Research Article

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NGO Goal-Setting/Attainment and Perceptions of Benefits Derived within the Framework of the UN-ECOSOC Consultative Status Program

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Abstract: The main vehicle in the UN-NGO dynamic is the consultative status program within the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Existing literature addresses UN efforts in facilitating formal collaboration with international civil society, but little research has been undertaken to examine macro-scale patterns of NGOs within such collaborations. This study sought to partly address the latter gap in the literature by examining NGO goals and goal/benefit attainment within the UN-ECOSOC consultative status program. The results of a survey sent to a random sample of 10% of all NGOs holding consultative status revealed that (1) a varied range of both extrinsic and intrinsic considerations motivated NGOs to acquire consultative status; (2) NGOs commonly were not achieving their initial goals or otherwise not deriving benefit from the collaboration; and (3) the degree/sense of goal or benefit attainment correlated strongly with the level of accreditation afforded to NGOs, with lower levels of consultative status usually corresponding to lower reported levels of goal/benefit attainment.

Keywords: civil society organizations; ECOSOC; intergovernmental organizations; nongovernmental organizations; United Nations.

1 General Statement of Problem Area & Research Purpose

The United Nations has become increasingly engaged with a broad range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). One of the main vehicles for this collaboration is the NGO consultative status program within the framework of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The UN has given priority to the cultivation of a more effective, diverse and democratic institutional culture via the active inclusion of and interaction among civil society organs to augment the traditional role of states as the primary transnational actors within the organization and to diversify the voices represented. This study seeks to identify the incentives on the part of NGOs to pursue formal association via the UN consultative status program, the degree to which these goals on the part of NGOs are being realized and to determine the real or perceived benefits NGOs derive from the collaboration.

This study proposes that the expansion of the number and role of NGOs in consultative status with the UN (ECOSOC) does not necessarily equate to the attainment of goals/benefits on the part of the NGOs participating in the collaboration. A component element of broader dissertation research into the UN-NGO dynamic, this study is framed by three research questions: (1) why do NGOs seek consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council; (2) are the NGOs' goals in pursuing the association being realized (and why or why not); and (3) what, if any, other benefits do the NGOs derive from the association? Hypotheses were generated specific to the research questions: (1) a diverse range of factors including both altruistic/extrinsic as well as more intrinsic motivations motivate NGOs to pursue consultative status with the UN; and (2) many NGOs within the consultative status framework are not realizing the goals they had

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originally established or deriving many other substantive benefits via the collaboration. Organizations and the meso-scale are essentially the unit and level of analysis though it should be acknowledged that micro-scale considerations such as the predilections of individual leaders within an NGO and macro-scale considerations such as the political climate within the state in which the NGO is based and/or the international dynamic can factor into the collaboration between NGOs and intergovernmental organizations including the UN.

2 Significance of Study

This research is significant for several reasons. The UN practice of establishing formalized association with international civil society has expanded exponentially in recent years and has been described as perhaps the most dynamic area of evolution within the UN (Alger 2002). When the practice of formal collaboration with international civil society was initiated in 1946, a mere 41 NGOs held consultative status with the UN, but the practice has expanded exponentially in recent decades with the status afforded to over 5,000 organizations at the time of writing, representing a highly diverse range of issues and locales (USAID 2019). However, it is not entirely clear why NGOs are incentivized to pursue consultative status with the UN. For example, for most organizations are the incentives largely/solely altruistic in that they seek to contribute to the knowledge base of the world's preeminent intergovernmental organization and/or champion their cause at the global level? Alternatively, do more self-serving motives such as organizational prestige/legitimacy and an associated enhancement to visibility or fundraising factor heavily in many NGOs decision to cultivate a formal association with the UN? Without understanding the motives of NGOs in cultivating relationships with the UN and the degree to which these goals and other benefits are being derived, any understanding of the organizational dynamic and its effectiveness would be incomplete.

Importantly, most research related to the relationship between the UN and international civil society has focused upon one or very limited numbers of such organizations or focused upon a particular issue area such as a specific human rights or development issue rather than seeking to understand overall patterns of NGO/civil society collaboration (Clark et al 1998; Tallberg et al 2013). A potential strength of this research is its broader parameters. In analyzing patterns among a representative sample of all NGOs holding UN-ECOSOC consultative status macro-scale patterns within the organizational dynamic may be ascertained. This is among the first academic studies of macro-level patterns of NGOs holding consultative status with UN-ECOSOC. It may also be among the first such studies which seeks to identify and explain specific reasons for engagement and the benefits derived from the latter by NGOs within the dynamic.

3 Operationalization

Hypotheses were operationalized via a detailed survey questionnaire mailed to 10% of all NGOs in consultative status with UN-ECOSOC. The UN's online Integrated Civil Society Organizations (ICSO) database was consulted for a list of all organizations holding consultative status. Each organization which identified English as at least one of its functional languages and listed a valid email address (the means by which surveys were distributed) within the database---over 95% of NGOs holding consultative status met both of the latter criteria---was assigned a unique number with questionnaire recipients selected via an online random number generator. Most questions contained in the survey instrument were objective in nature and allowed for numerical appraisal and comparison and also facilitated ease of response and minimal time commitment on the part of participants. Number lines were utilized for most (11 of 13---or 85% of total) survey items, wherein respondents indicated their reaction/score along a range of between 10 (high) to 0 (none/no) applicability. The number lines as printed in the survey utilized only whole numbers, but as many respondents marked scores between 2 whole numbers, half scores were recorded---i.e. a response circling, underlining, highlighting (etc.) only the number 5 was recorded as a score of 5, but a marking/indication falling between 5 and 6 on the printed number line was recorded as 5.5. The mean score for each number line item was tabulated and the latter along with the graphed distribution of responses is provided in the analysis. Additionally, in an effort to better understand and analyze responses to number line items and their range, a percentage breakdown of responses is provided according to whether

they were high, medium/moderate or low-range scores. The latter scoring was undertaken via division of all 21 possible numerical scores into 3 equidistant ranges: scores ranging from 10-7---high; 6.5-3.5---moderate/medium; 3-0 low.

Two (2) survey items were open-ended, subjective discussion questions. The number of subjective discussion-oriented questions was minimized in an effort to avoid adversely impacting response rate. Responses to the subjective, open-ended survey items were evaluated via qualitative content analysis. All such responses were read to identify the nature of feedback and what patterns existed among responses. Via coding of feedback, response categories were created to aid in framing and analyzing content of discussions and also to allow for some degree of objective comparison. For example, with regard to the initial question as to ‘why did your organization seek consultative status with the UN?’, responses were found to fall into 1 of 2 basic categories: reasons specific to the particular mission/scope of the CSO or reasons that were more general in scope. The follow up to the latter question, asked if those goals had been achieved and why or why not. Responses were found to fall into 1 of 4 types: yes---unqualified; yes---partly or qualified; no; or unknown/TBD.

4 Participant Self-De-Selection from Survey and Possible Bias

Some indication exists that many---possibly most---subjects randomly selected to participate in the study may have opted out of completing/submitting the survey due to reluctance to report little-no activity or goal/benefit attainment within the UN consultative status program. During the course of the study, it was not uncommon to receive questions from participants addressing a range of issues. The most common single topic about which the researcher was approached was related to NGO’s dearth of participation with the UN. Five subjects asked for guidance or otherwise expressed concerns related to the latter, often framing the comments as “many of the questions do not apply to us” as they had not participated in any programs or otherwise communicated with or made any contribution to the UN. Most of these participants also stated some variant to the effect that they did not want to “bias” or “skew” the data by responding with consistent 0s or 1s to number line items or respond negatively to the open-ended questions. Several made comments to the effect that they had “done nothing” or “had nothing to report” and thus did not feel they should participate in the research.

Responses to such queries always stressed that negative responses were perfectly valid, made contribution to the research, and also that if only the organizations achieving goals/benefits via the association with the UN self-report their experiences the results would be skewed in favor of that perspective. Participants were reassured that types of goals/benefits and levels of goal/benefit attainment among NGOs within the program appeared to vary widely and that there were likely many other NGOs with participation/attainment rates similar to their own. Also, it was stressed that responses were totally anonymous and the identities of respondents and the NGOs with which they are affiliated would be kept strictly confidential, information which had also been provided in the survey/consent documentation and in the introductory email. Those efforts were largely in vain as only 1 of the 5 subjects which had conveyed questions/concerns returned the survey questionnaire and that respondent left many survey items blank rather than provide scores indicating little-no attainment of goals/benefits derived from the UN consultative status affiliation. In addition to the latter experience, the average responses for survey items attempting to gauge levels of benefits derived were generally higher than the researcher had initially expected. For example, among the 62 questionnaires returned, most indicated high-moderate number-line scores in terms of *making connections with international NGOs* and *making meaningful contributions to the UN*.

The possibility must be considered that portions of the survey data compiled during the course of this research could demonstrate bias favoring (over-representing) the NGOs that have been more successful than most in realizing their initial goals in pursuing the association or that have otherwise derived more benefits than most via the association. If true, the actual overall rates of goal/benefit attainment on the part of NGOs within the UN-ECOSOC consultative status program may be less than numbers derived from this study indicate. There is no known reason why data bias favoring (via over-representation of) NGOs not attaining goals/benefits would have resulted in findings skewed in that direction as those organizations would logically be less inclined to submit a completed questionnaire. Also among those which did submit the survey, organizations with little-no success in goal/benefit attainment may be more inclined to omit responses to many individual survey items rather than report data they may regard as an unfavorable reflection.

Accordingly, if data generated in this survey are skewed, it is likely in the overestimation rather than underestimation of goal/benefit attainment of NGOs within the UN consultative status program.

Various other possible limitations to the research must be acknowledged. Given the relatively large number of NGOs participating in the UN consultative status program, the participation level needed for statistical significance, the focus upon only English-speaking NGOs, and the comparatively modest survey response rate (i.e. those NGOs which have failed to achieve goals or derive benefits via a prestigious opportunity for UN collaboration may not be inclined to complete/submit a formal questionnaire), a case study approach was undertaken, the results of which are not necessarily generalizable to all NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC. Also regarding the second hypotheses, NGO goal/benefit attainment may be curtailed by external factors beyond the control/influence of the organizations such as the level of accreditation granted by the UN (general, special, roster) which in effect restricts the type and extent of participation for example.

5 Profile of Survey Participants

As illustrated in Table 1, the number of questionnaires returned was roughly proportionate to the overall percentage of consultative status organizations holding special accreditation status. However, among survey respondents, those with general status were disproportionately overrepresented and those with roster status disproportionately underrepresented---both to substantial degrees. The latter patterns cannot be attributed to skewed sampling and survey participant selection as the proportion of NGOs randomly selected for the survey closely mirrored the distribution of accreditation levels of the total population of NGOs holding consultative status, partial confirmation that the random sampling process yielded a representative sample. As previously discussed, it is the researcher's belief that a self-(de)selection occurred with the surveys wherein those consultative status organizations with higher levels of UN goal/benefit attainment (e.g. those holding general status) would be more likely to report this and return the survey questionnaire, and conversely those with little-no UN goal/benefit attainment (possibly disproportionately concentrated as a pattern among roster status organizations) would be less intrinsically motivated to complete the survey and in effect self-incriminate.

Table 1: Levels Of Consultative Status Accreditation Of Ngo Survey Respondents Versus Distribution Of Accreditation Levels Within Cs Program Overall.

Accreditation Levels of 439		Accreditation Levels of	Accreditation Levels of
		Survey Respondents	all NGOs
Randomly Selected NGOs			
General	16 (3.6%)	14 (23.3%)	151 (3.2%)
Special	339 (77.2%)	43 (71.7%)	3595 (75.9%)
Roster	84 (19.1%)	3 (5%)	993 (20.9%)
Total	439	60*	4739

*Of 62 returned surveys, 2 respondents did not identify their level of accreditation

Table 2 presents a comparison of the spatial and MDC/LDC distribution patterns of NGOs randomly selected to receive the survey questionnaire relative to distribution of all NGOs with consultative status and regional proportion of world population. The regional distributions of those organizations randomly selected to receive the survey questionnaire closely mirrors the regional distributions of all NGOs holding consultative status with UN-ECOSOC, a further indication of the validity and representative nature of the sample selections. Overall, 33.9% of NGOs randomly selected were from predominantly LDC/developing regions, while the latter constitute 38.7% of all organizations within the consultative status program. Likewise 66.1% of NGOs randomly selected were from predominantly MDC/developed areas, with the latter comprising 61.3% of all consultative status organizations. As indicated in Table 2, the regional and LDC/MDC

distributions of NGOs randomly selected for the survey closely reflected the distribution of all NGOs in the consultative status program, again indicating that the random sampling process likely yielded a valid representative sample.

Table 2: Regional And Ldc/Mdc Distribution Patterns Of (1) Ngos Randomly Selected For Survey, (2) All Ngos With Ecosoc Cons. Status, And (3) Relative To Proportion Of Global Population

Regional Distribution of 439 Randomly Selected NGOs		Regional Distribution of all NGOs w/ CS	Regional Proportion of Global Population
Predominantly LDC/Developing Regions			
Africa	57 (13% of 439)	674 (15.3% of 4404)	16.4%
Asia	70 (15.9%)	794 (18.0%)	59.7%
Latin Am/Car	22 (5%)	238 (5.4%)	8.6%
Totals:	149 (33.9%)	1706 (38.7%)	84.7%
Predominantly MDC/Developed Regions			
Anglo Amer.	130 (29.6%)	1168 (26.5%)	4.9%
Europe	154 (35.1%)	1434 (32.6%)	9.9%
Oceania	6 (1.4%)	96 (2.2%)	0.5%
Totals:	290 (66.1%)	2698 (61.3%)	15.3%

6 Foundational Perspectives

The concepts of NGOs and civil society more broadly are key to this study. Linz and Stepan (1996, 116) provide an often cited encapsulation of civil society as being comprised of groups which freely self-organized independently of government influence and which seek to “articulate values, create associations and solidarities, and advance their interests.” Similarly, Waisman (2006, 49) defined civil society stating that it is “a slice of society, whose core is the web of voluntary associations that articulate interests and values, and their system of interaction, as long as these units are not under the control of the state”. NGOs can be regarded as all voluntarily organized associations that are independent of direct government and commercial control. In a three-part division of society, civil society constitutes everything not found in the spheres of government or business/commercial activity, wherein organizations pursue collective goals (Uhlen 2009). Concepts of civil society often regard it as constituting the mediating institutions which bridge the gap between individuals and the state (Thiel 2017). Many scholars have a broad and overarching concept of civil society as being comprised of a diverse range of professional/labor associations, religious organizations and perhaps most famously via his example of bowling leagues and their decline as symptoms of declining civil society in the US, Putnam (2001) also included leisure-related organizations. The terms *NGO* and *civil society* are not be entirely synonymous to many in that the latter is a more broad and inclusive reference than the former which refers to a more formally organized, structured entity which also has more defined agendas.

The term, *nongovernmental organization* (NGO) was popularized through its usage within the UN. The UN charter endeavored to distinguish between countries’ participation rights as opposed to those of non-state actors, initially described as *transnational private organizations* (Willets 1996). At present, the term NGO is preferred within ECOSOC, whereas other UN bodies as well as many other international actors continue to use the term *civil society organization* (CSO), with both terms in common use and often used interchangeably.

While the concept of NGOs and the perception of the latter as a key element of democratic society slowly emerged and expanded in the late 19th century, the most substantial growth in the total number and global nature of civil society has occurred since the mid-2000s. The post-WWII era was a pivotal time for the growth of international NGOs, as in the colonial period, states did not encourage the growth of such organizations, viewing them as potential competition for traditional political structures (Kwesiga and Namasi 2006). Following decolonization, NGOs in developing countries began to assume increasingly important roles in providing services and distribution of aid, as reflected in the tenfold

increase in development aid distributed by such international organizations between 1970-1985 for instance (Jokic 2013). During the 1980s and early 1990s, a significant expansion in the influence and number of international NGOs occurred and this upsurge, particularly in organizations related to human rights or free market economic reform, is widely credited with helping facilitate the global decline in authoritarianism and movement toward democracy. NGOs with an international focus were founded in many regions of the world in order to help address community needs or promote social causes, with one study estimating that around 25,000 organizations could reasonably be classified as international NGOs (INGOs)---those with programs in multiple countries---by the year 2000, increased from 6,000 in 1990 and less than 400 a century earlier (Paul 2000). The *Yearbook of International Organizations* lists over 38,000 active and some 30,000 dormant NGOs that operate in and obtain financing from 2 or more countries, their definitional criteria for being an INGO (UIA 2016).

Research has addressed the expanding number and roles of NGOs in recent decades but little research has been undertaken to address the actual behaviors or motivations of NGOs within the international arena such as why they pursue direct collaboration with the UN (Barnett and Finnemore 2004). Many of the attempts to address the UN-NGO dynamic have been critical such as noting the challenges inherent to coordinating large numbers of NGOs and the associated issue of quantity of affiliations versus quality of collaboration (Bloem, Attia and Dam 2008). Although the perception exists within international governance that countries and IGOs can benefit from utilizing civil society in roles such as policy expertise, provision of services, and compliance monitors, knowledge of the effectiveness of NGOs related in the latter areas and the complex variables related to effective performance in such roles remains tenuous at best (Tallberg 2010). The politicization of the NGO screening committee/process and the otherwise un-level playing field among many NGOs---e.g. an organization with a critical position against one or more national governments or that is otherwise the subject of a UN member's ire is far more likely to be denied consultative status---has also drawn criticism (Carpenter 2010).

The UN has attempted to promote pluralism within the ECOSOC consultative status framework by encouraging the affiliation and participation of NGOs representing historically marginalized issues (e.g., human/indigenous rights) and world regions (i.e. the predominantly LDC/developing world) and in albeit limited instances and modest amounts providing funds to enable NGOs from developing nations/regions to participate in UN functions (Mowell 2017). However, it is unclear whether such efforts have contributed to improvements in the diversity of representation in practice or whether such efforts undertaken by the UN in support of diversity of representation/participation remain largely symbolic in nature (Kymlicka 2008). For example, the increased profile of NGOs at the UN may primarily reflect good intentions and window dressing rather than substantive change in terms of the balance of influence and representation (Fox and Brown 1998).

Little research has been undertaken to explore the specific motivations of NGOs or benefits they may derived from such collaboration, but some insight exists. The UN is the primary forum for policy formulation and rule-making in the fields in which most international NGOs function and accordingly it stands to reason that NGOs with an international scope would seek to cultivate relationships with the UN and its bodies (Paul 2000). By gaining knowledge of procedures and language used at the UN and other IGOs, elements of civil society may learn how to effectively use international instruments associated with democratic traditions such as compliance reporting to advance domestic or transnational agendas in various policy areas including human or environmental rights (Riddell-Dixon 2008). Also, within democratic institutions whether at the sub-state, state or transnational level, NGOs can potentially foster and reinforce democratic ideals and practices via aggregation and representation of stakeholder interests and also via mitigating government power---i.e. civil society is beneficial for democracy (Uhlen 2009). In recent decades NGOs have acquired an increasingly important role in the developing world in the distribution of aid and provision of services, and accordingly many NGOs likely view association with IGOs such as the UN as a means of empowering their missions (Jokic 2013; Mowell 2018b).

Many NGOs may also see UN consultative status as a means of networking with other organizations with which they may effectively collaborate toward a common goal. Often civil society organizations are most effective when they engage in joint efforts via formal coalitions and with other entities such as business, labor or governmental actors (Paul 2000). Collaborative effort between multiple NGOs working in conjunction, particularly when there is also support from state actors, has been cited in various studies as facilitating change with regard to numerous international policy initiatives. Examples include the international movement which led to the 2008 global treaty banning cluster munitions (Bolton and Nash 2010), advocacy coalitions which have helped bring about action and accountability in health initiatives for women and children in many world regions (WHO 2012), and the successful efforts of NGOs working with labor unions

to ban sandblasting processes in jeans manufacturing in Europe that were potentially harmful to workers' health (Kryst 2012). NGO coalitions working in collaborative effort behind a common goal increasingly rival or even exceed the influence of state actors as evidenced in relief efforts for Typhoon Haiyan wherein civil society fundraising coalitions outpaced the contributions of national governments in many wealthy industrialized countries (GHA 2014). With regard to development, NGO coalitions have organized behind the concept that policy reforms are critical for increasing both visibility and public access to decision-making processes and also for advancing specific strategies (Udall 1998).

However, balanced, egalitarian and harmonious partnerships within NGO coalitions can be difficult to establish and maintain given sometimes significant differences in agendas, culture, influence, political and ideological background, and power that can exist and serve as centrifugal forces between different organizations (Fox and Brown 1998). The latter problems become compounded as the size, diversity and range of issues with which an NGO coalition may be dealing expand over time. As the result of such complexities, NGO coalitions can be fluid in terms of their dynamic and composition and they commonly dissolve, with many never intended to be more than a temporary alliance for a common cause. Accordingly, NGOs which established meaningful networking with other organizations as an objective of their participation in the consultative status program may not always attain this goal.

A potentially useful theoretical lens for viewing an analysis of goal setting/realization and benefit attainment is rational-choice institutionalism. The latter theory and the proposition that institutions/policies are created or integrated to address needs or to improve functional efficiency within a system may offer potential insight as to the possible motives of either side in government/IGO collaboration with civil society institutions (Tallberg 2010). In offering a well-formulated rational functionalist account seeking to justify NGO involvement in international or state governance, Raustiala (1997, 719) argues that "rather than undermining state sovereignty, active NGO participation enhances the abilities of states to regulate globally...(and) the empirical pattern of NGO participation has been structured across time and policy areas to reap those gains." Governments and IGOs that potentially see benefit to be derived (whether real or perceived) from direct, formal associations with NGOs (and vice versa) may pursue such arrangements out of self-interest rather than altruism or ideological commitment. Accordingly, many of the associations between governments and IGOs on the one hand and civil society organs on the other may not be born of lofty goals such as furthering pluralism or democracy-building but because they regard collaborations with such organizations as having something they need (O'Brien et al 2000). International institutions and collaborations among different types of actors may to a great degree reflect the outcomes of strategic choices made by actors in response to needs/problems related to issues such as transaction costs and problems of monitoring and enforcement (Deitelhoff 2009; Kahn 2010). This research sought to shed light on such matters by exploring the motivations of NGOs which seek consultative status with UN-ECOSOC and the goal-attainment and benefits they derived via the association.

7 Structure of the ECOSOC Consultative Status Program

In the ECOSOC consultative status program the UN formally accredits NGOs according to three gradations of influence which determine degree of access/input: general status, special status, and roster status. Accreditation level determines the right and ability of NGOs to circulate documents, access to informal preparatory meetings, and observe or participate at certain functions (UN 1999). General status is afforded to the relatively small number of organizations that are global in scope, directly involved with most areas of ECOSOC activities and are perceived to be capable of making "substantive and sustained" contributions. At the time the research was undertaken only 147 or 3.1% within the consultative status program held this level of accreditation. General status permits NGOs to submit written statements of up to 2,000 words to ECOSOC organs on subjects in which the organization has specialization. Many of the organizations with general status are among the world's most respected and well-known NGOs including Greenpeace, Oxfam International, Rotary International, Save the Children, and World Vision International for example.

NGOs with special status are those with a presence in multiple countries, expertise in a less diverse range of issues, but are potentially capable of making significant contributions in several such issue areas. Special consultative status affords less influence than general status and NGOs holding this accreditation level cannot propose items for the provisional agenda of ECOSOC or one of its bodies but are allowed to submit written statements of up to 500 words

(Cassese 1979). Special status is by far the most common accreditation level among NGOs in consultation with ECOSOC, with over 75% holding the latter designation at the time of writing.

Roster status is for those NGOs that are often less international in scope, usually focused on a more narrow issue area and can make an occasional useful contribution in their focused area(s) of expertise. NGOs with roster status are allowed to submit written statements only if specifically invited to do so by the UN and the organization's representatives may only attend public meetings at the UN that are directly relevant to their field of specialization. Roster status is the second most common type of ECOSOC consultative status with some 20% of organizations in the program holding this level of affiliation.

One assumption underlying this study is that the degree of goal/benefit attainment of NGOs will to at least some degree be impacted by the level of consultative status they hold. For example, it may be logical to assume that a higher percentage of NGOs holding general status would report achievement of goals and/or attainment of benefits from the collaboration as opposed to NGOs with special status due to both the breadth of operational scope and the increased opportunity to participate/contribute. Likewise, it may be reasonable to assume that smallest participation rates will be among NGOs holding roster status as their scope of operations is the narrowest and level of accreditation the most restrictive wherein for example submission of written statements is not a right or a matter of routine. This is not necessarily to say that the potential for success on the part of NGOs holding special or roster status should be entirely discounted, certainly when their weight of numbers and proportional representation is taken into consideration. While organizations with general status presumably have a greater degree of opportunity to participate and succeed within the ECOSOC consultative status program, they constitute scarcely more than 3% of organizations holding consultative status.

8 Survey Results

Using two open-ended questions, survey participants were asked (1) why their organization sought consultative status with the UN and in turn were asked (2) if those goals had been achieved and why or why not. Of 62 survey questionnaires returned, the vast majority---57 (91.9%) provided feedback for one or both of these items. In general, responses for the first survey item were more detailed than information provided for the follow up question inquiring as to whether those goals had been realized. Responses to the first question were organized into 2 basic categories: those that are specific to the policy/focus area of a particular organization/respondent; and those that were more general in scope.

Of the respondents addressing the first question, 18 (31.6%) cited reasons that were specific to the policy/focus area of their specific NGO as motivating factors for seeking consultative status. For example, a labor-related organization responded that it sought to represent workers and unions interests and protect their rights, stating that "it is inconceivable that the UN or any other major international institution function without direct involvement and input of trade union organizations." Another highly specialized NGO indicated their desire to contribute their expertise in risk governance/management and identify collaboration opportunities and stay updated as to international developments related to the latter. Development-related issues (economic or human/social) were the most commonly cited issue areas as drivers. Several responses also touched upon the organization's desire to increase its profile specifically within the issue area(s) in which it specialized.

The majority of responses---39 (68.4%)---focused upon a diverse array of more general motivating factors. Among the most common responses were those indicating a desire to be involved in various respects with the UN including the ability to attend conferences and obtain information about international issues. Others referenced the goal of networking or otherwise interacting with other NGOs. Sharing of information or best practices or international outreach in general were commonly cited motivating factors. Several respondents were also quite candid in that they explained that no or few clear goals for their participation in the program had ever been defined.

Overall, there seemed to be a roughly equal division between the number of altruistic motivators (e.g., contribute expertise to the UN; collaborative research/projects) as opposed to incentives of a more intrinsic nature (e.g., increased credibility or visibility for the organization; new funding opportunities) revealed by respondents, with altruistic/external motives being provided slightly more commonly. Interestingly, respondents citing mostly or entirely altruistic/external motives for seeking consultative status with the UN were somewhat more likely to indicate their goals for

participating in the consultative status program had been achieved than organizations which listed more intrinsic motivations for participating. The implication of the latter is that the NGOs whose sole or top priority was to contribute are perhaps more likely to find success and satisfaction than those organizations which chiefly sought some form of tangible benefit from the association.

Among the 56 respondents providing feedback as to whether their goals for seeking consultative status with the UN had been realized, 26 (46.4%) indicated “yes”, a 2:1 margin over the 13 (23.2%) organizations which indicated “no”. In justifying their responses, those organizations reporting that their goals had been realized had most commonly sought to enhance their profile/visibility internationally, participate in UN forums/functions, or to facilitate better networking, idea-sharing or other forms of communication internationally. While some respondents indicating one or more of the latter as goals, noted they had not been achieved, the majority of the organizations indicating that no goals had been achieved via the consultative status program either (1) indicated lack of clearly framed goals from the outset, or (2) had originally sought specific benefits for their organization which at least in some cases (i.e., funding opportunities or “UN training”) may have been unrealistic.

An additional 8 respondents provided feedback that could be best described as a qualified or partial “yes”. Such a response would indicate realization of only some of multiple objectives or only partial achievement of a stated objective. For example, one respondent noted in the first question that their goal was to “obtain recognition via the UN system as an exceptional NGO and also to use the forum to share thoughts and ideas.” In the follow up question the same respondent noted that they had only partially realized their goals in that they “welcome the recognition (via consultative status accreditation) but find it difficult to share information or promote their organization’s expertise” due to logistical barriers such as time, personnel and funding constraints. If such responses are included with feedback equating to an unqualified “yes”, a total of 34 respondents (60.7%) indicated they at least some of the goals which motivated their organization to pursue consultative status.

A total of 9 respondents (16.1%) essentially indicated that they could not effectively judge whether or not their goals for the consultative status program had been achieved. In some cases respondents indicated that they have not held the status long enough yet to assess whether their goals have been achieved, although in 2 such cases respondents have possessed the accreditation for several years. In other cases, it appears the organizations at least initially had intentions of participating but as yet have not due to logistical constraints. One such respondent noted that the levels of attainment of their goals in the program are as yet unclear as “the channels (for participation) are not convenient”. Another indicated that they are still seeking “ways to contribute and work within the UN system in ways that our finances and other limitations allow.” While not all respondents elaborated specifically as to why they were unable to realize their initial goals relative to the consultative status program, among those that did provide details, limited organizational resources including financial constraints were the most commonly mentioned theme.

One of the more interesting patterns to emerge from analysis of the follow-up question as to whether goals had been achieved and why/why not, was the dichotomy of responses related to the organizational goal’s breadth of scope. As indicated in Table 3, among the 56 respondents providing feedback for the survey item, 18 (32.1%) had indicated in the previous question that their organizational incentive for seeking consultative status accreditation was linked to some specific aspect of the NGOs policy/issue area such as development, labor, or human rights. The majority of respondents addressing this survey item—38 or 67.9%—did not cite goals specific to their organization’s policy/focus area, but indicated more general objectives such as participation in UN forums, have a voice in international issues, interact with other NGOs, enhanced credibility, etc. Among those respondents indicating goals specific to their organizational scope/focus, notably fewer (38.9%) indicated “yes” or partially/qualified yes (5.6%) as to their goals within the program being attained as opposed to responding organizations which had specified broader, more general goals (50% - yes, 18.4% partially/qualified yes). More respondents indicating consultative status program goals specific to their NGOs policy/focus areas also indicated “no” (27.8%) or “unknown” (27.8%) regarding achievement of said goals than was the case with those indicating more general goals (21.1% - no, 10.6% unknown). A possible conclusion is that some organizations within the program may find it easier to realize goals that are more general in focus rather than objectives specific to particular aspects of their organizational mission and in turn may find the experience of participation in the consultative status program more fulfilling.

Regardless of the breadth of goals which initially motivated the organizations’ to pursue consultative status, the sometimes detailed and impassioned feedback of many of the respondents indicating that they have not achieved their goals during their experiences with the program contribute to understanding many obstacles within the dynamic. For

Table 3: Responses To Whether NGO Goals For CS Program Had Been Achieved Or Not - A Comparison Of Broad/General Goals Versus Those Specific To A Particular Aspect Of Organization's Policy/Issue Area.

Responses from CS Organizations Indicating Highly Mission/Policy-Specific Goals for CS Program Participation				
Responses: N and Percentage of Total				
Yes	No	Unknown	Partial or Qualified Yes	Total Responses
7 (38.9%)	5 (27.8%)	5 (27.8%)	1 (5.6%)	18
Responses from CS Organizations Indicating Broader, More General Goals for CS Program Participation				
Responses: N and Percentage of Total				
Yes	No	Unknown	Partial or Qualified Yes	Total Responses
19 (50%)	8 (21.1%)	4 (10.6%)	7 (18.4%)	38

example, common themes in the survey findings were that many consultative status organizations lack the resources to participate and/or do not know how to derive meaningful benefits from the program. One respondent indicated that “all we have received (from the UN) are invitations to conferences, but our organization...lacks the resources to attend. One time we were able to attend an ECOSOC conference, but the benefits to our organization were unclear...and nothing learned seemed immediately relevant to our needs.”

Another potentially significant issue for the organizations which hoped to interact with representatives of foreign governments---for reasons such as impacting policy formulation internationally---is the segregation of civil society venues from country delegations and other UN bodies and the potentially inadequate space available for NGOs to function effectively within the consultative status program. One respondent provided detailed feedback concerning the latter trend, stating that “in the last decade we have seen at the UN, the shrinking of physical and communication space and the NGOs are now cordoned off into the ‘ghetto’ of the Church Centre, Salvation Army, Armenian Centre and other venues for our meetings, called (by the UN) ‘parallel events’ either opposite the UN Building or even further away.” The respondent continued: “This means that it is very rare indeed for official government delegates ever to attend the parallel events where very different messages and information...can be relayed, different from the formal speeches in the UN Building.”

A different respondent noted that one potential solution to the shortage of meeting/communication space for NGOs might exist in the form of coalitions: “The large number of organizations means that all cannot speak at official meetings, but often multiple views can be presented through a single speaker who represents a larger group of organizations.” However, the survey results indicate only around one-half of respondents have ever participated in an NGO coalition and among those which do it seems unlikely that the views of each NGO could be heard on each issue of potential importance to them. No solution appears to be in sight in terms of the segregation of consultative status organizations via the ‘parallel event’ approach. One respondent noted that although they had been hosting events and otherwise actively participating at the UN for the past 18 years, “over the last decade (since the implementation of the ‘parallel events’ strategy) I feel that no one making policy, i.e. government delegates, can hear us and so our issues are ignored.” Among the organizations recently admitted to the consultative status program which hoped to proactively influence international policy-making, but see no substantive opportunity to do so, and among the long-time participants who have witnessed their initial access to international delegations and UN bodies which contribute to policy formulation progressively erode, it is understandable that some degree of disillusionment may occur and that the latter and the combined realization of increasingly limited access to corridors of power and influence could potentially undermine the ability or willingness of organizations to fully participate in the program.

Another survey item asked respondents to indicate on number lines how they would rate the importance of each of 5 specific considerations concerning their organization's desire to have UN consultative status. The factors specified were: (1) general prestige/visibility, (2) credibility in fundraising, (3) networking with other NGOs/organizations, (4) contributing/exchanging research with the UN and other organizations, and (5) contributing written or verbal position statements on issues. Figures 1-5 provide the total number, mean and range of number line responses for each of the latter 5 items.

Figure 1: Importance Of General Prestige/Visibility Concerning NGO Desire To Have UN Consultative Status.

Figure 2: Importance Of Credibility In Fundraising Concerning NGO Desire To Have UN Consultative Status.

Figure 3: Importance Of Networking With Other Organizations Concerning NGO Desire To Have UN Consultative Status.

Figure 4: Importance Of Contributing/Exchanging Research With The Un And Other Organizations Concerning NGO Desire To Have UN Consultative Status.

Figure 5: Importance Of Contributing Written Or Verbal Position Statements On Issues Concerning NGO Desire To Have UN Consultative Status.

The variation in mean scores across the 5 considerations was not substantial, with general prestige/visibility scoring highest at 7.7, followed closely by networking with other organizations, contributing written/verbal position statements, and contributing/exchanging research with the UN and other organizations with means of 7.6, 7.4, and 7.2 respectively. All of the latter can be regarded as high-range scores and reflect almost equally high importance afforded by most respondents for each of the latter 4 considerations. The remaining item, credibility in fundraising yielded a somewhat lower mean score of 6.0, which although still moderately high, indicates fundraising was not a primary concern for most and was of the least importance among the considerations respondents were specifically asked to rate.

Participants also had the option of specifying other considerations important to their organization's desire to obtain consultative status. A total of 15 respondents specified a diverse range of other factors not addressed in the 5 number line options. All of the additional considerations specified were rated high (7-10) in importance, and 7 of the factors were rated 10 on the scale, denoting utmost importance. Table 4 presents a comprehensive list of each of the additional considerations as specified by respondents. Not all of the comments were detailed and some were not directly linked to the question at hand (e.g. "our consultative status level impedes us"), but some of the comments were insightful. For example, several related directly to the national circumstances in which the NGO was based including participation in advocacy that would be limited in the home country. Several organizations also specified considerations specific to their policy areas or scope of mission.

In an effort to gauge the types of actual positive impacts (as opposed to initial goals/incentives for obtaining the status addressed in a previous survey item) UN consultative status has had upon NGOs within the program, as well as general patterns and motivations for participation, participants were asked to use number line scores to rate the beneficial impact of each of 6 areas specified in the questionnaire: (1) making meaningful connections with other NGOs in the US; (2) making meaningful connections with other NGOs internationally; (3) making meaningful contributions to the UN; (4) general prestige/visibility; (5) media publicity; and (6) aiding in fundraising. Figures 6-11 provide the total number, mean and range of number line responses for each of the 6 survey items.

Table 4: Range Of Additional Considerations Specified By Survey Respondents As Being Important To Their Decision To Obtain CS Accreditation.

Recruiting for organization
Joining other UN organizations (UNFCCC)
Interaction with other NGOs within our country
Create awareness of global interdependency among UN membership
Legitimize our work when lobbying the government
Participate in global advocacy processes that are limited by our own national government
Universal peace
New ideas
Media coverage of UN involvement
Raise awareness about needs/rights of people with intellectual disabilities
Submit accurate data/information about our country (Iran)
Political considerations in determining the status of our organization
Advance the cause of families globally
Discussion
Our level of (CS) accreditation impedes us

Considerable variation in mean scores existed across the 6 areas, with 3 areas achieving either high or moderate-high mean scores and 3 with moderate or low-moderate scores. The highest mean and the only mean which would qualify as a high-range score in terms of benefits derived from the consultative status program was the 7.1 average for *prestige/legitimacy earned for your organization*. A similar survey item asking respondents why they initially sought consultative status also ranked prestige as the highest consideration, seemingly indicating that this goal of enhanced status via official association with the UN is both a top initial priority and one that has been largely realized as a benefit by organizations within the program responding to the survey.

Making meaningful contributions to the UN and making meaningful connections with other organizations internationally had the next highest mean scores of 6.4 and 6.1 respectively, both falling in the upper end of the moderate range for scores. Interestingly, both of the latter survey items relating to benefits realized also had roughly equivalent survey questions related to initial motivation for pursuing consultative status with the UN. In both cases the mean scores for benefits realized were substantially lower (by a full point or more), implying that although many NGOs feel an overall positive impact was experienced it may have fallen short of initial expectations formulated at the onset of pursuing/obtaining consultative status.

Significantly lower mean scores were obtained for the remaining 3 survey items within the category. *Media publicity for your organization* and *making meaningful connections with other NGOs in the US* possessed means of only 4.8 and 4.7 respectively, denoting that neither were generally regarded as a primary benefit by respondents. Beyond initial press attention that may be derived upon first obtaining formal accreditation with UN ECOSOC, it stands to reason that NGOs with little-no substantive activity level within the program would not receive further media attention. Initially the researcher did not know what to expect in response to the item gauging connection with US-based civil society. Given the prominence of US-based NGOs internationally in general and within the program in particular and also given the importance of the US as a source of funding and other support for initiatives related to international civil society, some question existed if non-US organizations specifically coveted building relationships with US counterparts, but survey findings indicate that the latter clearly is not the case for most respondents.

The lowest mean score for the series of items inquiring as to organizational benefits derived from the consultative status program were for *aid in fundraising for your organization*, with 3.9---the lowest mean score obtained for any number line item in the study. The latter results parallel the mean score for *credibility in fundraising*, which also scored lowest among items gauging initial motivation for obtaining UN accreditation. The survey results related to fundraising were among the more surprising outcomes of the study. Though it was not initially clear whether UN affiliation would actually prove to be beneficial in fundraising (through prestige/credibility of association etc.) in reality, the researcher initially assumed it would be among the top priorities or perceived advantages among NGOs seeking to obtain UN status. Survey results clearly indicated that at least for the majority of respondents neither was the case.

Figure 6: Beneficial Impacts Of CS Accreditation - Making Meaningful Connections With Other NGOs In The US.

Figure 7: Beneficial Impacts Of CS Accreditation - Making Meaningful Connections With Other NGOs Internationally.

Figure 8: Beneficial Impacts Of CS Accreditation - Making Meaningful Contributions To The Un.

Figure 9: Beneficial Impacts Of CS Accreditation - Prestige/Legitimacy Derived For Organization.

Figure 10: Beneficial Impacts Of CS Accreditation - Media Publicity.

Figure 11: Beneficial Impacts Of CS Accreditation - Aid In Fundraising.

Participants were also given the option of indicating “other” as a beneficial impact of obtaining consultative status and were asked to specify. A total of 10 respondents volunteered such information, with most of the comments being scored positively and 1 comment scored at 0: “no known/observable benefit derived”. A comprehensive summary of the comments offered is provided in Table 5. The majority of the comments related to legitimacy or credibility which had been represented as a number line item, though respondents often elaborated as to how (or with what entity) credibility had been enhanced. In two instances respondents noted how UN status had benefited their organization with regard to its specific policy area or scope of mission---i.e., personal safety awareness, connections with exchange students. One response centered upon benefitting from obtaining general information stemming from the program.

Table 5: Range Of Additional Considerations Specified By Survey Respondents As Benefits Derived From Their Organization Obtaining Consultative Status.

Educational resources/materials and useful information
Shows our work has international respect & we may be able to influence international policies
Awareness of personal safety issues
Credibility/legitimacy to participate in national processes
Credibility when offering consulting or collaborating
Beneficial impact with national government (Bangladesh)
Credibility/trust in relationship with government
Credibility with our beneficiaries (donors)
Legitimacy when lobbying government and political parties
Meaningful connections with US exchange students
No known/observable benefit derived

9 Summary and Conclusion

Among the most important factors identified by NGOs as incentives for pursuing consultative status with UN-ECOSOC were enhanced prestige/legitimacy and opportunities to network with other civil society organizations. Most NGOs participating in the survey did cite prestige as a benefit derived from the program, though the related benefit of media attention/publicity was clearly not a benefit for most organizations. While networking was an important initial incentive for most NGOs, the networking benefits actually attained/reported by study participants were more modest. Most NGOs also indicated that contributions related to research and making position statements were primary considerations in seeking collaboration via the UN program, though benefits reported in terms of making meaningful contributions to the UN were somewhat more modest, particularly among NGOs with special or roster status. Fewer organizations reported fundraising benefits as an incentive to obtain consultative status and almost none reported consultative status yielding any actual benefit upon fundraising. It appears that for most NGOs some combination of both intrinsic (e.g. prestige/legitimacy) as well as extrinsic/altruistic (e.g., research contributions) motivations factor into seeking consultative status, seemingly conforming the first hypothesis. The degree to which NGOs are achieving their original goals or otherwise deriving benefits from the UN consultative status program appears to largely reflect the NGO’s level of accreditation with those holding general status conveying a substantially higher degree of attainment from the collaboration than those with special or roster status, with NGOs in the latter category reporting the lowest levels of goal or benefit attainment. The latter findings appear to confirm the second hypothesis regarding lack of goal/benefit attainment being common, particularly for NGOs holding special or roster status.

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