sunny mid-October day in Quito, Ecuador, when the Habitat III conference closed. The celebratory mood was tangible among the 167 member states and 30,000 civil society attendees as they gathered for the concluding ceremony. The audience heard bracing speeches from the nation's president, the Ecuadorian minister of housing and urban development, the city's mayor, the secretary general of the conference, and representatives from civil society. They universally rejoiced in the success of the meeting but had strong words of caution about the future and the need to develop partnerships for the implementation of the Quito declaration.

In the audience were two long rows of non-governmental organization representatives from the 16 named groups of the General Assembly of Partners (GAP) who had taken their places among the member states; all had illuminated placards before them as did mayors and other subnational leaders from the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF). GAP represented a new partnership arrangement in the UN proceedings. A self-organized multi-stakeholder platform encompassing three sectors (civil society, non-member state governmental organizations, and the private sector), groups usually noted separately in UN documents, they had operated together to promote collective interests in the formulation of the Habitat III outcome document, the *New Urban Agenda*, while recognizing the independence of individual groups to pursue their individual interests.

The GAP attendees were especially pleased with their recognition at the conference. In the previous days, they had organized four assemblies and 16 roundtables, presided over several member state conference dialogues, been invited to address the inaugural and closing segments of the conference, and participated in a private hour-long meeting with Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. The Global Taskforce was basking in its successful hosting of the Second World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments, a meeting that occurred on two successive days in Bogotá and Quito. Both groups were encouraged by their direct mention in the outcome document. They believed that within the limits of the UN, they had participated in an evolving form of global governance: what some observers had labeled “stakeholder democracy,” defined as a process “that provides a mechanism for transmission of civil society deliberations to the public arena of decision-making” (Bäckstrand 2006).



Figure 1. Member States' approval of the New Urban Agenda at the Habitat III Conference 2016

Thus, as the curtain came down on this once-every-twenty-year, all-UN meeting, stakeholder contributions to the *New Urban Agenda*, were reflected throughout. The unanimously supported declaration would be noted for its clear tripartite message: 1.) create an enabling environment of governance and legislation, 2.) pay attention to the management and planning of urban spatial development, and 3.) promote new forms of knowledge, capacity-building, and finance in support of the effort. Further, it placed strong emphasis on the role of stakeholders (26 references), and like the key global agreements that preceded it, committed to the systematic use of multi-stakeholder partnerships in its implementation, specifically for the co-production of programs

and policies, knowledge-sharing, and reporting progress (11 references).¹ While these citations are one indicator of the UN's growing appreciation of stakeholders, a reciprocal measure is in the number of voluntary commitments (70) on the part of the stakeholders to the *New Urban Agenda*.²

Although the member states, as the only entities with the standing to craft agreements under international law, negotiated the final document, its contents were the product of innovative forms of participation from within the UN family and among members of civil society. These processes included the unprecedented involvement of 44 UN agencies and programs and 200 civil society experts in the development of the Policy Unit reports, one of the two key knowledge inputs, and broad citizen/expert/government official contributions through 11 regional and thematic conferences involving more than 10,000 participants for the other knowledge input, the conference declarations. They also incorporated new forms of dialogue among the member states and engagement platforms in the preparations. For example, the official conference modalities included GTF and GAP (who organized public hearings, offered contributory statements at the preparatory conferences, and participated in special meetings for exchanges of views with the Habitat III Bureau and, later, the co-facilitators (ambassadors) appointed to write the document).³

In many respects this collection of activities, though unique to the Habitat III preparations, built on the UN's willingness to experiment with new forms of deliberation over time. This paper will explore the current and future role of stakeholders and partnerships in the UN with special attention to those that promote sustainable development. The paper's underlying question is: How can stakeholders participate *effectively* in the deliberations, standard setting, and policy guidance of the global governance system as represented by the United Nations?⁴

As this paper will demonstrate, when discussing UN matters, judging effectiveness is nuanced. While observers who represent various professions ranging from international lawyers to grassroots organizers have many views on this topic, this paper will measure changes in stakeholder relations as reflected by their ability to participate in official convenings and contribute to member state deliberations on development issues. It will argue that stakeholders gained legitimacy and member state recognition through the growth of international issues-based advocacy networks that exhibited their concerns in regularly convened UN conferences. It will show member state reactions, namely the forging of stakeholder-supported development agendas and the invention of new implementation tools that permit stakeholder contributions without substituting for member state sovereignty in overall decision-making.

The paper has three parts. The first part, "From Consultants to Stakeholders and Partners," focuses on the history of stakeholders' roles and partnership agreements in the United Nations. The second part, "The Configuration of Today's Stakeholder and Partnership Arrangements," lays out the currently configured landscape of stakeholder and partnership arrangements as expressed in recent global agreements and in stakeholder responses to them, and the third part, "Paths Toward Effective Stakeholder Participation: Other Issues," explores some current conditions affecting further evolution of pluralistic governance within the UN system. The intent is to provide background for a follow-on study that will probe the expectations of the various actors including member states, UN agencies, civil society, and local and sub-regional governments in the development of partnership and stakeholder arrangements in pursuit of sustainable development.

¹ UN 2016: pp. 1, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 17, 18, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29 (stakeholders) 5,6,17, 22, 27, 29 (partnerships).

² At the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), the outcome document, *The Future We Want*, called for a registry to list the multi-stakeholder initiatives that governments, inter-governmental organizations, and major groups pledged to undertake to implement the agreed on development goals and commitments within it as a globally-agreed document. As a public document, the paragraph added a degree of accountability to these actions. Subsequent UN conferences similarly called for voluntary commitments and publicized them.

³ For more information, see Birch 2017.

⁴ The author is indebted to Derrick L. Cogburn who has framed this question in this way in *Transnational Advocacy Networks in the Information Society, Partners or Pawns?* (Cogburn 2017).



FROM CONSULTANTS TO STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS

The concept of civil society as contributing to the political, economic, and social strength of places is old. Discussions dating back to Aristotle's discourse on "community" flow through the 19th-century writings of Alexis de Tocqueville and on to such 20th-century social scientists as Robert Putnam. And in 1947, the founders of the United Nations—who envisioned the UN as an entity for high-level interstate diplomacy focused on promoting peace—also introduced the idea of its being a collective agreement of individuals when they wrote the first words of the preamble of *UN Charter*: "We the peoples" Their use of the "We the peoples" phraseology likely resulted from the advocacy of 1,200 representatives of voluntary associations who observed and lobbied the member state delegates to include this wording at the organizing convention in San Francisco (Alger 2002). The founders also affirmed that the organization would have dual aims:

- to "save succeeding generations from the scourge war" and
- to "employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples."

Peacekeeping would occur primarily through the Security Council and the General Assembly, while a third body, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), would deal with emerging development issues, having jurisdiction for coordinating the UN's economic, social, and environmental work. Today, ECOSOC's efforts are a wide-ranging, conducted by 15 UN specialized agencies, 10 funds and programs, eight functional commissions, six research and training institutes, and five regional commissions.

Pressed by the voluntary associations present at the charter-writing meeting, the founders acknowledged the value of non-governmental groups being consulted on occasions where their specialized knowledge might be helpful to the development work in the now oft-quoted Article 71. However, they strictly limited any interaction to the consultant's adding expertise to ECOSOC concerns. The *UN Charter* was explicit to respect this role and careful not to step on national sovereignty:

The Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence. Such arrangements may be made with international organizations and, where appropriate, with national organizations after consultation with the Member of the United Nations concerned (Chapter X, Article 71).

Over the years, the member states refined their expectations about the consultative status of non-governmental organizations through a series of resolutions (Willetts 2000). Regardless of their respective views on civil society, the member states have been and continue to be unanimous in their firm belief that the accredited organizations should play an advisory, not decision-making role in any interaction with ECOSOC. The current resolution on stakeholders, passed in 1996, articulates this judgment clearly, stating that under no circumstances would a non-governmental organization have any voting rights:

A clear distinction is drawn in the Charter of the United Nations between *participation without vote in the deliberations of the Council and the arrangements for consultation*. Under Articles 69 and 70, participation is provided for only in the case of States not members of the Council, and of specialized agencies. Article 71, applying to non-governmental organizations, provides for suitable arrangements for consultation. This distinction, deliberately made in the Charter, is fundamental and the arrangements for consultation should not be such as to accord to non-governmental organizations the same rights of participation as are accorded to States not members of the Council and to the specialized agencies brought into relationship with the United Nations (para 18) (UN 1996).

Having consultative status allows NGO stakeholders to enter the United Nations' highly guarded premises, attend international conferences and events and offer written and oral statements (limited to 2,000 words)



and sponsor side events at the meetings (UN Economic and Social Council 2011). While this is clearly of value to the NGOs, ECOSOC benefits from this arrangement, too: it gains expertise from specific vantage points and assistance in implementing and monitoring international agreements. To clarify this position, in 1996 the UN listed the two purposes for consultation with non-governmental organization: to gain and receive information:

Decisions on arrangements for consultation should be guided by the principle that consultative arrangements are to be made, on the one hand, for the *purpose of enabling the Council or one of its bodies to secure expert information or advice* from organizations having special competence in the subjects for which consultative arrangements are made, and, on the other hand, *to enable international, regional, sub regional and national organizations that represent important elements of public opinion* to express their views (para 20). (Italics added) (UN 1996)

THE ORGANIZATIONAL ADMINISTRATION OF STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS

In 1946, ECOSOC created a 19-member Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO Committee) to vet organizations for approval by the full ECOSOC. The NGO Committee members are geographically representative and serve four-year terms. The composition of the committee demonstrates widely varying national views on citizen participation in governmental affairs. Current membership (2015-2019) is Azerbaijan, Burundi, China, Cuba, Greece, Guinea, India, Iran, Israel, Mauritania, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russian Federation, South Africa, Sudan, Turkey, United States of America, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Guided by the successive resolutions outlined above, ECOSOC has charged the NGO Committee with making technical judgments to establish that an organization proves its competence in ECOSOC matters, provides evidence of its existence as an established institution having a legal governance structure, has financial support independent of any national government, and is non-violent.

However, since its inception, accreditation has been rife with problems. Some NGO Committee members have persistently used the process to disqualify organizations holding views perceived to be counter to their national interests.⁵ Among their red flags are groups dealing with separatism, terrorism, gay rights, freedom of expression, and human rights (Boström 2011). Thus, the NGO Committee's decisions frequently have flowed into the political realm. A recent example is the NGO Committee's review of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) (<https://cpj.org/about/>). Over a period of four years, the NGO Committee deferred the organization's 2012 application seven times for procedural reasons (the NGO Committee tactic to avoid a decision), until the United States forced a vote, resulting in a 10-6 (3 abstentions) rejection, with Azerbaijan, Burundi, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, Sudan, and Venezuela voting against. Ordinarily, the application would not be sent to ECOSOC but the United States brought the matter forward for an ECOSOC vote. In the end, 40 of the 54 member states voted in favor, with only five member states (China, Russia, Rwanda, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe) voting negatively and nine either abstaining or absenting themselves ("UN Committee Denies" 2016; Committee to Protect Journalists 2016).

Nonetheless, civil society organizations have increasingly sought consultative status. The original 41 non-governmental organizations accredited in 1946 has risen steadily so that by 1990 there were 700 and today there are more than 4,500. The surge is associated with the rise of inexpensive internet and wireless communications that has enabled inexpensive communications that support the proliferation of organized networks whose reach extends from the global to the local (Castells 2010, Hamman and April 2013).

The presence of more non-governmental organizations in UN work has many sources. On the civil society side, the growth of such supportive organizations as the network of United Nations Associations (UNAs) and

⁵ The recent experiences of the University of Pennsylvania and the Lincoln Institute for Land Policy are illustrative. Both endeavored to be accredited but were deferred repeatedly via a series of questions from China asking the entities attitudes toward Tibet, the sources of any government funding, and so forth.

the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (CoNGO) occurred early on.⁶ Next came the increase in such networked single-purpose advocacy organizations (or transnational advocacy networks) as Slum/Shackdwellers International (SDI), founded in 1996, and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), founded in 2004 as a consolidation of several local government associations. More recently, such multi-stakeholder partners' platforms as GTF, the Cities Alliance, and GAP have fueled the demand for consultative status.

On the UN side, new forms of stakeholder activism emerged after the end of the Cold War. They were associated with the UN sponsorship of a series of conferences that attracted high numbers of civil society observers, the member states' 1996 decision to extend accreditation to national and regional organizations (in the first five decades, only international NGOs could apply for consultative status), and the growing realization on the part of Secretary General Kofi Annan, his successors, and selected member states, that the UN would need to be more inclusive in its approach to development issues focused on sustainability writ large (UN General Assembly 2004). Finally, UN agencies, well aware of their dependence on outside financial support and their need of expertise to supplement their work began to develop several types of individual partnership agreements, ranging from bilateral arrangements between an agency and a single consultant/partners to multi-party agency/stakeholder platforms such as the Global Compact (established in 2000). The variety of these arrangements was so complex that the UN would detail each in a 268-page compendium issued in 2005 (United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service and German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development 2005).

The United Nations agencies had recognized the need to liaise with stakeholders early on when it founded the Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS), an inter-agency unit to foster communications with stakeholders. Based at the UN headquarters, it serves as a clearinghouse for varied UN activities involving civil society.

Of note, organizations can partner with the UN without having consultative status. However, the status offers symbolic and practical recognition to an organization and facilitates formal and informal transactions between stakeholders and member states that take place within the UN precincts.

INCREASED STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION AT UN CONFERENCES

Starting in the 1960s the UN began to convene system-wide conferences to raise awareness about broad issues that it otherwise could not cover comprehensively in its regular proceedings. These meetings began to set global norms along with commitments to address them and to establish monitoring arrangements for the commitments (Haas 2002). (Subsequent to any conference, the General Assembly passes a resolution that contains the agreement, thus recording it in the official records. These resolutions are non-binding.) The topics included the environment, gender, cities, information systems, food and others. In the 1970s alone, the UN convened a dozen such conferences (Fromerand 1996: 374). Initially, civil society had minimal roles in the meetings: some were invited to be observers, some helped with the preparations or contributed wording for

⁶ Two venerable organizations, the United Nations Associations and the Congress on Non-Governmental Organizations (CoNGO), serve as channels for communications and provide some watchdog functions for civil society in the United Nations. In practice, they serve as educational entities, designed to provide arenas for dialogue among NGOs and member states, and develop support for the United Nations among the broader public. Many of the nearly 100 independent United Nations Associations actually pre-date the UN, having their roots in organizations that supported the League of Nations. They are composed of individuals and organizations interested in promoting UN values, especially those related to human rights. Since 1946, they have been united in an umbrella group, the World Federation of United Nations Associations, founded by the 22 United Nations Associations in existence at that time. Local United Nations Associations work within countries to promote support for the UN, sponsoring model UNs, lectures, training on the UN processes, special projects tailored to their local context (e.g. Ghana's clean-ups in urban areas), and celebrating UN observance days, and other activities. Their membership ranges from more than 20,000 (USA) to under 100 (Botswana). Many have branches and chapters. Some are well financed—UNA Sweden, for example, has a \$4 million budget. Currently, United Nations Associations exist in 96 countries: 26 are in Africa, 17 in the Americas, 24 in the Asia-Pacific region, and 29 in Europe (World Federation of United Nations Associations 2015). The World Federation serves as a "good government" intermediary between UN officials and civil society, sponsoring Civil Society Dialogues on key topics, Security Council Election Debates, workshops on getting involved with the SDGs, briefings and newsletters to update their members on such current discussions as UN reforms (which it supports), the role of regional commissions, and so forth. Historically, it has played an important role in supporting UN human rights. Today, it has a special focus on youth and on SDG Goal 16: "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies." Its \$2 million budget, raised from foundations and a handful of member state and municipal governments, supports four offices (New York, Seoul, Geneva, and Brussels), its annual plenary membership meeting, the Global Youth Forum, and other activities. (See the World Federation of United Nations Associations website <http://www.wfuna.org/>). Founded in 1948, the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) works to assure that non-governmental organizations in consultative status have appropriate access to UN meetings and conferences. It has two classes of membership: full members for ECOSOC accredited organizations and associate membership for those with a formal tie to the UN. It provides convening and communications services to its members within 43 chapters, managed by three offices—NYC, Geneva, and Vienna. Recently, it has become more active in the Asia Pacific and Sub Saharan Africa, having taken on infrastructure investment projects.

the conference declarations unofficially. As time progressed, the conferences not only served to establish global norms and views around a particular topic but also as a conduit for shaping new global governance arrangements in these types of meetings, with those in the environmental arena being most effective in terms of redefining NGO/civil society roles, and others such as those dealing with the human settlements and cities following and advancing the new-found gains.

Activists and stakeholders, whether engaged in environmental, gender, or urban causes, energized by the existence of a given convening, began to make inroads in member state deliberations on global agreements through these conferences. While they did not succeed in entering officially into member-state negotiating and decision-making deliberations as some, such as the advocates of subnational governments, would desire, they have played increasingly important roles in directly and indirectly influencing the conference outcomes. As such, they contributed to a slow evolution of more pluralistic governance practices—within the UN context. The course of these changes are demonstrated in a succession of all-UN conferences beginning in the 1970s, especially the environmental conferences held in 1972, 1992, and 2012.

The environmental meetings were pace-setting with regard to advancing the recognition of stakeholders and reliance on partnerships. At the first UN Conference on the Environment (1972, Stockholm), two types of experts were present, all in unofficial capacities. Economist Barbara Ward represented the first type:



Figure 2 Four environmental conferences, held over a forty-year span would transform UN stakeholder relationships. The first was convened in Stockholm in 1972; the second, a 10-year review, met in Johannesburg in 2002; the third and fourth in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and 2012. While all were member-state driven, their outcome documents increasingly recognized and empowered stakeholders and partners.

“traditional expert.” She co-authored (with René Dubos) *Only One Earth*, the conference background volume, written at the request of the conference Secretary General, Maurice Strong, who had taken time off from heading the Canadian-foreign aid office (CIDA) to organize the affair. Strong also enlisted Ward to help shape the concepts for the outcome document during the preparatory meetings in advance of the conference. At the conference, Ward offered an hour-and-a-half address (an event not recorded in the official minutes because,

as an observer, not a member-state representative, she could speak only after the member states temporarily adjourned the official meeting). She was, by the way, one of the 300 observers that the member states accredited to the conference (Morphet 1966: 144).

A second type of non-member-state participant appeared at Stockholm in the form of some 10,000 activists (with varying levels of environmental expertise). While the official delegates representing 114 countries were convening, the activists who were not accredited to attend the formal meeting, organized five parallel meetings:

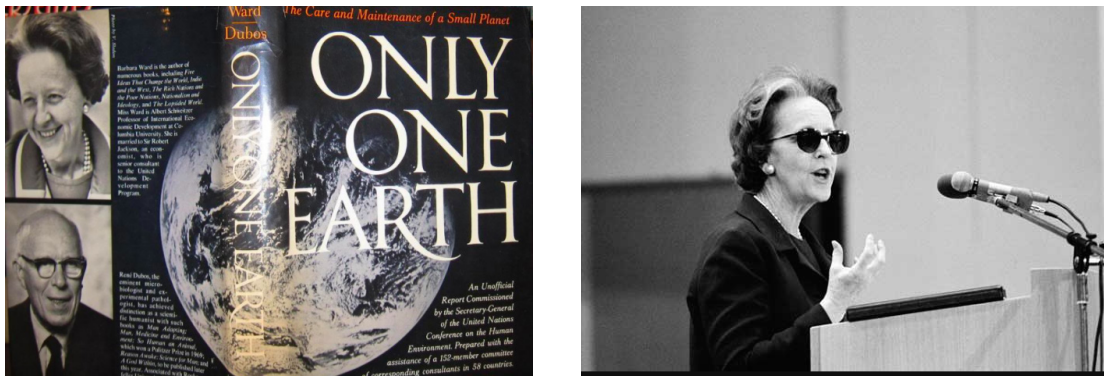


Figure 3. Barbara Ward played an important, unofficial role in the conference, representative of the expert advice that the UN would bring into its deliberations as it shaped initial global agreements on the environment.

the Environmental Forum, a scientific meeting sponsored by Sweden and the United States; the People's Forum, a convening of left-leaning NGOs; the Pow Wow, a group that discussed alternative technologies; the Dai Dong Conference, whose attendees focused on world peace and the environment; and an assembly dubbed the Hog Farm, a free-form encampment. Friends of the Earth and the editorial staff of *The Ecologist* issued a daily newspaper recounting the activities that took place outside of the official meetings. They not only attracted thousands of like-minded supporters but also gained international media attention.

For two weeks, the activists sponsored parades, side events, exhibits, and paper presentations and lectures consumed Stockholm as the member states hammered out the conference's official outcome document, the *Declaration on the Environment* (Faramelli 1972). While one observer scornfully characterized these activists' participation as a "colorful collection of Woodstock grads, former Merry Pranksters and other assorted acid-heads, eco-freaks, save-the-whalers, doomsday mystics, poets, and hangers-on," he also cited the importance of the scientific community who used the time's increased digital horsepower to develop alarming, business-as-usual scenarios, work confirmed by such field witnesses as sea explorer Jacques Cousteau and others who reported on the global environmental decline (Clark, Friedman, and Hochtstetler 1998: 11; Rowland 2015).

In the end, this UN conference marked several accomplishments. For example, on the official side, it achieved the recognition of environmental issues as an important UN concern. On the unofficial side, it demonstrated the growth of the popular sustainability movement across the globe.

The format of this environmental summit—a relatively small official meetings paralleled by separate massive civil society convenings—would set a pattern for future UN-wide conferences as well as lay the foundation for follow-on conferences in the 1970s. Habitat I, held four years later in Vancouver, Canada, is a prime example.⁷ Viewed as the human settlement counterpart to Stockholm's planetary concerns, the Habitat I organizers invited Barbara Ward to author a second conference theme book, *Home of Man*. This time around, the official conference would be accompanied by a UN-sanctioned "unofficial" meeting, the Habitat Forum. It took place in five enormous airplane hangers, adapted to accommodate a panoply of exhibits, lectures, performances, and plenary meetings during its 12-day duration. Some 15,000 attended daily, including Canadian head of state

⁷ Other conferences, especially those on women and human rights, would also be influential. A full discussion of them is beyond the scope of this paper but has been covered thoroughly by many authors. Constanza Tabbush (2005) summarizes many.

Pierre Trudeau and his wife, anthropologist Margaret Mead, Mother Theresa, and architect Buckminster Fuller. While sanctioned—meaning endorsed as an activity occurring at the same time as the official meeting—the Habitat Forum was not included in any official proceedings.

The two types of stakeholder interventions seen at Stockholm (and later Vancouver) informed the member state delegates' thinking. For example, at Stockholm, Ward introduced the idea of linking environmental



Figure 4. In 1972, environmental activists engaged in a broad set of activities designed to bring attention to environmental concerns including parading a model of the nearly extinct blue whale (left). Four years later at Habitat I, activists ran a full-fledged parallel conference (right).

and development concerns; the Environmental Forum demonstrated the worth of scientific knowledge in defining the related problems and solutions; and the activists put member state representatives on notice about the political strength of the rapidly growing environmental movement (Gartlan 2010). At Habitat I, the Vancouver Action Plan added spatial planning and management programs to development policies that traditionally focused on economic issues. And again, the immense and varied stakeholder meeting underlined the importance of improving the environment whether natural or built. Together, the two types of stakeholder contributions would eventually legitimize the creation of specialized programs—the United Nations Environmental Programme (1972) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (1978)—to serve as “catalytic agent[s], to identify prime problem areas, inspire corrective programs and provide seed money and technical assistance” (Hill 1975: 1).

THE 1990S BRINGS CHANGES TO STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION AT THE UN

With a lull in the 1980s, the UN again began to sponsor major conferences in the 1990s and early 2000s. In fact, in the 1990s alone it convened 16 meetings on themes ranging from child welfare to human rights, sustainable development, and women’s issues. These meetings would take on review-renew-update agendas that blended norm-setting and new operational functions. Exemplary is the second conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It is notable for its high levels of attendance, advances in UN approaches to stakeholder recognition, and structural changes in monitoring the conference’s outcomes.

At this meeting, nicknamed the “Earth Summit,” participation rose in all arenas. At the official level were 172 national governments—117 represented by their heads of state or chief ministers, a number that set a record for an international meeting. In the unofficial proceedings, some 17,000 stakeholders attended, in what had now become practice, a NGO “Global Forum” parallel to the member-state proceedings.

The member states produced the *Declaration on Environment and Development*, and an associated action plan, *Agenda 21*, that contained a major innovation in the stakeholder arena. It specified by name nine types of stakeholders under an umbrella title, “major groups,” each having a special interest in the promotion of



environmental and development issues.⁸ (They are: Women, Children and Youth, Indigenous Peoples, Non-Governmental Organizations, Local Authorities, Farmers, Workers and Trade Unions, Business and Industry, Scientific and Technological Community.)

Further, to monitor progress and interface with these players, the member states created a Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). Here, the member states not only consented to allocating some part of the responsibility for their global commitments to stakeholders as “key players who had a major role to play” but also to supporting an ongoing administrative structure that would include the major groups as legitimate monitors of progress (Bäckstrand 2006; Böhling 2011).

In the following decade, the General Assembly, guided by *Agenda 21*, fleshed out the structure and functions of the CSD, clearly expanding stakeholder roles. The CSD became a 53-member commission guided by a five-member bureau that met annually. With regard to the newly recognized major groups, the member states extended several privileges to major group members, namely having labeled seats in the gallery in ECOSOC or ECOSOC-related meetings, granting the ability to speak during these meetings and providing automatic credentialing to attend UN conferences. Further, as time went on, the CSD established special sessions or open dialogues to receive major group reports and comments on negotiated CSD documents. For each annual CSD session, it also charged a Bureau member to liaise with the major groups to brief them on the intergovernmental process. By 1998, it would officially convene a Multi-Stakeholder Forum with each CSD session (UN General Assembly 2013; Chasek 1997).

However, as conferences and their resulting declarations proliferated, a type of “summit fatigue” or overload arose among member states. This phenomenon led to a call to build on the conference outcomes to rationalize development work, an idea supported externally by the OECD and by key member states such as Great Britain, and internally by the World Bank, UNDP, and others.

STAKEHOLDERS IN THE 2000S

In response, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan took the occasion of the approaching millennium to arrange the “mother of all summits,” the Millennium Summit (2000), to put together a more coherent approach to the UN development agenda (Hulme 2009). In March 2000, Annan issued a roadmap, *We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century*, that laid out what would become the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The following May, more than 1,300 stakeholders met at a Millennium Forum to review and endorse the principles (United Nations 2000).

In September, the UN convened the Millennium Summit in New York City. The attendance sparkled with 149 heads of state or government, five deputy ministers, 21 other ministers, five vice presidents, and two crown princes (Glenn, Florescu, and Gordon 2001). The organizers included a civil society speaker in one official plenary in recognition of stakeholders’ growing importance in defining global issues.

The member states’ *Millennium Declaration* included an action plan that listed the MDGs, their targets, and called for their monitoring with greater stakeholder involvement. In so doing, the delegates singled out eight areas meant to eradicate poverty and promote environmental sustainability in the developing world (UN General Assembly 2000). In the next few months, the member states worked to refine the MDGs, and stakeholders—now globally organized and wiser in the ways of advocacy (having learned from their earlier conference experiences)—were extremely active lobbyists.

⁸ The source for this recognition came from the *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future* (1987), otherwise known as the Brundtland Commission report, that identified the scientific community, youth, business and industry, and non-governmental organizations as important players in the identification of environmental issues and of delivering programs to solve them (United Nations 1987). The United Nations Conference on Environment & Development, *Agenda 21*, Rio de Janeiro Brazil, June 1992. The conference or “The Earth Summit.” <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf> Chapter 23. Other significant agreements included the *Convention on Biodiversity*, the *Framework Convention on Climate Change*, the latter would become the foundation for the Paris Agreement (2015).

| GLOBAL CONFERENCES AND SUMMITS | | THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS | |
|---|------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Event | Year | Goal 1 | Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger |
| Children | 1990, 2002 | Goal 2 | Achieve universal primary education |
| Education for All | 1990, 2000 | Goal 3 | Promote gender equality and empower women |
| Least Developed Countries | 1990, 2001 | Goal 4 | Reduce child mortality |
| Drug problem | 1990, 1998 | Goal 5 | Improve maternal health |
| Food Security | 1992, 1996 | Goal 6 | Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases |
| Sustainable Development | 1992, 2002 | Goal 7 | Ensure environmental sustainability |
| Human Rights | 1993, 2001 | Goal 8 | Develop a Global Partnership for Development |
| Population and Development | 1994 | | |
| Small Island Developing States | 1994, 2005 | | |
| Natural Disaster Reduction | 1994, 2005 | | |
| Women | 1995, 2005 | | |
| Social Development | 1995, 2005 | | |
| Human Settlements | 1996, 2001 | | |
| Youth | 1998 | | |
| Millennium Summit | 2000, 2005 | | |
| HIV/AIDS | 2001 | | |
| Financing for Development | 2002 | | |
| Ageing | 2002 | | |
| Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries | 2003 | | |
| Information Society | 2003, 2005 | | |

Figure 5. In 15 years, the UN sponsored 33 conferences (left). By 2000, it would consolidate the conference declarations to create the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a framework for development programs (right).

Yet, by 2002, in the environmental world, many stakeholders concluded that the communications, educational, and lobbying roles given them were not sufficient to insure the development and implementation of the ideals encompassed in *Agenda 21* or the MDGs. Many member states came to agree that developing, implementing, and measuring progress on such programs would require giving additional power to more players than the current arrangements allowed.

These ideas came to a head at the ten-year review conference, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa. Here, the member states revamped their approach to sustainable development and to stakeholder activities. At the conference itself, attended by 190 member states and 22,000 participants, stakeholders were ever active, sponsoring several forums (Global People's, Indigenous People's Summit, Stakeholder Forum Implementation Conference, Local Government Session and Business Council for Sustainable Development) (Seyfang 2003). Further, during the conference itself, the thematic plenaries and roundtables included, for the first time, several stakeholder speakers alongside the member state speakers, a process that would continue at the subsequent CSD meetings.

Ultimately, the member states' *Johannesburg Declaration*, the WSSD outcome document, acknowledged that the implementation of sustainable development was well beyond nations' capacities and had to incorporate multi-stakeholder contributions. In the process, they defined a new kind of partnership (called Type II) that recognized and promoted multi-stakeholder agreements among many parties (including national or subnational governments, the private sector, and civil society) and aimed to address a specific sustainable development objective meeting specified standards.⁹ Here the UN went beyond its former practice of endorsing only member state to member state partnerships (called Type I).

Notwithstanding the admission that non-member-state actors could implement *Agenda 21* and the MDGs, the member states retained their sovereignty in policy matters, viewing stakeholder work as complementary to, not a substitute for, their decisions. How they defined complementarity would be subject to much tension-filled debate in the following decades. In the end, the stakeholder contributions were "decision-finding rather than decision-making," as seen in the fact that the so-called more inclusive arrangements, including the dialogues, did not seek to achieve consensus, joint problem-solve, or even vote on a topic (Bäckstrand 2006:

⁹ See the developing literature on partnerships, including Lowndes, Vivien and Chris Skelcher. 1998. "The Dynamics of Multi-Organizational Partnerships: An Analysis of Changing Modes of Governance." *Public Administration* 76 (Summer): 313-333; Felix Dodds. 2015. *Multistakeholder Partnerships. Making Them Work for the Post 2015 Development Agenda*. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Marianne Besisheim and Nils Simon. 2016. *Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Implementing the 2030 Agenda, Improving Accountability and Transparency*. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.



484). However, broadening the partnership concept would open new avenues for discussion among member states and their new-found partners from business and civil society who wanted to have some say in the any partnerships they formed.

Following the WSSD, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, conscious of the changes occurring in the environmental arena, sought to translate them more widely through the UN system. To this end, he appointed the Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relations headed by the former president of Brazil, charged with coming up with recommendations for better engagement protocols. Their report, *We the Peoples: Civil Society, the United Nations and Global Governance*, put forward 30 proposals the gist of which were informed by the report's statement: "constructively engaging with civil society is a necessity for the United Nations, not an option" (United Nations General Assembly 2004). The panel believed that such an approach would allow the UN not only to identify global priorities better but also to mobilize resources to deal with them more effectively in comparison to prior practice, which had restricted this work to member states. They argued that "opening up the United Nations to a plurality of constituencies and actors [is] not a threat to Governments but a powerful way to re-invigorate the intergovernmental process itself" (United Nations General Assembly 2004).

In the ensuing years, the member states and the UN administration adopted some of the panel's recommendations. For example, in June 2004, Secretary General Kofi Annan energized the Global Compact (founded in 2000 as a business collaborative to support the Millennium Development Goals) by convening the first Global Compact Leaders' Summit to discuss the mobilization of business stakeholders and reconfirm the members' ten corporate responsibility principles. In 2010, at the Millennium Development Goals Summit (the ten-year review), UN Secretary Ban Ki-moon announced the creation of an innovative multi-stakeholder partnership, *Every Woman Every Child*, a planning and implementation mechanism to address multiple MDGs (by 2017 it would galvanize 64 governments, six UN agencies/programs, and 180 organizations around the SDGs related to maternal and child health as well as gender equality, education, poverty, and hunger) (UN Every Woman Every Child 2016).

Two years later, when the member states convened the 20-year anniversary environmental summit, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), they would strengthen the nascent multi-actor governance system. They substituted a universal membership entity, a High Level Political Forum (HLPF), for the CSD in order to give the activities more prominence and stature in the UN system. They called for the renewal and expansion of the expiring MDGs, but did not write their specifications as they had with the MDGs in the *Millennium Declaration*. Instead, they called for the General Assembly to create sustainable development goals (SDGs) through a consultative process among member states and, importantly, with stakeholders. They sought to fashion new implementing tools for the goals—identifying multi-stakeholder voluntary commitments as one.

For the new goals, they specified a consensus-building process organized under a new body, an Open Working Group (OWG) convened by the General Assembly that would "insure the full involvement of all relevant stakeholders and the expertise from civil society, the scientific community and the United Nations system" (UN General Assembly 2012). In the HLPF, they created a hybrid agency reporting to both ECOSOC and the General Assembly, charged with integrating the three prongs (social, economic, and environmental) of sustainable development "while enhancing the consultative role and participation stakeholders." Finally, they introduced the idea of promoting stakeholders' "voluntary commitments" to supplement the Type II Partnerships defined 10 years earlier. (Notably, voluntary commitments increasingly became implementation tools of choice in this and subsequent conferences. They found favor because they are neither negotiated nor consensus-derived and are viewed as a means to accelerate implementation while allowing for the committing entities to tailor their promises to their individual contexts and goals.) (Weiss 2014)

Subsequently, the member states established the OWG with 30 seats (each with one vote shared by three



ambassadorial-level members), headed by two ambassadors who served as co-facilitators, one from the South and the other from the North. Initiated in January 2013 and concluded in September 2015, the official OWG deliberations took place once a month with informal meetings in between. The multi-day sessions included the testimony of member states and selected non-member-state experts. The co-facilitators convened regular pre-meeting briefings with stakeholders. With each monthly meeting, stakeholders held side events and lobbied the ambassadors as they sought to secure specific goals.

For example, those proposing a goal focused on cities launched an active campaign supported by several major multi-stakeholder advocacy groups, many with interlocking memberships. Among them were the Ford Foundation funded *Communitas Coalition*, the #Urban SDG (including members from WIEGO, several academic institutions from the South and North, *Mistra Urban Futures*, UN-Habitat (as an observer), experts from transportation, health, specific local governments, and others), SDSN's Sustainable Cities Thematic Network, UCLG's Global Task Force of Local and Regional Government. They worked with several friendly member states organized into the Group of Friends for Sustainable Cities led by Sweden and Singapore. In the end, they were influential in securing Goal 11, "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable," with seven targets focused on housing, transportation, planning, environment, cultural heritage, resilience, and green and open space. The urban advocates viewed this accomplishment as a critical precursor to the upcoming Habitat III conference in 2016.¹⁰

In September 2015, the 193 member states attending the UN Sustainable Development Summit issued *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, containing the carefully negotiated 17 goals with 169 targets. Shortly thereafter they launched the online registry of voluntary commitments called for at Rio+20 as a means to help ensure accountability, transparency, and compliance.¹¹

THE CONFIGURATION OF TODAY'S STAKEHOLDER AND PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

Clearly, the idea of consulting stakeholders to define global development issues, drawing on their mass for political support, and employing their expertise and financial capacity in partnerships and voluntary commitments for implementation gained traction between the 1970s and the 2000s.

An analysis of the three other global agreements, in addition to the *New Urban Agenda*, underlines the extent to which stakeholders receive mention. A secondary assessment of the stakeholders' voluntary commitments—visible in the registries associated with the conferences—serves as a rough proxy of the stakeholders' belief in the effectiveness of their participation and hence allegiance to the topic at hand either in individual projects or with other partners including member states. Collectively, the global agreements on resilience, financing, and sustainable development rely heavily on stakeholders (who are mentioned 94 times) and partnerships (mentioned 169 times) in various roles related to the formulation of the documents and their implementation and monitoring. Their total commitments add up to nearly 4,000 items; commitments to the SDGs constitute the bulk by far (94 percent). Within the SDG registry, variances exist among the goals. For example, 41 percent of the commitments are pledged to Goal 14, "Life Under Water," a number that increased after the summer 2017 Oceans conference, while Goal 11, on cities, has 7 percent. Table 1 details the findings.¹²

¹⁰ The urban advocates also aspired to have some recognition of cities in the Paris Agreement in December 2015. This latter recognition did not occur despite a forceful declaration of more than a thousand mayors and local leaders issued from the steps of Paris's *Hotel de Ville* during the Climate Summit for Local Leaders held in parallel with COP 21, the official meeting.

¹¹ See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnerships/>.

¹² The respective registries are: Sendai: <http://www.preventionweb.net/drr-framework/commitments/#tab-2>; Addis Ababa <http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/ffd3/commitments.html>, SDGs: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnerships/> and New Urban Agenda: <http://nuimplementation.org/>

TABLE 1. GLOBAL AGREEMENTS' STATEMENTS ON MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS (2015-2016)¹³

| Year | Agreement | Text | Cites | Commitments |
|----------------|--|--|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| March 2015 | <i>Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030</i> | 19 (i) An effective and meaningful global partnership and the further strengthening of international cooperation, including the fulfilment of respective commitments of official development assistance by developed countries, are essential for effective disaster risk management. | 42 (stakeholder) 14 (partnership) | 82 |
| July 2015 | <i>Addis Ababa Action Agenda</i> | The enhanced and revitalized global partnership for sustainable development, led by Governments, will be a vehicle for strengthening international cooperation for implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. Multi-stakeholder partnerships and the resources, knowledge and ingenuity of the private sector, civil society, the scientific community, academia, philanthropy and foundations, parliaments, local authorities, volunteers and other stakeholders will be important to mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, complement the efforts of Governments, and support the achievement of the sustainable development goals, in particular in developing countries. This global partnership should reflect the fact that the post-2015 development agenda, including the sustainable development goals, is global in nature and universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities, needs and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. We will work with all partners to ensure a sustainable, equitable, inclusive, peaceful and prosperous future for all. We will all be held accountable by future generations for the success and delivery of commitments we make today. | 16 (stakeholder) 26 (partnership) | 43 |
| September 2015 | <i>Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development</i> | 39. The scale and ambition of the new Agenda requires a revitalized Global Partnership to ensure its implementation... This Partnership will work in a spirit of global solidarity, in particular solidarity with the poorest and with people in vulnerable situations. It will facilitate an intensive global engagement in support of implementation of all the Goals and targets, bringing together Governments, the private sector, civil society, the United Nations system and other actors and mobilizing all available resources. We acknowledge also the essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of our commitments. Governments and public institutions will also work closely on implementation with regional and local authorities, sub-regional institutions, international institutions, academia, philanthropic organizations, volunteer groups and others. Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development 17.16. Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries 17.17. Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships | 14 (stakeholder) 23 (partnership) | 3,675 |
| October 2016 | <i>New Urban Agenda</i> | 153. We will promote the systematic use of multi-stakeholder partnerships in urban development processes, as appropriate, establishing clear and transparent policies, financial and administrative frameworks and procedures, as well as planning guidelines for multi-stakeholder partnerships. | 22 (stakeholder) 12 (partnership) | 70 |

¹³ The author did not include the *Paris Agreement* here because it is actually a convention or treaty among member states covering their commitments to hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels, increase the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change, foster climate resilience and low GHG emissions, and provide financial support to do so. Nonetheless, the Conference of Parties resolution adopting the Paris Agreement as part of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change references stakeholders 11 times, underlining the need for non-government contributions to the achievement of the agreement's goals. See <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/10g01.pdf>.

PATHS TOWARD EFFECTIVE STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION: OTHER ISSUES

However, behind the stakeholder exuberance at Habitat III described at the beginning of this paper, two major issues remain unresolved. At the center is the deep dispute among member states about whether to revise the UN-Habitat governance structure to make it more fit for implementing the *New Urban Agenda*. On one side, certain member states, including the African Group, favored giving the entire responsibility for implementing urban issues in all global agreements to UN-Habitat while others believed that UN-Habitat should be one of several units charged with overseeing them. At Quito, they reached a compromise. They agreed on wording in the *New Urban* that called for UN-Habitat to serve as “a” (not “the”) coordinator for implementation. In an additional provision, they asked the Secretary General to appoint an independent panel to assess UN-Habitat’s capacities to undertake this task and to present its findings to a High Level Meeting convened by the President of the General Assembly with any recommendations for changes to be considered and voted on by the General Assembly in 2018.

Today, UN-Habitat, as a programme (not an independent agency) under the jurisdiction of the General Assembly, has an established governance structure and a secretariat. A Governing Council (GC) composed of 58 member states meets every two years to set UN-Habitat’s work program and budget and a Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) that serves as the GC’s intersessional subsidiary group meets four times a year to monitor the GC mandates. UN-Habitat’s secretariat is based in Nairobi, Kenya and has three regional offices (Nairobi, Fukuoka, and Rio de Janeiro), and nine information and liaison offices (New York, Brussels, Geneva, Moscow, Beijing, Chennai, Amman, Budapest, and Cairo). The “home office” has seven branches: Urban Legislation, Urban Planning and Design, Urban Economy, Urban Basic Services, Housing and Slum Upgrading, Risk Reduction and Rehabilitation, and Research and Capacity Building. Its budget comes from multilateral or bilateral partners for technical assistance, earmarks from member states, and about five percent from the regular UN budget. The major question with regard to governance is the African Groups’ pressing for universal membership, that is governance by the 193 member states, in the belief that this change would raise more attention and capture more funding for urban concerns. Opposing this position are the United States, the European Union, Japan, and others.

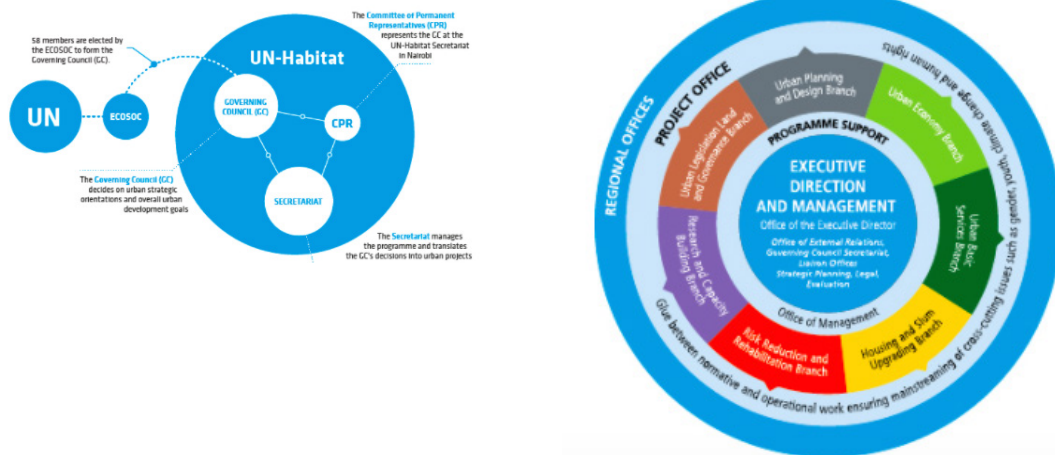


Figure 6. UN-Habitat’s structure (left) and organization chart (right).

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is one of five programmes that report to the General Assembly (See Figure 6). UN-Habitat’s secretariat pursues the General Assembly established mandate to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all.



On stakeholder relations, the member states and the UN agencies and programs continue to struggle with how to initiate and nurture new practices incorporating stakeholders and partnerships. They are locked in an institution founded on interstate diplomacy in a world that is seeking to solve transboundary problems demanding multiple actors, i.e. through pluralistic global governance.

UN REFORMS

For both issues, the answers are embedded in complex questions related to the UN's fragile structure of consensus and governance as an international organization composed of 193 member-state decision-makers. For the UN-Habitat governance question in particular, the solution will likely be forged within a larger UN reform program overseen by the newly named Secretary General, António Guterres.¹⁴ Reforms will be related to the member states' decision that *Agenda 2030* (with the 17 SDGs) will frame the development system's work; the *New Urban Agenda* acknowledged this directly and provides a roadmap for the achievement of the urban elements of the SDGs.

Six months after his January 2017 appointment, Guterres completed a wide-ranging review of the UN development system's expenditures, human resources, and knowledge production. He issued his first report on the subject, prefacing the findings with this statement: "I am convinced, nonetheless, that the current model has reached its exhaustion point and is insufficient to match the ambition, effectiveness and cohesion required by the new agenda." As evidence, he noted that 50 percent of the system's budget was concentrated on the first six SDGs, 91 percent of non-core funding was flowing to single-entity projects hampering *Agenda 2030*'s desired integrated approach, and that the UN agencies had substantial skill-set gaps among its employees in the areas of partnerships, financing, and technical expertise in emerging frontier issues.

The question of stakeholders and partnerships, which is especially fraught, also falls into the upcoming UN development system reforms. Member states' attention to non-governmental relations stems from their realization that world peace is threatened by poverty, social exclusion, and environmental degradation; they recognize that the solutions to. They know that contributions from different spheres of government, the private sector, and civil society will be required to shape appropriate policies and programs and allocate resources.¹⁵ While key donor member states that include the European Union, United States, Japan, and China give significant support peacekeeping (\$8 billion in 2016), they also provide funds well beyond that for development activities.¹⁶ (For example, in 2016, they provided \$5.4 billion for the regular UN budget and, in addition, they supported several UN agencies and programs directly with billions of dollars (e.g., in 2016, the UN Development Program received nearly \$5 billion; UNICEF, \$18 billion; WHO, \$4.4 billion; FAO, \$2.6 billion; UNESCO, \$667 million; UN-Habitat \$229 million; and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNISDR], \$74 million).¹⁷

While member states have deep reservations about how to manage civil society through stakeholder and partnership arrangements, the stakeholders themselves vary in their abilities to carry out needed commitments and partnerships and in assuring their representativeness, transparency, and accountability. Further, multi-stakeholder groups, so necessary to solve today's complex problems like urbanization, take even more cultivation. Organizations with varying aims, levels of knowledge, modes of operating, organizational cultures, leadership/decision-making structures require time to develop trusting, well-functioning relationships. Much work remains to be done on both sides—member state and stakeholder.¹⁸

¹⁴ For background on this topic see UN General Assembly 2017.

¹⁵ For the purposes of this paper, the author has drawn a definition of civil society/stakeholders from a variety of sources including: World Economic Forum 2013; Salman, Sokolowski, and Haddock 2017. She defines it as formal and informal groups representing non-state, not-for-profit organizations and/or individuals who are active in public life, expressing their respective interests and values in order to pursue shared objectives or ideals.

¹⁶ Together, the EU members contribute 33 percent of the UN's regular budget, the US, 22 percent, Japan 9.7 percent; and China, 7.9 percent. The EU contribution is not counted as a total but as the sum of individual member state contributions with Germany providing 6.4 percent of the UN regular budget; France, 4.9 percent, and the UK 4.5 percent. The Netherlands, Norway and Sweden are other substantial donors. The UN has set guidelines that no member state will be assessed at any higher rate than 22 percent of the regular budget. Failure to pay the assessment results in a loss of vote in the General Assembly (Elcano Royal Institute 2017).

¹⁷ For an explanation of UN funding, see Elcano Royal Institute 2017; United Nations Development Program 2016; United Nations Executive Board 2013; FAO 2015, WHO 2015, UNESCO 2016; and UN-Habitat "Financial Overview" webpage (<https://unhabitat.org/donor-relations/financial>).

¹⁸ ECOSOC has sponsored partnership forums, commissioning papers on the topic. Examples are: Marianne Beisheim and Nils Simon, "Multi-stakeholder Partner-

CONCLUSION

Since the founding of the United Nations in 1947, the organization has changed substantially, especially in how it advances its dual aims of pursuing peace and promoting the economic and social wellbeing of the world's population. In particular, the trajectory of this change has colored the member-state/stakeholder relationships over time. These relationships ranged from the member states' early engagement of non-member state players as consultants needed for specialized advice on topics of their choosing; to member states' slow acquiescence of stakeholders defining, advising, and helping set norms on global issues; to member states' acknowledgment that they cannot solve the world's pressing social, environmental, and economic problems without stakeholder involvement.

This transformation, far from complete, has taken place over nearly seventy years. The UN began with devising a structure, the NGO Committee, to vet experts. Later, through UN conferences of the 1970s and 1990s, primarily those related to the environment and secondarily to those concerned with such related issues as human settlements, new arrangements emerged. As stakeholders made their views known at the conferences through their sheer numbers, their alternative conference declarations, publications, reports, demonstrations, and lobbying, member states began to incorporate some of their ideas in conference declarations. Starting with the 1970s conferences and continuing to the present, UN conference organizers expect unofficial convenings to parallel the official meetings.

Over time, the member states began to recognize the interests of specific stakeholders in their official proceedings. In 1992, they named nine "major groups" and afforded them important access to UN matters—a significant breakthrough. Ten years later, they created a sustainable development monitoring entity that involved stakeholders. They also assented to and encouraged formal multi-stakeholder partnerships for implementation. After the member states' consolidation of dozens of conference proceedings into the Millennium Development Goals and the convening of the third environmental summit, stakeholder contributions took on another form—registered voluntary commitments—and the monitoring structure was elevated.

By the time Habitat III preparations began, the organizers added innovative features that would contribute to the evolving form of pluralistic governance in the United Nations. They added a systemized and broad-based approach to collecting inputs for the outcome document, supported the creation of a more inclusive stakeholder platform beyond the major groups, instituted stakeholder hearings on the draft outcome document as official modalities, and incorporated stakeholders in the plenary sessions of the conference itself. Further, the member states and the Secretary General responded with formal briefings. These items would contribute to enhancing effective stakeholder participation within the context of the UN. One example, of many, is that GAP's "older persons" stakeholder group was able to increase references to their interests from two in the original document to 22 in the final version.

In the end, the increased stakeholder participation over time has not changed any formal balance of power: member states are sovereign in final decision-making. Nonetheless, it has enhanced the soft power of stakeholders, with member states more receptive to stakeholder contributions in sharing knowledge and expertise, stakeholder assistance in establishing standards or norms, and stakeholder provision of implementation commitments and services. So, yes, stakeholders are more than window dressing.

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