Strengthening Participation of Civil Society in Global Environmental Governance
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Abstract
Global environmental governance is too important to be left to the diplomats and politicians with the only outlet for the participation of individual members of civil society being public demonstrations. As international relations agendas expand into areas previously considered to be the domestic jurisdiction of states, such as environmental protection, issues of immediate concern to citizens are increasingly subject to decisions at the international level. The success of policies and programmes at the international level depends on the participation and support of a range of non-state actors. Given the decentralized structure of international law, perceptions that international rules are legitimate are of vital importance to their effectiveness.

While the leaders of a few international environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have access to international negotiations, few of these organizations have a mechanism for direct member participation. Many other international, regional, and local environmental NGOs do have structures that assure that their members can participate in leader selection and policy development. These can serve as the means or models for broader participation by civil society in international environmental decision making.

This paper describes some of the problems encountered by civil society in gaining access to international decision processes, such as the Kyoto Protocol and the World Congress on Sustainable Development. Application of existing organizational models and new, creative proposals to increase information, access and education must be developed at the global level. These include clearer, non-technical descriptions of the proposals and existing agreements, open processes for selecting representatives who have access to the decision-making process, and increased education both in sustainability principles and international law. We will explore some possible solutions, but most importantly call for increased attention to this basic problem.

Introduction
International relations agendas have been expanding into areas previously considered to be the domestic jurisdiction of states, such as steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the reduction and/or elimination of hazardous and toxic materials, as well as covering truly international issues such as protection of the global commons of the atmosphere and oceans. Thus, issues of immediate concern to the health, welfare and livelihoods of individual citizens are increasingly subject to decisions at the international level. Civil society has had a role in many of the deliberations leading to international agreements, mostly through the participation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). There is no universal convention for such participation, however, and in many cases, the primary outlet for the participation of individual members of civil society has become public demonstrations.

In this paper, we first explore the legitimacy of processes through which decisions are made at the international level, the transparency and accessibility of various international decision-making processes,
the possibilities - or lack thereof - for a democratisation of these processes including the fundamental question of why civil society, including NGOs, should be involved in international decision-making in the first place. We then quickly review a few examples in which NGOs, particularly, have had a role in international law- and policy-making processes, focusing on mechanisms of participation and the degree to which such participation has affected the final outcome. Finally, noting that there is a wide variety of structures through which national and international NGOs involve or do not involve their membership or constituency, we explore possible formal mechanisms by which the participation can be increased.

We also note that there is considerable literature examining nongovernmental access to international decision making. It is not our intent to replicate these or present an extensive review as much as to explore issues and mechanisms for increased and equitable access by civil society in ways that make street demonstrations unnecessary.

**International democracy**

**Definitional and conceptual issues**

It is accepted virtually without discussion in the Western world that democracy is the best form of governance. Yet it is difficult to describe decision-making in the international sphere as adhering to democratic principles. As long as international issues are perceived to be remote from the day-to-day concerns of citizens in various countries, the non-democratic nature of international decision-making may not appear to be a fundamental problem. However, given the impact of international law and politics on the domestic sphere, it becomes difficult to justify a lack of access by citizens to international decision-making processes and fora.

Just what kind of access citizens should have, and the modalities of access, are difficult conceptual and practical questions. There is no widespread agreement on what democracy means in a domestic context, and even less of a consensus regarding international forms of democracy. It is, however, often argued that enhancing access to international law- and policy-making by NGOs would either result in a democratisation of the international sphere or would be in conformity with democratic principles and would go some way to addressing the democratic deficit at the international level.

**Why democracy at the international level?**

There are many possible explanations for the increased relevance of international law and politics in the domestic sphere. Even before the concept of globalisation came to be entrenched in public discourse, it was understood that state borders are porous, and that the domestic sphere is affected by events and activities in other states and in the international sphere. Environmental degradation is obviously not contained within the borders of states in which sources of pollution are located, and environmental protection measures require coordination or cooperation among different jurisdictions. Increasing awareness of threats to the earth’s ecosystem on a global scale has underscored the crucial importance of law and policy at the international level to combat these threats (Charnovitz 2003 45). While it is possible for environmental policy-making to proceed in several jurisdictions at once, the scope and scale of environmental issues diminishes the effectiveness of such “fragmented deliberation;” at some point, a “global conversation” is required (Perez, 37). After all, it hardly seems in accord with democratic principles to allow the population of one state to agree, through democratic processes, to export their environmental problems to other jurisdictions through transport of hazardous waste, siting of polluting industries near borders, or offshoring of polluting industries.

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4 See, for example, Charnovitz (1997, 2003), Delbrück, Gemmill and Bamidele-Izu, McGrew, Raustiala, Shelton, and Tarlock.
Phenomena associated with globalisation, including the rapid development of transportation and communication technology and the rise of the multinational corporation with operations in multiple jurisdictions, have diminished the effectiveness of the traditional range of regulatory tools available to states. Important decisions, it is argued, are taking place in an internationalised space over which governments have little authority. The pursuit of policy goals such as environmental protection, social welfare and economic development is thus seen to depend on the development and enhancement of international forms of governance (Delbrück, 29-30).

The notion that the state represents the national interest has, of course, always been recognised as a fiction. There are many interests within any given state competing for the attention of those in government; even in a robust democratic society, some interests are better represented by government than others. Interests that are marginalised at the domestic level are thoroughly eclipsed at the international level if the state is the only conduit through which citizens’ interests and perspectives can be heard in international fora.

Interdependence and globalisation have driven a rapid expansion of international organisations, both in terms of their number and their role in international politics. Enhancement of international governance may be an appropriate way to regulate the behaviour of multinational corporations in international space, but the decisions and activities of international organisations with little claim to represent civil society nevertheless have a significant impact on domestic politics. States may not have the jurisdictional reach necessary to regulate activities in the international sphere, but at least many of them can make some justified claim to representing their citizens. When states delegate tasks and functions to international organisations, this creates a democratic deficit: individual citizens affected by decisions of international organisations cannot be said to be represented by them in any meaningful sense of the word (Anderson, 113-15; Charnovitz 2003, 48; Delbrück, 29-30, 35).

A number of authors have called for the creation of parliaments or other types of fora at the international level composed of representatives of the people (Held; Falk and Strauss; Wagar, 142-146). Such proposals, as interesting as they are, are not likely to be implemented in the near future. Other means of bringing democracy to the international sphere are therefore sought, and one of the main candidates is the nongovernmental organization.

NGOs and International Democracy

The notion that NGOs represent the populations of the world’s states – that they speak for civil society – has of course been subject to a good deal of criticism. NGOs represent their members and have no mandate to speak on behalf of the populations in the jurisdictions or regions in which they operate; therefore, even if a broad range of NGOs are involved in international decision-making, there is no guarantee that the voices of civil society will be represented in those decision-making processes (Delbrück, 41; Perez, 43; Anderson, 117). This argument does not, however, lead to the conclusion that NGOs should be excluded from international decision-making. It simply suggests that our expectations regarding what NGO participation can do to address the democracy deficit in international governance should be reasonable and realistic. For example, Delbrück describes the enhanced participation of NGOs in international decision-making processes as a “surrogate for democratic legitimation” but nevertheless concludes that NGOs have a good deal to contribute to such processes (Delbrück, 40). Inclusion of NGOs in decision-making processes may not guarantee that these processes are thereby made representative of civil society. In addition, significant practical questions such as the process through which NGOs eligible

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5 Porter and Brown (56-64) have an excellent delineation of different types of NGOs with examples of how they have influenced international regime formation and other policies.
for participation are selected and the modalities of their participation in deliberations and decision-making will have a decisive impact on the influence that NGOs are able to exercise. Nevertheless, there are good reasons for believing that NGO participation addresses, if not closes, the democratic deficit. NGO participation ensures a greater plurality of voices and points of view; and NGOs, being a different type of actor than states, can accomplish things that states cannot.

NGO participation in international deliberation and decision-making enhances the plurality of voices in international fora in at least two ways. In the first place, the processes by which states reach a definition of the national interest on a given issue necessarily excludes certain voices and perspectives, or at least fails to do them justice. Even in states with robust democracies, it is impossible for governments to speak for all citizens on all issues. If NGOs are included alongside governments in certain international fora, the number and range of points of view that are represented in these fora will be increased. It may be argued that increasing the number of points of view and voices is a good thing in and of itself, as the final decision may be based on better information and a better understanding of the context in which the decision is to be implemented.

It is often argued that NGOs contribute knowledge and expertise that state representatives may not have. This may be because NGOs have devoted resources to gathering data on a particular source of environmental degradation, or because their members possess scientific, technical, legal or some other form of expertise that is relevant to a given international issue-area (Raustiala, 558). This knowledge and expertise may also be related to the nature of the NGO and its work: for example, NGOs with a long history of involvement with aboriginal communities or local harvesters of natural resources may be better placed than government representatives to discuss the likely impacts of various policy alternatives on local communities.

There is another way in which NGOs enhance the plurality of voices. NGOs constitute not only an additional voice alongside that of state representatives, but, in most cases, a different kind of voice (McGrew, 408; Charnovitz 2003). States and NGOs are obviously very different types of actors, and play different roles in international fora. For example, states may be reluctant to criticise the positions or the behaviour of other states for fear of compromising good relations or for fear of exposing their own potentially questionable records on a given issue. NGOs may have greater room to manoeuvre, and a greater ability to raise issues or to address different kinds of issues. Of course, this point should not be overstated: NGOs, like any organisation, are embedded in coalitions and networks and must make strategic and tactical choices about the issues they address and the way in which they address them; NGOs may not always be perfectly free to make certain statements or take certain positions. Nevertheless, when their voices are included alongside those of state representatives, not only the number but also the type of issues that can be raised and addressed is likely to be increased.

The ability of NGOs to criticise state practice in ways that states are reluctant to do is of particular relevance once an international policy statement or convention is concluded. NGOs often carry out particularly valuable work in the areas of implementation and compliance, by drawing attention to the failures and shortcomings of states and by shaming states into better performance. Not only are NGOs in a better position to speak out on poor records of implementation and compliance, but they may also have better data on such issues, either because states do not have the resources to gather and disseminate this data or because they are unwilling to do so (Raustiala 561).

NGOs do not only seek to represent the interests and perspectives of their members and of the broader society at the international level. They also serve to transmit information, arguments and critiques regarding international legal and policy processes back to civil society. In some cases, NGO accounts of international negotiations or the activities of international organisations may serve to balance the accounts presented by governments, thus giving a broader perspective on what is happening in international fora
and why certain outcomes were reached. In many cases, NGO accounts of events at international
conferences may constitute the best or the only source of information on those events, and come to be a
valuable tool to members of civil society, academics, and members of governments themselves (Raustiala
564 ff).

Calls for Public Participation

A number of official and/or formal statements and protocols have been made emphasizing the
importance and value of public participation in international forums. For example, the 1992 “Earth
Summit” in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, declared, “The broadest public participation and the active
involvement of the nongovernmental organizations and other groups should also be encouraged” in the
implementation of Agenda 21.6

The “Earth Charter”, endorsed by 14,852 groups, organizations and individuals from around the
world, included the call to “Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and
accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making; support local, regional and
global civil society, and promote the meaningful participation of all interested individuals and
organizations in decision making. Among the endorsing groups are over 400 cities, town, and national
governments or agencies. 7

The Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in
International Forums included the provision, “Public participation generally contributes to the quality of
decision-making on environmental matters in international forums by bringing different opinions and expertise
to the process and increasing transparency and accountability… Efforts should be made to proactively seek the
participation of relevant actors, in a transparent, consultative manner… 8

The Almaty Guidelines also identified several groups of “relevant stakeholders”:
(1) The members of the public who are, or are likely to be, most directly affected;
(2) Representatives of public-interest organizations, such as environmental citizens’
organizations; and
(3) Representatives of other interests that might cause, contribute to, be affected by or be in a
position to alleviate the problems under discussion.

Participation in United Nations Conferences and the Commission on Sustainable Development

Beginning in 1972 with the Stockholm Conference on the Global Environment, the United Nations
has sponsored a series of conferences dealing with global international issues, including the United
Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3 to 14
June 1992, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg, South
Africa 29 August to 4 September 2002.

6 Agenda 21, Chapter 1: Preamble, United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Rio de
Janerio, Brazil, 3 to 14 June 1992. See also Chapter 27, Strengthening The Role Of Non-Governmental
Organizations: Partners For Sustainable Development
7 Section IV, Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace, paragraph 13. The final text of the Earth Charter was approved in
November 2005]. For a list of endorsers see http://www.earthcharter.org/endorse/.
8 The Almaty Guidelines were adopted at the second meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention held in
Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 25-27 May 2005. See
On the issue of determining which NGOs are eligible to participate in international processes, see See Otto,
1996 and Aston 2001, addressing the issue of accreditation of NGOs by ECOSOC.
The level and degree of NGO participation in these conferences has varied considerably. In Stockholm, both NGOs and governmental representatives experienced a new form of international environmental conference. NGOs were not only able to participate as observers, but were frequently contacted by governments that wanted the NGOs to become more active on their concerns. Between Stockholm and Rio, there were a series of meetings leading to international agreements in a variety of issues. Those NGOs whose representatives participated regularly were able to make significant contributions to the deliberations; just showing up at only one meeting was not effective.

During the preparatory meetings for UNCED, NGOs again were admitted and had full access to the deliberations. The text of Agenda 21, for example, had input from NGOs, including major contributions to the text from IUCN. In Rio at UNCED itself, NGO representatives were also admitted as observers to sessions, although the separate meetings of the NGOs were sited several kilometers away from the main meeting location. A number of official delegations to UNCED also included citizen members.

There were several preparatory meetings for the WSSD in Johannesburg at different locations around the globe. While some governments, including Canada, included nongovernmental representatives in their official delegations, NGO access was restricted by budgetary restrictions if nothing else. In Johannesburg itself, while there were efforts to include some interaction with the formally recognized “Major Groups” process of the CSD (see below), most NGO representatives were excluded from the negotiating sessions. The primary activity center for NGOs, where many of the side events were held, was a 30-60 minute bus ride away on the other side of Johannesburg. IUCN did have a set of offices and a series of presentations, panel discussions and seminars in a bank building a few blocks from the primary WSSD meeting hall. This did serve as another gathering point for IUCN’s NGO members, but was not particularly useful for access to the formal deliberations.

The United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was established by the UN General Assembly in December 1992 to review progress in the implementation of the UNCED declarations as well as to provide policy guidance to follow up the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation from the WSSD at the local, national, regional and international levels. WSSD reaffirmed the CSD as the high-level forum for sustainable development within the United Nations system. The CSD meets annually in New York, in two-year cycles, with each cycle focusing on clusters of specific thematic and cross-sectoral issues. The CSD has opened its sessions to broad participation from both governmental and nongovernmental actors.

The nine “Major Groups” recognized by CSD are Women, Children and Youth, Indigenous People, NGOs, Local Authorities Workers and Trade Unions, Business and Industry, Scientific and Technological Communities, and Farmers. Participation by the individuals and organizations accredited by the UN Economic and Social Council and/or the CSD in the activities surrounding CSD meetings is coordinated through a set of “Major Groups Organizing Partners.” The process for the 14th meeting of the CSD, described at http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd14/mg/guide_part4.htm#involvement, appears quite complex, but may need to be so given the large number of individual groups in each category. One suggested explanation for the more limited access of NGOs is that the official delegations get their instructions from home and NGO comments to the plenary or side events are seen more as talk than having a substantive impact on the proceedings.

9 Prof. Nicholas Robinson, Pace University School of Law and Past Chair, IUCN Commission on Environmental Law. Personal Communication, 6 November 2005.
10 Personal observations by RC in Johannesburg, August-September 2002.
12 Nicholas Robinson, Personal Communication, 6 November 2005
Participation in Negotiations for International Treaty and Other Agreements

The picture is a bit more mixed when one looks at nongovernmental access to and participation in negotiations leading to international treaties. One conclusion appears to be that organizations or networks of organizations that have a direct interest and expertise in the subject matter and who are able to attend regularly the series of meetings leading up to the final agreement can have a significant impact on the final product.

For example, Sierra Club was able to provide support for one person to attend at least six of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) meetings that produced the final Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) (see [http://www.pops.int/](http://www.pops.int/)), and participate in the meetings in conjunction with other members of the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN). Those individuals who attended INC meetings regularly got to know and became known to the governmental representatives. They were able to participate fully in the primary meetings as well as the side meetings (contact groups) on specific issues.13

Another factor leading to successful participation of this individual was his participation as a Sierra Club representative in the IPEN network, which maintained regular electronic and telephone contact throughout the POPs treaty negotiations and continues to do so during the implementation phase.

A critical issue for an NGO, whose focus is primarily domestic but does have a small international program, is to find funding for international involvement and justify travel to international meetings. A corollary problem is the need to provide consistent representation by experienced people knowledgeable of international protocols and modalities. Participation in relevant international networks can facilitate development of that experience.

This example points out the value of informal or formal international NGO networks of experts on particular issues. We propose greater recognition of and, in some cases, promotion of such networks and involving them in the coordination of civil society’s participation in international governance activities. While less of an actor in at least some sectors than in the past, IUCN, with its many small and large NGO members around the world, would be a logical organization to assist in, if not lead in, that process.

A more contentious international environmental issue is global warming and climate change. As this Berlin Conference is being held, Canada is hosting the 11th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (“COP 11”) and the 1st Meeting of the Parties of the Kyoto Protocol (“MOP 1”) in Montreal. Many groups have organized “synchronised demonstrations around the world—in as many places as possible—to press for urgent action on climate change, directed, in particular against the Bush administration in the US for its failure to ratify Kyoto. These demonstrations are planned for Saturday, 3 December, in middle of the conference period, 28 November to 9 December 2005.14 In addition to the demonstrations, there will be a large number of side-events and parallel events, with 3-day meetings already planned on the margins for municipal leaders, and another for youth, and another for environmentally advanced industry and technology (Sierra Club of/du Canada).15

13 Michael Gregory, Sierra Club representative to IPEN, Personal Communication, 9 November 2005. See also the summary reports on the POPs meetings at [http://www.iisd.ca/process/chemical_management.htm#pops](http://www.iisd.ca/process/chemical_management.htm#pops) [accessed 10 November 2005].
15 For a full calendar of related events, see [http://www.climateactionnetwork.ca/e/action/calendar/](http://www.climateactionnetwork.ca/e/action/calendar/) [Accessed 13 November 2005]
Of particular interest in the Climate Change discussions is the effort of Seattle, WA, USA Mayor Greg Nickels challenging mayors across the United States to join Seattle in taking local action to reduce global warming through leadership and action. As a result of his efforts, on June 13, 2005, the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement was passed unanimously by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. As of November 09, 2005 188 mayors from 38 states representing over 40 million Americans, have signed onto the agreement.16

Under the Agreement, participating cities commit to take following three actions:

- Strive to meet or beat the Kyoto Protocol targets in their own communities, through actions ranging from anti-sprawl land-use policies to urban forest restoration projects to public information campaigns;
- Urge their state governments, and the federal government, to enact policies and programs to meet or beat the greenhouse gas emission reduction target suggested for the United States in the Kyoto Protocol, a 7% reduction from 1990 levels by 2012; and
- Urge the U.S. Congress to pass the bipartisan Climate Stewardship Act, which would establish a national emission trading system

In connection with this project, the U.S. Mayors have scheduled a press event during the climate change conference in Montréal. Also planned is the Municipal Leaders Summit on Climate Change. Expected outcomes of the Municipal Leaders Summit include a Municipal Leaders Declaration on Climate Change and presentation of local government position to COP11/MOP1 in official session.17

Along with the activities of many other groups in Montreal, Sierra Club US and Canada will have a group of over 80 volunteers and staff in Montréal, registered with the UN as observers to the formal sessions and expecting “to have DIRECT contact by working the corridors and being in the room. We can cajole and squeeze hands and twist arms if necessary.” In addition, they will do extensive media work both in Montreal and their home cities and participate in the side and parallel events. They expect “hundreds more not registered but participating in events such as the march and youth conference in Montreal.” 18

While the very visible civil society presence in Montreal could have some impact on the formal discussions, we would argue it does not meet the criteria of Agenda 21, the Almaty Guidelines, or the Earth Charter for “the meaningful participation of all interested individuals and organizations in decision making” (Agenda 21) “in a transparent, consultative manner” (Almaty Guidelines).

Mechanisms for Public Participation

Gemmill and Bamidele-Izu (2002) suggest a number of principles for NGO participation in policy development:

- Clear articulation of rules, rights, and commitments to consultation with civil society beyond time-limited NGO fora;
- Clearly delineated selection criteria for NGO participation in consultations and advisory groups, placing an emphasis on diversity;
- Establishment of guidelines for the process of NGO contributions;
- Commitment to respectful treatment of NGO documents;
- Support for publication and dissemination of NGO submissions to delegates at relevant international meetings;

18 Elizabeth May, Executive Director, Sierra Club of/du Canada, Personal Communications, 11-12 November 2005.
• Formalized submission process for NGO recommendations and comments to intergovernmental bodies;
• Provision for feedback and response to NGO submissions by intergovernmental bodies or national governments;
• Mechanism for monitoring the implementation of these components.

They continue,
A more formalized structure for NGO participation would be useful in addressing some of the current obstacles to civil society involvement in global environmental governance. The wariness that governments and others have of NGO involvement might be reduced if baseline standards defined the rights and responsibilities of governmental and non-governmental entities in a clear and consistent manner.

While these are useful guidelines, they lack specifics on mechanisms to achieve them. In addition, they do not recognize that there are many individuals, outside the large international NGOs, who also deserve to be heard in policy development. We emphasize that many of the international NGOs and larger national NGOs, at least in the United States, solicit and attract members whose primary role is financial support, with little involvement in the organization’s operation or policy development. We suggest in addition to the mechanisms for larger NGO participation, such as those developed by ECOSOC, there need to be mechanisms developed for broader participation of all levels of civil society, as suggested by the list of “relevant groups” in the Almaty Guidelines.

From the standpoint of involving broader segments of society in international policy-making, NGOs may also be better at communicating the nature of the problem that international conventions seek to address and the approach taken in those conventions than are governments. The formal legal and policy texts agreed to by governments are widely available on the internet, as are, in many cases, decisions taken by states pursuant to such agreements along with other information. However, the sheer volume of these documents, combined with their often opaque drafting style overflowing with highly specialised vocabulary, make it difficult for members of the public to absorb their contents. The process of rendering international decision-making processes accessible to members of the public is often better handled by NGOs than by governments. In states with well-functioning democracies, NGOs and governments could cooperate to disseminate information to the public and to open up channels of communication among governments, civil society and international organisations.

Here are some suggestions for specific ways to involve civil society in the international policy making process. In many ways, local, national and/or national subentities of international NGOs could facilitate these processes:

(1) Following initial drafting of an international agreement, hold public meetings in major cities around the world to obtain citizen input. This process could be facilitated by local governments. Collation of the input and endorsement by local entities could strengthen the legitimacy of the input, similar to the critical value that the US Mayors’ Climate Protection Agreement should have both in the US and COP11/MOP1.

(2) Solicit comments from smaller NGOs using IUCN’s list of members; IUCN, through its regional structure could serve as a convener of regional meetings of interested NGOs and additional interested individuals. We note that many smaller NGOs function and are governed more directly by their members; many are active participants in IUCN’s World Conservation Congresses, which encourage “grassroots” involvement. Such consultations, even if organized by IUCN, should not be restricted to IUCN members, since in many parts of the world, IUCN dues are larger than smaller NGOs have the ability to pay.
A set of regional consultative processes or round tables where NGO representatives, citizens, and other actors—e.g. elected representatives; civil servants with responsibilities for implementation and/or compliance; relevant business groups—participate in discussions and prioritize various options. This could be a cumulative process, where participants in local discussions select representatives to a regional conference, with these results being transmitted to the international decision-making group. Ideally, individual members of that latter group would be expected to participate in these regional meetings.

Enhancing NGO access to international decision-making processes is not a panacea: the democratic deficit remains, and must be addressed through efforts on a wide range of fronts. Furthermore, simply letting NGOs in the door at international conferences will not necessarily permit them to make meaningful contributions; careful thought must go into determining what role they can and should play. NGOs themselves must regard invitations to participate in international processes with a critical eye: are they being permitted genuine access and opportunities to influence events, or is their presence sought in order to legitimize decisions over which they have no impact?

We have sought to demonstrate that, despite the difficulties and shortcomings, NGO participation in international decision-making processes can improve the outcomes of those processes and can, in certain circumstances, contribute to their legitimacy.
References


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