

Discussion Paper

The Future We Want By, For and With All Stakeholders ***Redefining the Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Contract***

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Introduction

Recent grassroots events such as the Arab Spring, *Los Indignados* and the Occupy Movements have given expression to the feelings of frustration and even anger with the status quo. More significantly, these events demonstrate the power of people when unified and mobilised, as well as the growing importance of information technology and social media in enabling this mobilisation.

At a time of increasing global problems and disillusionment with government and the prevalent economic systems, stakeholder democracy offers a platform that could lend greater moral and political strength to the governments addressing the difficult decisions that need to be taken now and in the near future to ensure the viability, equitability and sustainability of life on this planet.

Stakeholder democracy is the idea that involving all participants, at every level, will result in better informed, and more thoroughly deliberated, decisions being taken. It means that all stakeholders will thereby take greater ownership of the outcome and then be active in the delivery of policy on the ground, optimally in partnership with governments and other stakeholders.

To this end, Rio+20 marks an opportunity to rethink and redefining the way in which all stakeholders engage, participate and shape decisions at all levels of government processes.

This paper explores both the best practices, and the learning opportunities within the UN and elsewhere, in an attempt to catalyse and stimulate a vital discussion on how multi-stakeholder participation could evolve in the future.

Learning from the Past and Elsewhere

The involvement of stakeholders is not entirely new. The International Labour Organization (ILO), established in 1919, has a tripartite governing body composed of 28 government representatives, 14 workers' representatives, and 14 employers' representatives. However, the ILO system was never replicated on the international level. The model has the potential to be adopted and built on within other organisations.

The two critical documents that helped codify the international empowerment of stakeholders were each created at the Earth Summit in 1992. One was the Rio Declaration's Principle 10, on Access to Information, Public Participation and Environmental Justice. The second, of course, is Agenda 21 and its nine chapters on Major Groups. Over the last twenty years we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of stakeholders taking an active role in UN intergovernmental meetings.

The decade of intergovernmental summits and convention meetings in the 1990s included a series of revealing experiments. The Habitat II Conference, in 1996, for the first time at a UN conference provided non-voting seats at the negotiating table for stakeholders. This approach – started in the informal meetings prior to the conference – allowed stakeholders to put forward amendments to the negotiating text that became part of the draft text if any government endorsed the amendment.

This made it clear that such practices should be built upon, along with lessons from elsewhere, in order to determine what new form of future stakeholder engagement we want. Habitat went on to publish those stakeholder amendments as an official UN information document – whether they were accepted by governments or not.

The UNAIDS Board, established in 1996, has five representatives, and five alternates which represent the perspectives of stakeholders; these are non-voting members. UNAIDS was the first United Nations programme to have formal civil society representation on its governing body.

More currently, in 2009 the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) – an intergovernmental body which serves as a forum to review and follow up of food security policies – went through a reform process to increase effectiveness by including a wider group of stakeholders, and increasing its ability to promote policies that reduce food insecurity.

The framework of the reformed CFS broadens participation and aims to:

- Give a voice to all stakeholders in the world food system
- Be inclusive and encourage an exchange of views and experiences
- Build on empirical evidence and scientific analysis
- Monitor the effectiveness of actions towards reducing hunger

The reformed CFS' structure allows input from all stakeholders at global, regional and national levels. It is comprised of a Bureau and Advisory Group, Plenary, a High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) and the Secretariat.

The Bureau is the executive arm of the CFS. It is made up of a Chairperson and twelve member countries. The Advisory group is made up of representatives from the 5 different categories of CFS Participants and also has 13 members who are elected. These are:

- UN agencies and other UN bodies;
- Civil society and non-governmental organizations particularly organizations representing smallholder family farmers, fisherfolks, herders, landless, urban poor, agricultural and food workers, women, youth, consumers and indigenous people;
- International agricultural research institutions;
- International and regional financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, regional development banks and the World Trade Organization;
- Private sector associations and philanthropic foundations.

The CFS' Advisory Group helps the Bureau advance the Committee's objectives in particular to ensure linkages with different stakeholders at regional, sub-regional and local levels and to ensure an ongoing, two-way exchange of information.¹

Fundamentally, the CFS' system allows decisions to be made in consensual manner. The Bureau meeting is preceded by the Advisory Group meeting, and follows the same agenda, of which both Bureau and Advisory Group members jointly attend. And while Bureau members ultimately make the final decisions, if there is a difference of opinion, it is worked through to a resolution or at least to an understanding of the difference. Additionally, a trust fund has been set up for civil society which

¹ Information taken from the CFS website - <http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-home/cfs-about/en/>

ensures that funding of the Advisory Group members is not a barrier on individuals or their respective organisations.

We can learn from these examples, past and present, as we move forward toward the types of democracy want and need.

Principles

Learning from the above examples enables us to distil key principles of best practice which will help define any future structures and governance systems in order to ensure that all stakeholders and their ideas are brought to bear on the problems we face and deliver optimal outcomes. These principles include:

Participation:

- a) Engagement must not only be between government and stakeholders, but also between stakeholders themselves.
- b) Grassroots engagement is of fundamental importance; participation must not simply include the more organised and well-funded stakeholders.
- c) Ensure mechanisms for stakeholders to participate in formal processes and engage directly with governments and intergovernmental bodies.
- d) Involve a combination of stakeholders in the initial design and preparatory processes for an intergovernmental meeting.

Access to information & Transparency:

- e) Ensure transparency in all processes and decisions by stakeholder bodies, particularly when representing constituents.
- f) Ensure that summaries of all meetings with key stakeholder partners and coordinators are made publicly available.
- g) Provide all stakeholder coordinators with the same information and the same documents at the same time.

Democratic Process:

- h) Where possible, stakeholder representatives and coordinators should be elected.
 - o Ensure all stakeholder coordinators represent as wide a network or stakeholder group as possible and have the resources and mechanisms to reach out to those networks.
- i) Identify and publish a set of criteria for the appointment of key stakeholder partners and coordinators. Involve stakeholders to define those selection criteria.
- j) Clearly divide constituencies or stakeholders into groups, who will be affected individually by the outcome of the intergovernmental meeting. This is to ensure equal inclusion and representation of all 'major groups'.

Building Capacity

- k) Include capacity-building and training initiatives as part of the stakeholder engagement strategy.
- l) Allow time and resources for the engagement strategy to be evaluated and assessed after the meeting has come to an end.
- m) Establish trust funds and other funding mechanisms as far as reasonable to ensure that finances are not a barrier to participation.

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It is hoped that these principles will be used to begin the dialogue on the types of new governance models which are necessary in the future. And although this has been written in the context of sustainable development, these principles can apply to any stakeholder process.

This paper is a discussion paper and will itself evolve and develop over time. If you would like to contribute to its development, please contact:

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