The Nature and Degree of NGO Interaction with the United Nations within the ECOSOC

Consultative Status Program

La naturaleza y el grado de interacción de las ONG con las Naciones Unidas en el marco del ECOSOC

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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 the UN with regard to 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 the nature and degree of NGO participation within the UN-ECOSOC consultative status program. The results of a survey sent to a random sample of 10 percent of NGOs holding consultative status revealed that most organizations have minimal participation and a large minority of NGOs awarded the status do not appear to be actively engaged.

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RESUMEN

El principal vehículo en la dinámica ONU-ONG es el programa de estatus consultivo del Consejo Económico y Social de las Naciones Unidas (ECOSOC). La literatura existente aborda la ONU en relación con la facilitación de la colaboración formal con la sociedad civil internacional, pero se han realizado pocas investigaciones para examinar los patrones a gran escala de las ONG en dichas colaboraciones. Este estudio buscó abordar parcialmente esta última deficiencia en la literatura mediante el análisis de la naturaleza y el grado de participación de las ONG en el programa de estatus consultivo del ECOSOC de las Naciones Unidas. Los resultados de una encuesta realizada a una muestra aleatoria del 10% de las ONG con estatus consultivo revelaron que la mayoría de las organizaciones tienen una participación mínima y una gran minoría de las ONG con estatus consultivo no parecen participar activamente.

Introduction to the Problem and Research Parameters

The United Nations has increasingly sought collaborative relationships with a diverse range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in recent decades. One of the principle outlets for this collaboration is the formal consultative status program for NGOs within the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The UN has prioritized the development of a more diverse, egalitarian and effective institutional culture through the inclusion of and interaction among elements of civil society both to supplement the traditional role of states as the chief transnational actors within the UN and to increase the number and range of perspectives represented. This exploratory research examines the depth and type of interactions within the UN-NGO dynamic via a randomly selected case study of 10 percent of the NGOs participating in the ECOSOC consultative status program.

This study proposes that the expansion of the number and (ostensibly) the role of NGOs in consultative status with the UN (ECOSOC) does not necessarily equate to meaningful participation on the part of the NGOs in the program. Specifically, the objective of the research was to shed light on the degree to which the UN-NGO dynamic within the ECOSOC consultative status program is legitimate or merely a facade cultivating the illusion of UN-civil society interaction. A component element of broader dissertation research into the UN-NGO dynamic, this exploratory study is framed by the following research question: what types and degrees of participation exist among NGOs which hold consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council?

The latter led to the formulation of the following working hypothesis: Most NGOs in consultative status with UN-ECOSOC do not participate in any meaningful way in UN meetings or otherwise make a contribution (providing input at conferences, submitting research/data, etc.) to the UN goal of engaging with pluralist international civil society. The research question and hypothesis were formulated via the experiences of the researcher serving as the UN Representative of multiple NGOs which have held consultative status with UN-ECOSOC. The researcher was initially surprised that little-no substantive interaction occurred within the program once the formal association was established with the NGOs he represented, and anecdotally, this pattern of limited or no actual interaction seemed to be quite common with other organizations within the consultative status program.

Organizations serve as the unit of analysis. However, it should be acknowledged that other variables including state-level and systemic international-level considerations may also impact the degree and nature of the association between NGOs and intergovernmental organizations. An example of the latter would be governmental and/or intergovernmental organization (IGO) /UN policies that restrict the actions/participation of NGOs.

Foundational Insights

Civil society, more specifically NGOs and the manner in which the latter collaborate with the UN are foundational concepts within this study. Linz and Stepan (1996, 116) provide a concise overview of civil society as being composed of groups which freely self-organized independently of state influence and which endeavor to 'articulate values, create associations and solidarities, and advance their interests.' Waisman (2006, 49) defined civil society in similar terms explaining 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.' Nongovernmental organizations or NGOs can be regarded as all voluntarily and formally organized associations that are independent of

direct government and commercial control (Mowell 2018a). In a tripartite division of society, civil society constitutes everything not found within the domains of state or business/commercial activity, wherein organizations pursue collective action (Uhlin 2009). Concepts of civil society often regard the latter as comprising the institutions which bridge the gap between individuals and the state (Thiel 2017). Scholars often advocate a broad, inclusive concept of civil society as constituting a diverse range of civic organizations, professional/labor associations, religious organizations and perhaps most famously via his example of the decline in bowling leagues as symptomatic of eroding civil society in the US, Putnam (2001) also included organizations related to leisure. The terms civil society and NGO are not be necessarily synonymous in that the former is more broad and inclusive in scope while the latter refers to a more formally organized, structured organization which also may possess more defined goals than civil society in general.

Nongovernmental organization (NGO) was popularized as a term via its use within the United Nations. The verbiage of the UN charter endeavored to distinguish between countries' participation rights as opposed to those of non-state actors, which were initially described as transnational private organizations (Willetts 1996). At present, NGO is the preferred term within

ECOSOC, whereas other UN bodies as well as many other international actors continue to prefer the term civil society organization (CSO), but both terms remain in common use and are often used synonymously.

The concept of civil society and NGOs and the perception that they constitute an important element of democratic society began to slowly take root in the late 19th and early 20th century. However the most substantive growth in the number and global scope of civil society has occurred in recent decades. The post-colonial era was a pivotal period for the expansion of international NGOs, as in the colonial era foreign powers did not encourage the growth of such organizations, regarding them as potential threats to established political structures (Kwesiga and Namasi 2006). Decolonization helped facilitate global growth of NGOs and in developing countries they began to assume increasingly prominent roles in distributing aid and providing services, as can be seen in the approximately tenfold increase in development aid disbursed by such international organizations between 1970-1985 for example (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 (Mowell 2018b). NGOs with an international scope were established in many regions in order to help address regional needs or to advocate a range of policy/societal reforms, with one study estimating that around 25,000 organizations could be classified as international NGOs (INGOs)---those with programs in multiple states---by the year 2000, up from only 6,000 in 1990 and less than 400 a century earlier (Paul 2000). The 2024 edition of The Yearbook of International Organizations lists some 75,000 international NGOs (by definition, those that operate in and obtain funding from 2 or more states) across 300 states and territories (UIA 2024).

Scholarship has explored the growing number and expanding roles of NGOs in recent decades but little effort has been made to examine the actual behaviors or motivations of NGOs within the international arena such as the nature and degree of their collaboration with intergovernmental organizations including the UN (Barnett and Finnemore 2004). Many of the attempts to address the UN-NGO dynamic have been critical of the dynamic such as noting the shortcomings and limitations inherent to coordinating large numbers of NGOs and the associated issue of quantity of affiliations versus quality and depth of collaboration (Bloem,

Attia and Dam 2008). While the perception exists within international governance that state actors and IGOs can benefit from utilizing civil society in various roles such as compliance monitors, policy expertise, provision of services, knowledge of the effectiveness of NGOs in such collaborative roles and understanding concerning the complex variables related to effective NGO performance in such roles remains somewhat nebulous (Tallberg 2010). The politicization of the NGO screening committee/process at the UN and the otherwise un-even playing field among many NGOs---e.g. organizations vary widely in terms of their resources and political clout/support---has also garnered criticism (Carpenter 2010). A recent study revealed that many NGOs within the Consultative Status program regarded lack of expertise/familiarity with UN processes, lack of necessary funds or personal, and logistical issues such as geographical distance from UN conferences as among the most common barriers to participation (Mowell 2021).

The UN promotes pluralist ideals within the ECOSOC consultative status framework via encouraging the inclusion and participation of NGOs representing historically marginalized issues (e.g., human/indigenous rights) and world regions (i.e. the predominantly developing regions) and in albeit limited instances and modest monetary amounts, the UN makes some

effort to provide financial support to enable NGOs from developing regions to participate in UN functions (Mowell 2017). However, it is unclear whether such efforts have facilitated tangible improvements in the diversity of NGO representation or whether such initiatives remain principally symbolic in nature (Kymlicka 2008). For example, the elevated profile of civil society at the UN may primarily reflect good/hopeful intentions (and window dressing) rather than genuine change in terms of the balance of influence/representation and actual collaboration (Fox and Brown 1998).

Limited research has been undertaken to explore the specific behaviors of NGOs including the substance and degree of their interaction within IGOs collaborations, though some insights do exist. As the principle venue for policy formulation and rule-making in the areas in which most international NGOs function, it is understandable that NGOs with an international scope would seek to cultivate relationships with the UN and its organs (Paul 2000). In acquiring understanding of the language and procedures used at the UN and other IGOs, NGOs may learn how to more effectively use international instruments associated with democratic traditions such as compliance reporting in order to advance domestic or transnational agendas in various policy arenas such as human or environmental rights (Riddell-Dixon

2008). Additionally, within democratic institutions NGOs can potentially foster and reinforce democratic ideals and practices via aggregation and representation of stakeholder interests and also via mitigating state authority ---i.e. civil society helps promote and reinforce democratic norms (Uhlin 2009). Civil society has acquired an increasingly important role in the developing world in the distribution of aid and provision of services in recent decades, and accordingly many NGOs likely view association with IGOs such as the UN as a means of empowering their missions (Jokic 2013; Mowell 2018b). Another practical benefit for at least some organizations appears to be the credibility, legitimacy and prestige that NGOs might potentially derive from a formal association with the United Nations, which some organizations may perceive as advantageous in fundraising and advancing a positive public image (Mowell 2020).

Many organizations may also regard UN consultative status as a useful vehicle for networking with other organizations with which they may collaborate toward achievement of a common goal. Civil society initiatives are often most effective when they undertake joint efforts via formal coalitions among multiple NGOs or with other entities such as business, labor or governmental actors (Paul 2000). Cooperative effort between NGOs working in conjunction, particularly when there is also support from state actors and multinational business, has been cited in various studies as successfully facilitating change with regard to numerous international policy initiatives. Examples of the latter include the global movement leading to the 2008 international treaty banning cluster munitions (Bolton and Nash 2010), advocacy coalitions which have enabled 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 organizations to ban certain sandblasting processes in jeans manufacturing that were potentially hazardous to the health of workers (Kryst 2012). NGO coalitions engaged in collaborative effort behind a common goal may rival or even surpass the influence of state actors as can be seen in relief efforts for Typhoon Haiyan wherein civil society fundraising coalitions exceeded the contributions of national governments in many wealthy industrialized states (GHA 2014). In terms of development issues, NGO coalitions have organized behind the idea that policy reform is critical for both increased visibility and public access to decision-making processes and also in order to advance specific development strategies (Udall 1998).

Balanced and harmonious partnerships within coalitions can however be difficult to create and maintain given

the sometimes substantial differences in agendas, culture, influence, political climate, and power that exist and serve as centrifugal forces between different NGOs (Fox and Brown 1998). Such problems may become compounded as the size, diversity and range of issues with which an NGO coalition may be involved expand over time. Stemming from such complexities, coalitions can be fluid with regard to their dynamic and composition and they often fragment or dissolve entirely, with many such coalitions never intended to be more than a temporary collaboration in support of a shorter-term common objective. Thus, many organizations which sought meaningful networking with other NGOs as a goal of their participation in the consultative status program may not always achieve this objective.

Given some of the latter realities which may be important drivers in IGO-civil society relationships, a potentially useful theoretical framework for juxtaposing an analysis of the nature and degree of interaction within in the UN-civil society dynamic is rational-choice institutionalism. In short, rational-choice institutionalism contends that institutions/policies are created or integrated in order to satisfy needs or to improve functional efficiency within a system such as state or IGO collaboration with civil society institutions (Tallberg 2010). In offering a related rational functionalist

perspective in 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.' States and IGOs including the UN that see potential benefit to be derived from direct, formal associations with NGOs (and vice versa) may pursue such arrangements out of self-interest rather than altruism or commitment to some idealistic agenda.

Accordingly, many of the associations between governments and IGOs on the one hand and civil society organs such as NGOs on the other may not be the result of idealism such as advancing pluralism or democracy-building but because they regard collaborations with such organizations as a path to achieving a desired, tangible objective (O'Brien et al 2000). The dynamic within many international institutions and cooperation among different actors may at least to some degree reflect the results of actors' strategic choices taken in response to needs/problems related to issues such as transaction costs or problems related to monitoring and enforcement for example (Deitelhoff 2009; Kahn 2010). This study sought to illuminate aspects of the UN-NGO dynamic by

cultivating at least a partial understanding of the nature and degree of NGO engagement with the UN within the ECOSOC consultative program. UN interest in developing relationships with a diverse range of civil society organizations is essentially twofold: (1) to increase the diversity and number of voices heard within the international dynamic beyond state-actors and their governments and (2) to cultivate partnerships transcending traditional reliance upon state-actors in the implementation of UN initiatives such as development and humanitarian aid (Mowell 2025). However, if the UN-NGO dynamic exists more in name/theory than in actual practice (as evidenced in meaningful interactions and contributions), then substantive attainment of the latter two goals may be in doubt.

Organization of the Consultative Status Program

The UN-ECOSOC consultative status program formally accredits NGOs according to three levels, a classification regime which determines an organization's degree of access and input: general status, special status, and roster status. The level of consultative status afforded determines the ability of NGOs to circulate documents, gain access to preparatory meetings, and participate in or observe certain UN functions (UN 1999). General status is the highest level of accreditation and is afforded to the comparatively small number of organizations that are global in nature, have a range of operations relevant to all or most areas of ECOSOC activities and are perceived to be capable of making 'substantive and sustained' contributions to the UN. At the time the research was undertaken only 147 or 3.1 percent of NGOs within the consultative status program held this accreditation level. General status permits participants to submit written statements of up to 2,000 words to ECOSOC on subjects in which the organization has expertise. Many organizations which hold general status are among the world's largest, most respected and most well-known NGOs including Greenpeace, Oxfam International, Rotary International, and Save the Children.

NGOs afforded special status are those organizations with a presence in multiple countries (though perhaps not global in scope of operations) and expertise in a more narrow range of issues, but are potentially capable of making substantive contributions to the UN in several such areas. Special status affords less access and influence than general status and NGOs awarded this penultimate accreditation level are not permitted to propose items for the provisional agenda of ECOSOC but may submit written statements of up to 500 words if they so choose (Cassese 1979). Special status is the most commonly held accreditation level among

NGOs in the program, with over 75 percent holding the latter designation.

Roster status is for NGOs that are often less international in scope, usually focused on a more specialized issue area and can potentially make an occasional useful contribution in their specific field(s) of expertise. Organizations awarded roster status may submit written statements only if specifically invited to do so by the UN and the NGOs' designated representatives may only attend public meetings at the UN that are directly pertinent to their field of specialization. Roster status is the second most common type of ECOSOC consultative status with some 20 percent of organizations accredited at this level.

An assumption underlying this research is that the nature and degree of NGO participation within the consultative status program will at least somewhat reflect the level of accreditation held by the organization. For example, it is logical to expect that a larger proportion of NGOs awarded general status would be actively engaged as opposed to those organizations with special or certainly roster status due to both the wider operational scope and having substantially greater access and opportunity to participate and make some form of contribution. Concomitantly, it is likely reasonable to expect that the lowest rates of participation in the program will be among NGOs holding roster

status, as the operational scope of such organizations is the most specialized and the UN accreditation level by far the most restrictive. However, the potential contributions of organizations awarded special or roster status should not be dismissed entirely, as their larger numbers and proportional representation within the program still allow for potentially meaningful participation---particularly via NGO coalitions for example.

Research Significance

This research is significant for several reasons. Formal association with international civil society has increased as a priority at the United Nations for decades and has been described as one of the most dynamic recent developments within the UN (Alger 2002). In 1946 when the practice of formal association with global civil society was initiated, only 41 NGOs held consultative status with the UN, but the collaboration has grown exponentially in recent years with the accreditation afforded to a diverse range of over 6,000 organizations at the time of writing (USAID 2024). Yet the degree and substantive nature of the collaboration between the UN and NGOs within the consultative status program remains unclear. Little research has sought to explore the degree or types of engagement that actually occur within the dynamic. For example, how many of the consultative status organizations actually participate

and in what respects? Any attempt to understand the UN-civil society organizational dynamic and its effectiveness would be incomplete without an understanding of the dynamic within what is arguably the flagship of the UN's formal association with NGOs, the consultative status program of the UN Economic and Social Council (UN-ECOSOC).

Significantly, most research delving into the formal relationship between the UN and civil society organs has focused upon one or a small number of such organizations or has been specific to a somewhat narrow thematic focus area such as a specific human rights or development issue rather than seeking to explore macro-scale patterns of interaction with civil society (Clark et al 1998; Tallberg et al 2013). Other research has examined patterns of NGO participation for specific countries or world regions (e.g., Mowell 2017; Mowell 2023). The broad parameters of this research serve as a distinguishing quality and potential strength. Analysis of patterns among a representative, random sample of all NGOs holding UN-ECOSOC consultative status may identify macro-scale patterns within the organizational dynamic. This study is among the first to explore macro-level patterns of NGO participation within the UN-civil society relationship. The research is also among the first attempts to gauge the nature and depth of NGO participation

specifically within the UN-ECOSOC consultative status program.

Operationalization

The research was operationalized via a survey questionnaire distributed to 10 percent of all NGOs in consultative status with UN-ECOSOC. The online Integrated Civil Society Organizations (ICSO) database was the source for a list of all organizations holding consultative status with UN-ECOSOC. To be included in the selection pool, each NGO must have (1) identified English as at least one of its operational languages and (2) listed a valid email address (the means by which surveys were distributed) within the database, with over 95 percent of NGOs holding consultative status meeting both of the latter criteria. In turn, each NGO was assigned a unique number with questionnaire recipients then selected via a web-based random number generator, https://stattrek.com/. Items contained in the questionnaire were largely (with some questions participants were given an opportunity to briefly elaborate) objective and allowed for numerical analysis/comparison and also ease of response and shorter time for participants. Number lines were utilized for four items, in which respondents marked their reaction/score along a range of between 10 (high) to 0 (none/no) applicability. The number lines utilized only whole numbers, but as

many respondents indicated scores between 2 whole numbers, half scores were recorded. For example, a response indicating only the number 5 was recorded as a score of 5, but a marking/indication falling between 5 and 6 on the survey number line was recorded as 5.5. The mean score for each item was tabulated and the latter along with a graphed distribution of responses is provided in the analysis of findings. Also, 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 scoring/analysis was undertaken via division of all 21 possible number line scores into 3 equidistant ranges: scores ranging from 10-7 were deemed high; with 6.5-3.5 moderate/medium; and 3-0 low

Survey Recipient Self-De-Selection and Possible Bias

There is some indication that many---possibly most---subjects randomly selected to participate in the research may have opted out of the survey due to reluctance to report little-no activity within the UN-ECOSOC consultative status program. During the research, questions from those NGOs selected to participate in the survey addressing a range of issues were common. The topic about which the researcher was most often approached was related to the NGO's lack of participation/contribution. Five subjects requested guidance or otherwise expressed concern related to the latter issue, often framing the comments as 'many of the questions do not apply to us' as they had thus far not participated in any programs or otherwise made any contribution to the UN, despite in at least some cases having held consultative status for at least several years. Most of these subjects also offered some observation to the effect that they did not wish to 'bias' or 'skew' the data by reporting consistently low number line items---e.g. 0s or 1s). Several participants commented that they had 'done nothing' or 'had nothing to report' and thus did not feel they should participate in the study.

Replies to such comments emphasized that negative survey responses were valid, made contribution to the research, and also noted to participants that if only the NGOs which were the most active within the UN program self-report their experiences, the survey results would be skewed in favor of that perspective. Participants were reassured that activity levels among NGOs within the program appeared to vary substantially and that there were likely many other organizations with participation rates similar to their own. Additionally, it was emphasized that responses were anonymous and that the identities of participants and their NGO with which they are

affiliated would remain confidential, information which had also been stressed in the survey/consent forms and in the introductory email message. Such efforts were largely in vain as only 1 of 5 subjects conveying such questions/ concerns returned the questionnaire and that participant omitted many survey items rather than provide indications of minimal-no activity within the UN consultative status program.

The possibility must be considered that portions of the survey data compiled during the course of this research could demonstrate bias in terms of over-representation of the NGOs that have more actively participated in the UN-ECOSOC collaboration. If true, the actual overall rates of participation on the part of NGOs within the UN-ECOSOC consultative status program may be lower than numbers derived from this study indicate. There is no known reason why survey results would be biased in favor (via over-representation) of organizations not actively participating in the program as those NGOs would likely be less inclined to participate in the survey. Additionally, among those NGOs completing/submitting the survey, organizations that have had little-no engagement within the program 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 the survey findings are skewed,

it is likely in the overestimation rather than underestimation of NGO participation within the UN-ECOSOC consultative status program.

Other potential limitations related to the research must be acknowledged. Given the total number of NGOs listed as participating in the UN consultative status program, the survey completion level needed for statistical significance, the focus upon only English-speaking NGOs, and the survey response rate of just over 14 percent (i.e. NGOs which have been admitted to but failed to participate in such a prestigious UN-civil society collaboration may not be inclined to complete/submit a questionnaire drawing attention to the latter), a case study approach was undertaken and the results are not necessarily generalizable to all organizations holding consultative status with ECOSOC. Also regarding the working hypothesis, the nature and degree of NGO participation may be impacted by external factors beyond the control/ influence of the organizations such as for example the level of accreditation granted by the UN (general, special, roster) which in effect restricts the type and extent of participation. The point of the latter observation is that results conveying minimal or no participation may not necessarily reflect absence of interest or any other negative indictment of NGOs.

Survey Participants

As Table 1 illustrates, the number of surveys returned was proportionate to the overall percentage of consultative status organizations holding special accreditation status. However, among respondents, NGOs with general status were disproportionately overrepresented and those with roster status disproportionately underrepresented, to substantial degrees in both cases. The latter cannot apparently be attributed to skewed sampling as the proportion of organizations randomly selected for the study closely reflected distributions of the total NGO population across the levels of the consultative status program (general, special and roster status), seemingly confirming that the random sampling process yielded a valid, representative sample. As noted previously, it is the researcher's belief that a self-(de)selection occurred with the study wherein those NGOs with higher levels of participation (e.g. those holding general status as opposed to roster status) would be more likely to participate in the research and complete/return the survey questionnaire, and conversely those with minimal-no activity---possibly disproportionately concentrated as a pattern among roster status organizations---would be less inclined to participate in the research 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. Randomly Selected NGOs	Accreditation Levels of Survey Respondents	Accreditation Levels of all NGOs in Program
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 anonymous respondents did not identify their level of accreditation

Table 2 provides an overview of the regional and MDC/LDC distribution patterns of NGOs randomly selected to participate in the survey relative to distribution of all organizations in the consultative status program and the regional proportions of global population. The regional distributions of those organizations selected to receive the survey closely reflects the regional distributions of all NGOs in the consultative status program, additional indication of the validity and representative nature of the random sampling process. Overall, 33.9 percent of organizations randomly selected were from LDC/developing regions, while the latter constitute 38.7 percent of NGOs within the consultative status program overall. Likewise 66.1 percent of NGOs randomly selected were based in MDC/developed areas, with the latter constituting 61.3 percent of NGOs in the consultative status program overall. As conveyed in Table 2, the regional and LDC/MDC distributions of those organizations randomly selected closely mirrored regional distribution patterns of all NGOs in the program, additional indication that the sampling procedures likely yielded a sample that was a valid representation of the overall population of NGOs in the program.

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%

	Regional Distribution of 439. Randomly Selected NGOs	Regional Distribution of all NGOs w/ CS	Regional Proportion of Global Population
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%

Study Findings

Survey results were useful in establishing an understanding of various aspects of NGO participation within the UN-ECOSOC consultative status program. As one element of broader dissertation research exploring the UN-NGO dynamic, a range of objective questions were designed to explore the general nature and the degree of participation of NGOs within the formal collaboration. Survey elements and NGO responses/findings can be organized into several thematic groupings including origins of acquiring consultative status, the nature of accreditation and representation, participation, networking and communication.

Source of NGO Pursuit of Consultative Status

One questionnaire item asked participants to indicate which leader/ position within their organization was chiefly responsible for seeking consultative status with the UN. In constructing the survey, the researcher hoped that this item may help address why some NGOs within the program participate and some do not. For example, if the goal of obtaining consultative status was in most cases initiated by a board member or other person (e.g., donor or volunteer) other than a member of senior leadership in charge of day-to-day operations, perhaps lack of managerial support for the collaboration with the UN could be inferred. However, the latter was not found to be the case among respondents, with around two-thirds of NGOs indicating that senior management within their organization bore responsibility for seeking consultative status. Among the fixed-choice options the most common response was executive director with 34.4 percent, followed closely by CEO with 31.3 percent. 15.6 percent

of respondents indicated that one or more board members were primarily responsible. Participants also had the option of indicating 'other' and asked to specify the job title, an option chosen by 18.8 percent of respondents. A fairly diverse range of titles/responses were provided with president, secretary general, director of a specific division/program, or a committee or committee chair the most common responses. The conclusion drawn is that in most cases, persons in senior direct leadership/management roles of NGOs (rather than ancillary roles such as a major donor, board member or mid-level personnel) were responsible for pursuing and obtaining consultative status.

Accreditation/Representation

UN offices are geographically dispersed throughout many world regions. The largest and (via serving as the seat of the General Assembly, Security Council and many other key UN bodies), the most important UN presence is its primary headquarters in New York. The Geneva headquarters is second in size and also in importance as it is home to some 25 major UN divisions/programs including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the World Health Organization. Third in size and significance is UN headquarters

in Vienna, host to several UN agencies/programs including the International Atomic Energy Agency. Additionally, the UN maintains regional headquarters in 5 locations: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia---North Africa; Bangkok, Thailand---Asia and the Pacific; Beirut, Lebanon---Mideast and Western Asia; Nairobi, Kenya---Sub-Saharan Africa; and Santiago, Chile---Latin America and the Caribbean.

As part of the effort to discern patterns and degree of NGO participation with the UN, the survey questionnaire contained items designed to gauge levels of participation at different UN locations: each of the 3 primary UN headquarters in New York, Geneva and Vienna and also the regional offices. The first such survey item asked participants to indicate if a representative of their NGO has successfully obtained a UN grounds pass/ID (the latter is a higher standard for the designated UN representative of a NGO---rather than merely submitting names of intended representatives---as obtaining the grounds pass requires their physical presence on site and often indicates the representative actually attended a function at the site) for each location. Those indicating that representatives had obtained passes/IDs were asked to indicate the number of representatives obtaining passes/IDs for each site.

UN guidelines allow each organization holding consultative status to designate up to 7 representatives for annual passes at each of the 3 primary UN headquarters locations (up to 9 temporary passes may also be requested which are valid for up to 3 months), and up to 2 representatives for each regional UN office. It was expected that NGO-designated representatives would be concentrated in New York and the other 2 headquarters sites in descending order of site importance with far fewer representatives designated at regional offices and as illustrated in Table 3, this is precisely what the survey data reflected. 42 NGOs indicated their representatives had successfully obtained their credentials for New York, followed by 26 for Geneva and 9 for Vienna. Only 2 organizations (both based in the Mideast---one of these in Lebanon) reported credentialed representatives for Beirut, and only 1 organization (based in Africa) reported credentialed representation for Addis Ababa, with 0 reported for the remaining regional offices of the UN. The mean number of NGO designees among organizations reporting representation at the sites was highest at 5.0 in New York, followed by Geneva with 2.5 and Vienna with 1.9.

These distributions are logical in that organizations are designating representatives where there are larger numbers of UN offices/programs, larger UN staffs and consequently potentially more opportunities to participate in UN functions via their consultative status. Many of the UN's most important organs and conferences are based in New York, as is ECOSOC itself, the parent organization of the consultative status program and chief catalyst of the UN-civil society dynamic. Smaller numbers of other UN agencies/projects are headquartered in Geneva and in turn Vienna and both sites often host conferences though not at the size or frequency associated with New York. Regional UN offices have considerably smaller staffs, more narrow scope of operations and principally host projects or conferences that are specific to their respective geographical areas such as regional economic commissions. The NGOs that via their consultative status accreditation designate representatives to the regional UN offices likely are either headquartered in that region or have a significant proportion of their programs specific to the region, and this reality was reflected in the survey findings as the only respondents reporting credentialed representatives at regional offices of the UN were headquartered in the same region---if not even the same country.

In attempting to assess commitment to and participation in the consultative status program, participants were asked what total number of UN representatives within their organization will have obtained a UN grounds pass/ID (for all sites combined) in a typical year. As indicated in Table 3,

among the 55 respondents answering the question, 4.2 was the mean total. The latter was perhaps slightly higher than anticipated, but the range of responses to the survey item was considerable, with the majority of respondents indicating only 1 or 2 representatives typically obtained credentials annually, and a minority of respondents indicating numbers higher than the mean.

Table 3: Designation of un Representatives by Location and Number of Grounds Passes/Ids Reported Obtained per Site

UN Headquarters / Regional Office	N of Respondents Designating. Representatives for Site	Mean N of Reps. Obtaining ID/Grounds Pass for Site
New York	42	5.0
Geneva	26	2.5
Vienna	9	1.9

Regional Offices

Addis Ababa	1	1
Bangkok	0	0
Beirut	2	1
Santiago	0	0

Another survey item asked participants to indicate the UN site(s) at which they have participated in meetings, conferences or other functions since obtaining consultative status. As expected and indicated in Table 4, the responses closely mirrored the data for accredited representatives by UN sites. The majority of respondents (43 or 78.2 percent of responses) indicated participation at some form of event at the UN's New York headquarters, followed by Geneva (28/50.9 percent) and Vienna (11/20.0 percent) respectively. Only small numbers of respondents indicated ever having participated in any event at a UN regional site, with Santiago, Chile earning the smallest total (2/3.6 percent).

Asked to assess the overall difficulty involved in the process of accrediting their UN representatives, respondents were asked to rate the level of difficulty on a number line with 10 indicating a very high level of difficulty and 0 indicating no difficulty. As can be seen in Figure 1, the mean response among 57 answers was 4.9, which at face value would seem to indicate that the designation and credentialing of UN representatives does not pose a substantial challenge for most organizations. However, among all responses,

Table 4: CS-Accredited NGO Participation in Functions per United Nations Site

UN Headquarters / Regional Office	N of Respondents Designating. Representatives for Site (% of Responses)
New York	43 (78.2%)
Geneva	28 (50.9%)
Vienna	11 (20.0%)

Regional Offices

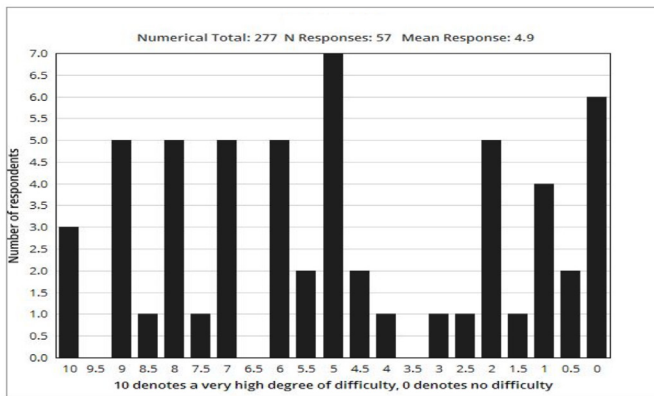|	
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	3 (5.5%)
Bangkok, Thailand	4 (7.3%)
Beirut, Lebanon	4 (7.3%)
Santiago, Chile	2 (3.6%)

20 or 35.1 percent were 7 or higher, regarded as a higher range score on the number line as constructed. The exact same number of responses, 20 or 35.1 percent denoted a low score of 0-3.5. Thus, for every organization which reported little-no difficulty with the process of designating/credentialing their organizational representatives to the UN, another organization reported high levels of difficulty. The results of this survey item may serve as a good insight into impediments to participation in that if more than one-third of program participants experience difficulty with what should be a relatively

simple process---a process explained in detail in both print and online literature made available to accredited NGOs---more complex undertakings such as conference participation and

understanding the process of providing statements and engaging with coalitions/networks of other NGOs may prove daunting.

FIGURE 1: LEVEL OF NGO DIFFICULTY IN ACCREDITING UN REPRESENTATIVES WITHIN
THE CONSULTATIVE STATUS PROGRAM

Respondents were asked to select from forced-choice options in order to best characterize the nature of their organization's UN representative(s). The strategy of including this survey item was that it may lend insight into the nature and degree of NGO participation within the consultative status program. Specifically, if very few board members or donors were designated as UN representatives, that may possibly indicate lack of support/enthusiasm from the latter segments for the collaboration, potentially helping to explain low levels of organizational participation. However, survey results indicated board members were commonly appointed as NGO's UN representatives with respondents indicating a total of 52 in the role, the

2nd most common response. The most common characterization of the nature of UN representatives was full-time employee, with 67 denoted in that role, with a tie for the 3rd most common response between donors (indicating their appointment is not uncommon) and part-time employees, each with 29 representatives in the roles. The forced-choice options for this item did perhaps shed some light on what was likely not a significant driver of lack of participation within the consultative status program as results showed board members and donors were often designated as UN representatives, implying support for and interest in the program on their part. However, forced-choice responses to this survey item did not identify

specific issues related to designation of UN representatives that may impede participation.

Participants also had the option to indicate 'other unpaid supporter' of their organization. Interestingly, the latter received the highest number of responses to the survey item with 84 (32.2 percent) of 261 total responses. This level of response for 'other' had not been anticipated and consequently participants were not asked to specify the title/nature of other UN representatives. However, some respondents did voluntarily denote the title or background with the most common responses including former employee (of various titles/responsibilities), former board member/chair, or the chair of various types of advisory committees within the organization such as a governmental affairs or public relations committee.

Participation and Networking

The questionnaire items addressing participation and networking are especially important to the contention of the exploratory hypothesis that most organizations within the consultative status program do not participate in the program in a meaningful way or make a contribution within the UN-civil society dynamic. While survey findings in general indicated somewhat low to moderate levels of activity, the totality of data derived from these survey elements does not conclusively support the hypothesis. The findings do however show

minimal communication between most NGOs and the UN or secondary entities (other UN-affiliated NGOs, foreign governments, other IGOs) and also indicate that only a minority of respondents have ever hosted/organized a meeting or other event at a UN forum and only slightly more than half have ever participated with other NGOs in any UN-related network or coalition.

Participants were asked approximately how many UN-related conferences, meetings or workshops their NGO has attended in 3 different time periods: 2005-present, 1995-2005, and pre-1995. The results for the most recent time period are potentially the most useful as the majority of organizations holding consultative status have likely acquired the accreditation within the last decade, meaning most respondents likely were not participants in the program prior. As can be seen in Table 5, 47 (75.8 percent) of 62 respondents reported their organization had participated in a UN-related function since 2005. However the mean number of UN functions attended was significantly skewed by 5 organizations which reported attending 100 or more functions—2 of these NGOs reported over 200. If data from these 5 outlier organizations is omitted, the resulting mean number of UN functions attended drops to 13.6, a figure that likely more closely reflects the reality of most NGOs that do participate in the program and a number that is more consistent and realistic in comparison with the mean numbers reported for earlier

time periods. The decline in number/ mean of responses almost certainly reflects that fewer survey respondents had attained consultative status prior to 2005 or 1995, rather than respondents becoming increasingly active over the time period, as upon examination of the 47 NGOs indicating activity at some point since 2005, most did not hold accreditation prior that that point. Interestingly, the considerably smaller mean number of UN functions attended prior to 1995 would be consistent with the significantly more limited number of formal outlets/forums for UN interaction with civil society that would have been available in the early 1990s and prior.

Another survey item related to participation, asked a short series of questions as to whether NGOs had made written or verbal statements at a UN forum and in either case if they had been asked by the UN to do so. Perhaps the most important contribution that consultative status organizations can make within the UN framework and the most significant form of expression available to them is to present written or verbal statements related to their fields of expertise. Further, being asked by a UN body to present a position statement on an issue implies a valuation of NGO input on the part of the UN and also conveys that the organizations within the program are viewed by the UN as relevant, competent and capable of making a worthwhile contribution to its body of work. Accordingly, gauging the number of written or verbal statements and the degree to which they were actually requested by the UN offers a meaningful glimpse into the nature and degree of participation of consultative status organizations.

Table 5: Participation in UN conferences, meetings and workshops by organization holding consultative status

Time Period	N Respondents Not Listing 0	Mean N per Respondent*
2005-present	47	27.5* (19.4/13.6*)
1995-2005	16	14.7
Pre-1995	6	9.5

*The mean number of UN functions attended per respondent for the period 2005-present is skewed by a small percentage of respondents who reported abnormally large numbers: 5 NGOs reported 100 or more, with 2 of those reporting 200 or more. If data from the latter 2 organizations is omitted, the mean drops to 19.4 and is further reduced to 13.6 if data from all 5 outliers is excluded. Such statistical outliers were not present in data reported for the earlier time periods.

A majority of respondents, 38 (61.2 percent), indicated that they had presented a written statement. Of the latter, only 24 (38.7percent of all survey respondents) had been asked by the UN to do so. Less than half of all survey respondents, 25 (40.3 percent), indicated that they had made a verbal statement at a UN forum. Only 18 respondents (29.0 percent) reported having been asked by the UN to present a verbal statement. It is curious that only a small percentage of respondents indicated ever being asked by the UN to present written or verbal statements. Critical interpretations of the latter could include a variety of possible conclusions including: (1) exponential growth of the consultative status program and the number of NGOs participating means that there are more organizations within the dynamic than can be effectively used/consulted as originally intended; (2) wide variations could exist in terms of the real/perceived credibility and competence of NGOs with many of the organizations not deemed worthy by the UN of being solicited for input; (3) many of the NGOs awarded consultative status have such a narrow or obscure focus that there is little they can effectively contribute to the often broader issues with which the UN is concerned---which in turn raises the question of why such organizations were admitted to the program; (4) perhaps ECOSOC and other UN organs understand that many consultative status organizations---especially smaller NGOs---either cannot (e.g., financially) or will not participate and thus do not bother with formal requests soliciting their participation. It is worth noting that given the general wording of the survey item, respondents may have broadly interpreted the wording inquiring if they had "been asked" to provide position statements to include general invitations sent out en masse to many organizations via conference announcements, which means the number of organizations that have specifically been approached by the UN to provide statements is potentially lower than the survey data suggests.

Asked if their organization had ever organized or hosted a meeting or other event at the UN, only 26 respondents (41.9 percent) of 62 to submit the survey questionnaire indicated in the affirmative. Asked if their organization had ever participated in any way with any NGO network(s)/coalition(s) active within the UN framework, the response rate was only slightly better with 32 respondents (51.6 percent) indicating that they had done so in the past. The latter survey item also asked respondents to provide the names of the network(s) or coalition(s) with which they had participated. Table 6 provides a comprehensive list of all such groups identified by the 18 respondents providing feedback. A total of 43 networks/coalitions were listed across a diverse range of policy/issue

areas including human rights and social issues, democracy, development, and environmental issues. While some of the networks/coalitions were temporary in nature, intended to serve a purpose for a specific conference or that otherwise only existed briefly, many are long-term in nature such as many of the standing UN groups for which multiple respondents indicated an affiliation (e.g. NGO Major Group).

One of the survey items designed to determine how NGOs perceive the UN-civil society dynamic asked participants to score on a number line the degree to which they felt that the UN values the participation of their organization, the results of which are provided in Figure 2. Among 57 respondents in total, the mean score was a somewhat mediocre 5.9, conveying that many NGOs do not feel valued to a great degree by the UN. A large number of respondents did in fact feel that their participation was valued, as among the responses, 23 or 40.4 percent scored 7 or higher on the number line, indicating a high degree of

valuation as perceived by the NGOs. The largest number of responses, 24 or 42.1 percent, fell within the moderate range of a score of 3.5 to 6.5, with more respondents selecting a mid-range score of 5 than any other point on the number line. A total of 10 respondents or 17.6 percent of all surveys submitted indicated a score of 3 or less, 4 of which (7.0 percent) indicated a number line score of 1 or less.

Using a number line to illicit responses, participants were asked to what degree their organization networked with other organizations in the program. As noted in Figure 3, among 60 responses, the mean score was a somewhat tepid 5.5 on a number line scale of 10. Nearly half of respondents (28 or 46.7 percent) indicated a score of 7 or higher, denoting a higher degree of networking with other NGOs. However, the majority of responses fell within the moderate (13 or 21.7 percent) or low (19 or 31.7 percent) range, with 6 respondents indicating a score of 0, denoting no networking-related interaction whatsoever.

Table 6: UN Civil Society Networks/Coalitions identified by NGOs as groups with which they have participated

Arab Forum for Environment/Devt.	NGO Committee on Social Devt.
Arab Network for Environment/Devt.	NGO Committee on CSW (3)
CEDAW	NGO Major Group (2)

Civil Society Network	The 3 Right-holder Group
Climate Change Network – Nigeria	Trade Union Organizations
Coalition for the Rights of the Child	UN DPI Office
CONGO	UN Interagency Network (2)
CONGO Committee on Child Rights	UN Women (2)
CRIN	UNAC Coalition
CSD Civil Society Forum	UNEP-TUNZA
CSW-GO	UNESCWA Beirut Office
ECE Forum – Geneva	UNFEM (2)
Equality Now	UNPFA
Equality without Reservation	VAWG
Global Campaign-Equal Nationality	Water Event - Geneva
Global Compact	Women in Conflict Environments
Human Settlements/UN Habitat	Women Learning Partnership
IANSA	Women's NGOs
Int'l Union for Conservation of Nature	World Mission Foundation
KARAMA (End Violence…Arab Women)	World We Want PSG
National Endowment for Democracy	WWSF - Geneva
NGO COA	

FIGURE 2: DEGREE TO WHICH CCONSULTATIVE STATUS ORGANIZATIONS FEEL
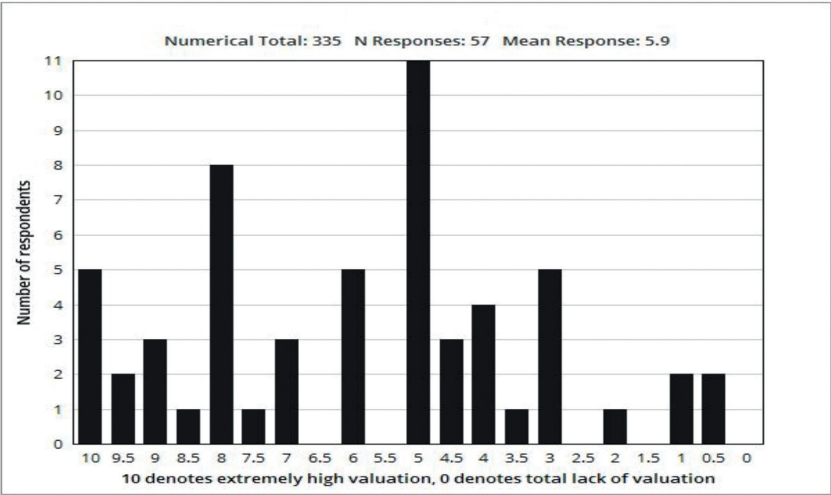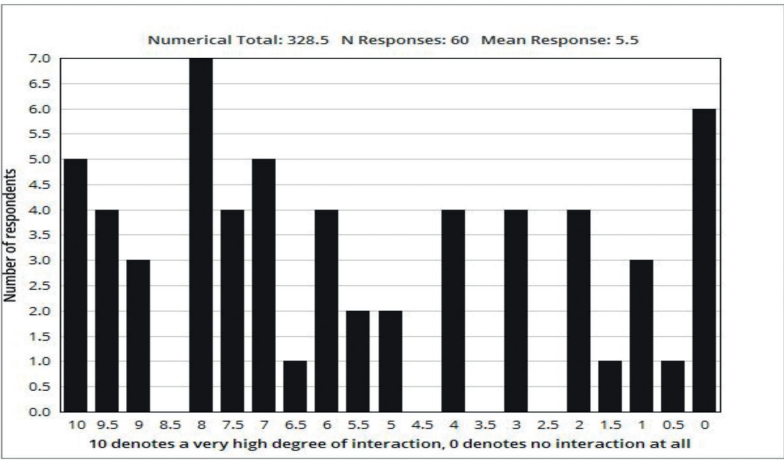THE UN VALUES THEIR PARTICIPATION

FIGURE 3: DEGREE TO WHICH NGOs REPORTED NETWORKING WITH OTHER
ORGANIZATIONS IN THE C.S. PROGRAM

Communication

NGOs were asked if their organization had ever communicated with the UN since obtaining consultative status, excluding the routine required submission of quadrennial reports. The goal of the latter survey item was obviously to help gauge degrees and patterns of participation of NGOs within the program. Among the 61 participants answering the

question, a large majority---75.4 percent---indicated that they had communicated with the UN. However, the manner in which organizations communicated and the frequency of communication varied widely.

Several survey items sought to explore the nature and frequency of communication among consultative status organizations. The goal of the latter was that such questions would serve as a means of assessing the nature and levels of NGO participation and in general the findings showed minimal/infrequent communication for most organizations and zero communication for a large minority. The first such survey item asked participants if since obtaining consultative status they have been contacted by (1) other NGOs affiliated with the United Nations, (2) foreign governments, or (3) a UN agency/office initiated contact and if so, how many times in total.

The findings, as displayed in Table 7, indicate that only a minority of respondents had been directly contacted by any of the latter entities and in those cases, the frequency of contact has in general not been high. A total of 23 respondents indicated their organization had been directly contacted by either other UN-affiliated NGOs or by a UN agency/office. The mean number of contacts by other UN-affiliated NGOs was 61.7, but this number was skewed to a substantial degree by a single respondent claiming to

have been contacted more than 1,000 times. If the latter outlier is removed, the mean number of contacts reported from other UN-affiliated NGOs is 19.0, likely more representative of reality for those organizations in the consultative status program. The mean number of times respondents reported being contacted by a UN agency/office was 17.3. A more modest total of 14 respondents reported being contacted by foreign governments, a mean total of 20.1 times.

In an effort to understand, the nature of communication that was occurring, respondents indicating that their organization had been directly contacted by one of the latter sources were asked to specify the purpose of the communication via forced-choice options: (1) general information sharing/introductions, (2) collaboration/sharing of research, (3) specific question about UN process, (4) specific question about the NGOs organizational scope/mission. The most common responses were *for general information sharing/introductions and collaboration/sharing of research which* received 34 and 28 responses respectively. *Specific question about UN processes or the NGO itself* each received a more modest 19 responses. Participants also had the option of indicating "other" and were asked to briefly specify the nature/purpose of the communication. A total of 7 respondents indicated "other" and those responses centered around the following topics: coalition issues,

Table 7: Source and frequency of entities contacting consultative status
organizations

Source of Contact	N Respondents Reporting Contact	Mean N Contacts per Respondent*
UN-affiliated NGOs	23	61.7* (19.0*)
Foreign Governments	14	20.1
UN Agency/Office	23	17.3

*The mean number of times contacted by UN-affiliated NGOs is skewed by one respondent's claim of having been contacted over 1,000 times. If data derived from this single outlier is omitted, the mean drops to 19.0

donations/fundraising, joint statements/ events, and position papers.

In an effort to gauge patterns of communication with the UN, survey participants were asked to indicate which of 4 forms of contact (if any) they had used to pose a question/request to the UN and how many times they had used each medium: email, telephone, fax, writing. Relatively small numbers of respondents indicated that they had communicated with the UN using any of the mediums. Email was the most commonly used method of communicating with the UN, with 34 respondents (54.9 percent of those returning the survey) indicating its use for a mean of 7.1 times each. Given that most respondents appear to have held consultative status for a number of years, the frequency of email communication for most does not appear to be great and even more infrequent for other mediums. Only

19 respondents (30.6 percent) reported having called the UN--a mean number of 5.4 times each. 15 respondents (24.2 percent) indicated having written to the UN--a mean number of 5.9 times each. As expected, communication by fax machine was the least common medium with only 8 respondents (12.9 percent) indicated they had done so--a mean of 4.9 times each.

This survey item also used number lines to ask participants to rate their level of satisfaction with the speed and substance of the communication experience with the UN for each of the 4 mediums with 10 denoting complete satisfaction and 0 complete lack of satisfaction, the results of which are presented in Figures 4-7. Although a small percentage of respondents indicated low scores denoting dissatisfaction, the mean responses for each category were all mid-range and in each category there were more scores

denoting high satisfaction levels than the opposite. Mean scores were comparable across all categories with satisfaction levels reported highest for fax (6.5), email (6.4), and writing (6.3) respectively, with telephone (5.6) the least satisfying medium for communicating with the UN reported by the NGOs. Survey findings suggest that most NGOs do not perceive significant communication problems to exist with the UN and accordingly, the latter issue is likely not a substantial impediment to participation within the program for most organizations.

The range and distribution of responses to most survey items related to participation, networking and communication indicates that a small percentage of organizations in the consultative status program are very active, most organizations are minimally-moderately active or active only occasionally, and a substantial minority do not appear to participate in any way. The latter observations may vary somewhat depending upon the measure being utilized. For example, less than half of respondents had ever presented a verbal statement at a UN function and only around one-third had ever been asked to provide either a written or verbal statement. Less than half of organizations submitting the survey reported ever having networked with other consultative status organizations and frequency of communication and meeting attendance related to the program overall appear to be minimal for most NGOs. However, other indications exist denoting at least moderate levels of participation, such as the fact that more than half of consultative status organizations reported participating in a UN-related network/coalition or having presented a written statement at some point (though both may be infrequent activities for most NGOs). Also, despite evidence indicating a somewhat tepid degree of overall engagement, most organizations feel that the UN values their participation to a moderate-high degree.

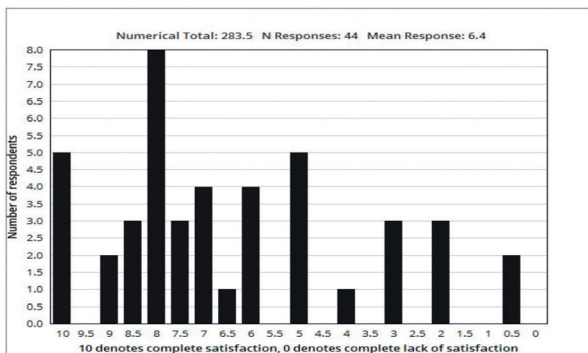FIGURE 4: LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH EMAIL COMMUNICATION WITH THE UN

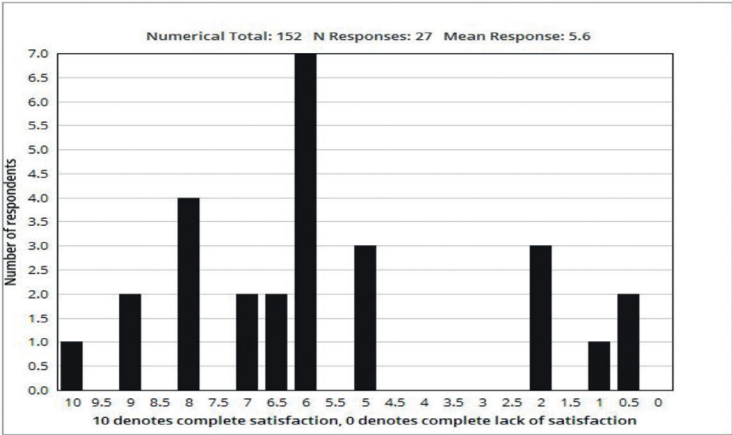FIGURE 5: LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH TELEPHONE COMMUNICATION WITH
THE UN

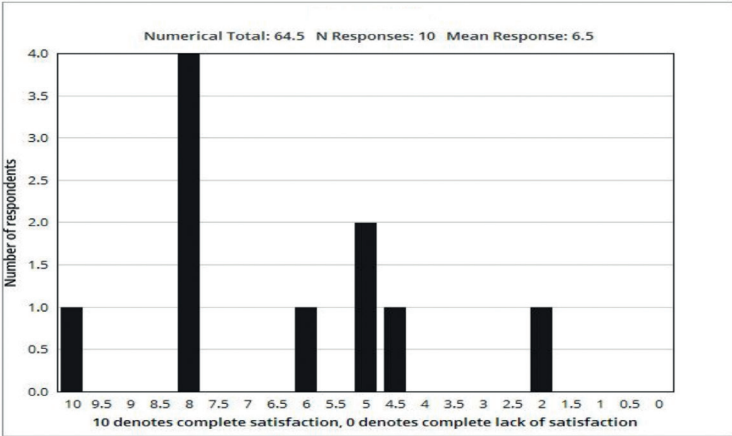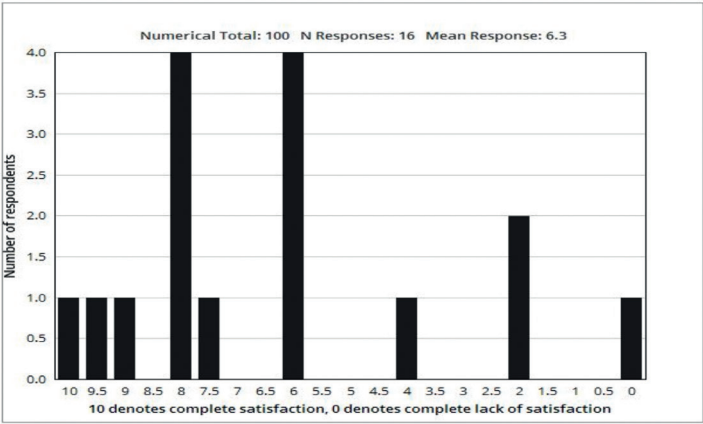FIGURE 6: LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH FAX COMMUNICATION WITH THE UN

FIGURE 7: LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH WRITTEN COMMUNICATION WITH THE UN

Conclusion and Possible Directions for Future Research

Some elements of the study findings produced expected results. For example, in the early conceptualization stage of this research it was obvious that significant variations existed in terms of NGO participation levels within the consultative status program. Multiple NGOs with which the researcher was personally familiar had either lost their consultative status through inactivity or were barely retaining the status via an occasional modicum of effort every few years. However, simultaneously it was clear that some other organizations were active and successful participants within the program. The latter observations appear to be largely supported by the survey results. It had also been expected that UN headquarters in New York would be the focal point of NGO activity such as accreditation of representatives and attendance of conferences, followed in distant second place by Geneva with minimal-no participation at other UN sites and this precise pattern was reflected in the survey data. Additionally, the researcher's impression was that substantive and regular communication was not occurring between organizations within the consultative status program and the UN, foreign governments, or with other NGOs in the program and this was largely (though not uniformly) evidenced in the survey results.

Other survey outcomes were unexpected. Respondents' perceptions of UN valuation of their contributions via the consultative status program

were substantially higher than initially anticipated. Organizations reported participating in NGO networks/coalitions and also presenting written statements to greater (though still somewhat modest overall) degrees than expected. Broadly, although levels of participation within the consultative status program could reasonably be described as anemic for many, possibly most accredited NGOs, survey results in general indicated somewhat higher levels of activity than initially anticipated. Survey results revealed enough (if often modest) activity that the hypothesis which predicted that most NGOs in consultative status with UN-ECOSOC do not participate in any meaningful way or make a contribution to the UN goal of engaging with international civil society cannot be supported. However, many findings do cast doubt on the frequency and depth of participation of many NGOs within the consultative status program.

Analysis of the survey questionnaire results yielded insight concerning the type and degree of participation of NGOs. The majority (75.4 percent) of respondents indicated they had communicated with the UN since admission to the program though the survey results cannot specify the frequency or substance of the communication. The majority of respondents indicated the successful appointment of one or more UN representatives and attendance at a minimum of 1

UN conference/meeting, though both of the latter activities tend to be confined to either the UN's New York or Geneva headquarters and the frequency of credentialing representatives and attending UN functions appears to be modest for the majority of NGOs. While most respondents (61.2 percent) reported having presented a written statement at the UN, the frequency of the latter could not be judged and only a minority of respondents reported ever presenting a verbal statement (40.3 percent) or having been asked by the UN to present a written (38.7 percent) or verbal (29.0 percent) statement. Only slightly more than half (51.6 percent) of respondents indicated their organization had ever participated in any NGO network/coalition at the UN and less than half (41.9 percent) reported their organization ever having organized/hosted a meeting or other event at a UN forum.

While the study did not provide a complete picture, the information it did yield seems to indicate that a small minority of organizations in the consultative status program are involved to a substantial degree and regularly participate in some way, a (perhaps larger) minority of organizations are mostly to entirely disengaged---either never having participated in the first place or withdrawing from active participation at some point, and a majority of NGOs are engaged only to a minimal-to-moderate degree or only sporadically participate over the

course of time that they have been in the program. A range of possibilities exist in potentially explaining the latter pattern including the following examples: (1) some NGOs were primarily concerned with prestige/credibility derived from an official association with the UN and never intended to make meaningful contributions; (2) some NGOs may have initially had the intention to participate but were unable to realize any intrinsic benefit to their organization from the affiliation and consequently either minimized or ceased their efforts to participate; (3) some may have had largely or entirely extrinsic motives and at least initially sought to contribute expertise/perspective rather than derive benefits, but a range of financial or logistical barriers impeded their ability to participate; (5) those organizations that are larger, possess more resources and that are truly international in their scope of operations, are much better positioned to participate in the consultative status program than smaller organizations with less resources. As many questions remain, it is the researcher's hope that this foundational study will help pave a path for further analysis of the substance and depth of the UN's collaboration with civil society.

As an exploratory study, this research has shed light on some aspects of the UN-NGO dynamic within the ECOSOC consultative status program. The study has also helped to identify areas of interest that might hopefully be addressed in future research, though definitive answers to some questions may prove illusive. Future survey/interview research into this issue are almost certain to face the same issue of self-de-selection bias in that NGOs with limited or no participation in the program (which may be the majority of organizations) will likely be less inclined to participate, thus skewing the results to reflect greater degrees of activity than exist in reality for most NGOs. Additionally, what constitutes "substantive" or "meaningful" interaction between an IGO and a civil society organ is subjective and may prove difficult to define and measure. Yet if the UN and other IGOs seek to project an image of active engagement with NGOs and other vestiges of international civil society (i.e. as a means of conveying institutional diversification and democratization---beyond participation of solely state actors), then efforts should be undertaken the assess the veracity and legitimacy of such organizational dynamics. For example, a potentially worthwhile direction for further qualitative research into this subject could entail obtaining lists of designated UN representatives of NGOs in the consultative status program and undertaking open-ended interviews with the subjects to solicit their opinions and experiences related to the program and the manner in which their NGO has participated or reasons why they have failed to do

so. Also, other intergovernmental organizations including for example the European Union and Organization of American States also have formalized relationships with NGOs and it would be worthwhile to examine other such dynamics to assess the nature and degree of IGO-civil society engagement.

Declaration of authorship roles

BD Mowell: Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Software, Supervision, Writing - Original Draft/Reviewing and editing, Validation, Visualization.

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Appendix A – Survey Questionnaire Items

1. What is your classification as an NGO in consultative status with the UN?
   General Status (   ) _____
   Special Status   (   ) _____
   Roster Status   (   ) _____   Do you feel your present classification is appro
   priate? Y ___ N ___

2. Within your organization, who was most responsible for seeking UN Con-
sultative Status?
   CEO _____
   Executive Director _____
   Board Member(s) _____
   Other (please specify title _____) _____

3. Please indicate if a designated representative of your organization has suc-
cessfully obtained a UN Grounds Pass/ID for each of the following UN head-
quarters/offices …
   New York Y ___ N___ If Yes, number of representatives obtaining grounds
   pass/ID: _____
   Geneva   Y ___ N___ If Yes, number of representatives obtaining grounds
   pass/ID: _____
   Vienna   Y ___ N___ If Yes, number of representatives obtaining grounds
   pass/ID: _____

Regional Offices

   Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Y ___ N___ If Yes, # of representatives obtaining
   pass/ID: _____
   Bangkok, Thailand Y ___ N___ If Yes, # of representatives obtaining grounds
   pass/ID: _____
   Beirut, Lebanon Y ___ N___ If Yes, # of representatives obtaining grounds
   pass/ID: _____
   Santiago, Chile Y ___ N___ If Yes, number of representatives obtaining
   pass/ID: _____

4. In a typical year what total number of representatives of your organization
will have completed accreditation and obtained a UN Grounds Pass: _____

5. At which of the following UN headquarters/offices has your organization participated in meetings/conferences or some other function?

New York _____
Geneva   _____
Vienna   _____

Regional Offices

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia _____
Bangkok, Thailand _____
Beirut, Lebanon _____
Santiago, Chile _____

How would you assess the overall ease/difficulty of designating and accrediting your organization's representatives to the UN?
(10 denotes a very high degree of difficulty, 0 denotes no difficulty)
10----------9----------8----------7----------6----------5----------4----------3----------2----------1--------0

6. Which of the following best characterizes the nature of your designated UN representatives?

Full-time employee(s) of your NGO _____ (# in this category _____)
Part-time employee(s) of your NGO_____ (# in this category _____)
Board member(s) of your NGO _____ (# in this category _____)
Donor(s) to your NGO _____ (# in this category _____)
Other unpaid supporter(s) of your NGO _____ (# in this category _____)

7. Approximately how many UN conferences/meetings/workshops has your organization attended in the following periods:

2005-present: _____
1995-2005: _____
Pre-1995: _____

8. Aside from attending conferences has your organization…

Presented a written statement at the UN? Yes____ No____
Presented a verbal statement at the UN? Yes____ No____
Been asked by UN to present a written statement? Yes_____ No_____
Been asked by UN to present a verbal statement? Yes_____ No_____

9. To what degree do you feel that the UN values the participation of your NGO? (10 denotes extremely high valuation, 0 denotes total lack of valuation)
10----------9----------8----------7----------6----------5----------4----------3----------2----------1---------0

10. Has your organization ever organized/hosted an event (e.g., meeting among NGOs) at the UN?
Yes_____ No_____

11. To what degree has your organization networked with other NGOs in Consultative Status with the UN? (10 denotes a very high degree of interaction, 0 denotes no interaction at all)
10----------9----------8----------7----------6----------5----------4----------3----------2----------1---------0

12. Has your organization ever participated in any NGO network(s)/coalition(s) active within the UN framework? Y_____ N_____ Name(s) of network(s)/coalition(s):

13. After obtaining your accreditation, has your NGO ever communicated with the UN (not counting submission of quadrennial reports)?
Yes _____
No _____

14. Since you obtained Consultative Status have any of the following directly contacted you?
UN-affiliated NGOs   Y_____(estimated # of times: _____)
No_____
Foreign governments   Y_____(estimated # of times: _____)
No _____
UN agency/office Y _____(estimated # of times: _____) No _____

If yes, for what purpose did the other NGO(s) contact you (check all that apply):
General information sharing/introductions _____
Collaboration/sharing of research _____
Specific question about UN process _____
Specific question about your NGOs mission _____
Other (please specify_____) _____

15. To what degree has your organization communicated with the UN with a question/request via the following mediums? (**below each please rate level of**

satisfaction with the speed/substance of reply from UN: 10 denotes complete satisfaction, 0 denotes complete lack of satisfaction)

Have you emailed the UN? Yes _____ No _____If yes, how many times: ____

   10----------9----------8----------7----------6----------5----------4----------3----------2----------1---------0

Have you called the UN? Yes _____ No _____If yes, how many times: _____

   10----------9----------8----------7----------6----------5----------4----------3----------2----------1---------0

Have you faxed the UN? Yes _____ No _____If yes, how many times: _____

   <10----------9----------8----------7----------6----------5----------4----------3----------2----------1---------0