



Yasmin Almedia Lobato Morais, (2021)
Globalization and the Sustainable Development Goals: Interactions between Global Civil Society and the United Nations, London School of Economics Undergraduate Political Review, 4(2), 56-75

Globalization and the Sustainable Development Goals: Interactions between Global Civil Society and the United Nations

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Abstract

With the onset of globalization, topics that gain international attention and the way decisions are made on the international level have changed noticeably. The international development agenda is now influenced, monitored and implemented by a wide array of actors. Civil Society Organizations are among them. They have conquered unprecedented opportunities to voice their concerns at international forums, take part in decisions, and assist in their implementation. This paper discusses the extent to which global civil society is included in the construction of the international development agenda. To examine this phenomenon, it focuses on the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations, a process which included various civil society actors. Four main criteria are evaluated in this analysis: (1) issue framing; (2) position shifting; (3) goal formulation and (4) influence of future procedures. Results found were varied and pointed to other questions and trends that must be addressed in future research.

Keywords: Globalization. Global Civil Society. Sustainable Development Goals. International Development Agenda. United Nations.

Introduction and Methods

As we witness unprecedented global change, topics that gain international attention and the way decisions are made on the international level have changed dramatically. Because



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of globalization, international politics is being influenced by a diverse agenda, rather than just being concerned with traditional state-related matters such as security and conflict resolution. This trend has been enhanced by the advent of social media, which has made it possible for citizens and grassroots movements to influence political and diplomatic decisions.

In this paper, I present a description of how, in the context of globalization, civil society actors have influenced international politics, focusing on the consultation process that led to the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations. In the context of this paper, civil society refers to a group of citizens who advocate for a given cause; this includes associations, institutes, foundations, research groups and other similar organizations. I have chosen the UN due to its historic prominence in international development agenda discourse, seeing as it is the main international forum to address such issues, and because the UN has expressed the importance of global civil society participation in creating and implementing the global development agenda.

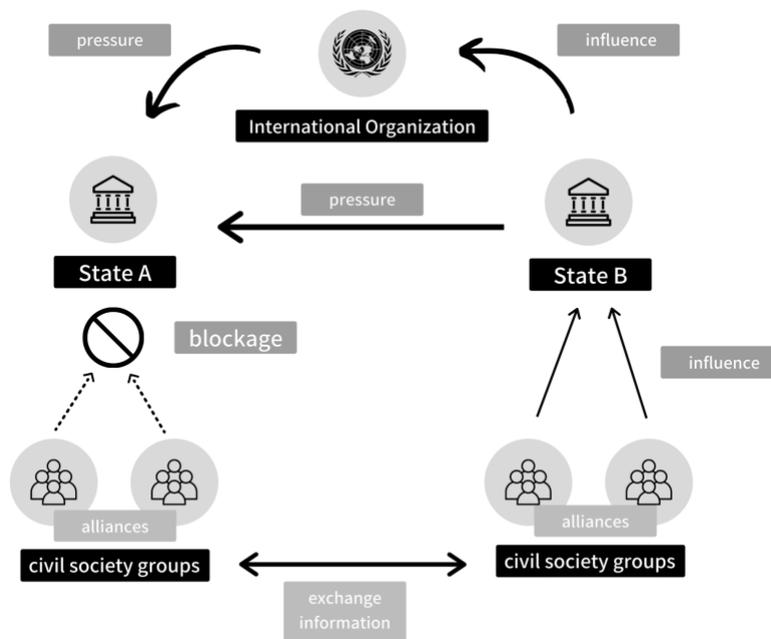
This paper is based for the most part on a literature review that includes the authors Rosenau (1992), Keane (2003), Tarrow (2005), Colás (2002), and Spini (2011). When addressing the relationship between the UN negotiation processes and CSOs, my analysis relies chiefly on secondary sources collected from the UN Online Database (meeting registration forms, meeting recordings (UN Web TV), feedback reports, meeting minutes and General Assembly resolutions) and on a literature review of scholars focused on the institution and its interaction with transnational actors – mainly Colás (2002), McKeon (2009), and Palmer (2015). To illustrate the UN's relation to global civil society, I focus on the SDGs consultation process, which took place mainly through the so-called Open Working Group of the General Assembly on the Sustainable Development Goals, between 2012 and 2015. Lastly, I reflect on whether those consultations were effective in giving civil society a voice to express its concerns and to assist in the implementation of the Goals. The central question of this paper is: did Global Civil Society influence negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda? Four main criteria are evaluated to answer this question: (1) issue framing; (2) position shifting; (3) goal formulation and (4) influence of future procedures. These criteria were developed by Sénit (2019). It is important to point out that this paper explores results of research carried out at the undergraduate level, with all its limitations. The questions raised by this are ones I would like to address as I continue my studies in the field.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are also known as 'Non-Governmental Organizations' (INGOs), but the second term is contested by international development agencies, as it does not describe what those organizations are. Rather, it describes what they are not (UNDP 2015). For that reason, I have chosen to use the term 'Civil Society' and its variations in this paper. 'Civil society' can be characterized through Hegel's political trilogy theory (Spini 2011: 17), as a third actor, besides family and state; it is a 'space where individuals establish social bodies for the pursuit of particular interests'. The expression 'global civil society', however, is a 'neologism of the 1990s', a decade marked by the end of communist regimes, an increasing number of independent states, the collapse of major state powers and a new multipolar global order. In fact, nearly 90 per cent of international CSOs have

been formed since 1970 (Keane 2003: 5).

As global civil society emerges, it transforms the international political dynamic, making it more interconnected, complex, and pluralized. Keck and Sikkink's 'Boomerang Model' (1998 *apud* Tarrow 2005), shows how this process works. First, Civil Society Organizations are formed. In some instances, they can be in touch with and influence their states, and in other instances, their influence is blocked by their national governments or legal frameworks. In all instances, they are able to share information with each other. As a result, they externalize their political pressure by referring to International Organizations (IOs), which then serve as an umbrella resource to combine civil society efforts and link them to states worldwide. Such pressure also comes in the shape of requirements to adopt the policies of international institutions. Some states continue to resist pressure, while others work in conjunction with CSOs.

Figure 1: Boomerang Model



Source: Adapted by author from Tarrow (2005: 146)

For Kissling and Nanz (2008: 3), organized civil society serves as a 'transmission belt between a global citizenry and the institutions of global governance'. This transmission belt operates in two complementary ways: it gives a voice to citizens' concerns and channels them into the deliberative process of international organizations, and it makes the internal decision-making processes of international organizations more transparent. To fulfill these two roles, civil society organizations need to exercise a certain level of influence.

International institutions such as the United Nations are increasingly feeling the effects of global civil society (Keane: 2013). The number of CSOs accredited by the UN and

represented at UN Conferences has risen significantly since the Stockholm Conference on the Environment in 1972 (Colás: 2002), and it is clear that global civil society has taken up space for participation and brought attention to pressing global issues.

The United Nations and Global Civil Society

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established the terms for CSO accreditation within the United Nations system, determining many of its main rules and features (Willems 2000 *apud* Colás 2002). Under UN's Charter Article 71, conditions were set up for CSOs to gain consultative status and, therefore, be able to participate in international conferences on various topics, such as the environment (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), human rights (Vienna, 1993) and women's rights (Beijing, 1995), which have been regarded as representative public spaces of global civil society (Colás, 2002). Conditions included in Article 71 include accountability measures, administrative transparency, a broad geographical reach, and issue relevance to the UN's repertoire (Colás, 2002).

In its report 'A Renewed Global Partnership for Development' (2013), the UN reflected on the creation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)¹ and proposed changes to encourage more contributions from non-state actors. For context, the idea of a global partnership for development was conceived at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000 (UN, 2013). During the summit, member states agreed 'to create an environment - at the national and global levels alike which is conducive to development and to the elimination of poverty' (UN 2013: 3), and the Millennium Development Goal 8 (MDG 8) was created as the strategy to ensure global partnerships.

The UN acknowledges, however, that, despite the virtues of proposing a global and unified development agenda, MDG 8 presented several omissions in its scope (UN, 2013), for at least three main reasons mentioned in the report. First, it called for only developed countries to address the issues presented in the remaining goals, instead of catalyzing collective and multilateral action. Second, it did not integrate other international human rights commitments (previously established by the UN Charter and the Declaration on the Right to Development, for instance). Last (and most relevant to this paper), MDG 8 'did not reflect the *important role of other actors* in development cooperation, such as *private philanthropic foundations, civil society* and other new forms of cooperative and collective actions' (UN 2013: 6, my emphasis). After presenting these three reasons for the merely partial success of MDG 8, the report suggests that a renewed global partnership for development should focus on the inclusion of new actors in order to enhance the voice of global civil society as a whole, focusing on the poorest and most vulnerable in international norm-setting, monitoring and accountability bodies led by the United Nations (UN 2013).

One year after a report encouraging partnerships with the private sector and civil society, in 2003, the Secretary-General invited civil society representatives to discuss current practices and make recommendations (McKeon 2009). They expressed frustration about their governments' lack of support and response to their concerns surrounding agreed-upon international obligations. In a report submitted to the UNSG in June 2004, four main

recommendations were laid out. First, to 'reinterpret multilateralism to mean multi-constituencies', as a way to include civil society (Mckeon 2009: 165). Second, to 'realize the full power of partnerships', as they are important to close the implementation hiatus by combining the complementary influence and capabilities of 'diverse actors'. Third, to 'link the local with the global', as only a true integration with local operations will ensure that the goals are achieved in the global scale. Lastly, for partnerships to 'help tackle democracy deficits and strengthen global governance', by tapping into new information, communication technologies (ICT), civil society networks and engaged citizens.

The outcome of these consultations and recommendations was anti-climactic, failing to ensure meaningful participation of global civil society.

The lack of success in achieving the MDGs could be attributed to the UN's failing to include civil society in the process, as its participation is indispensable to making the goals happen, as the organization itself has stated. With that in mind, the UN has stated that the engagement of civil society is critical – success to build and implement the new agenda will depend on the UN's power to 'inspire and mobilize essential actors, new partnerships, key constituencies and the broader global citizenry' (UN 2014: 15). In 2012, when it was decided that the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) would replace the 8 Millennium Development Goals of the previous 15-year rounds, this aim was put into practice. Development planning would follow three main avenues: political, financial and public. The third avenue (public) is the focus of this paper, as it was created with an extensive consultation process (Palmer 2015) in mind.

To lead such a process, the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on the Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) was created. Its consultations took place over 16 months and offered various opportunities for civil society organizations and individuals to 'provide online written comment concerning development priorities and the goals and they were formulated'. The OWG was responsible for drafting the SDGs in a final report, submitted in August 2014, containing 177 goals and 167 targets. The final list, adopted in September 2015 is very close to the recommendations made by the OWG (Palmer 2015). Given the importance of the OWG to grasp whether the UN consultations with global civil society were effective, I will outline the main aspects involved in the participation mechanisms promoted by it.

Global Civil Society and the Creation of the 2030 Agenda

As shown in the previous section, the United Nations has acknowledged the importance of global civil society to create an effective development agenda.

Along with the OWG mentioned above, in July 2013, the High-level Political Forum (HLPL) was created under the umbrella of the General Assembly and the ECOSOC as the 'central UN platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' (Palmer 2005: 267), and to 'autonomously establish and maintain effective coordination mechanisms for participation' (UN 2013: 5). But the main strategy the United Nations used to stimulate civil society participation remained the Open Working Group, formed by 30 member states delegations with representatives from one to four member states in each. A full list of member states and groupings is included in Appendix 3 (UN, 2013).

Furthermore, the UN thematic Major Groups were defined during the Rio +20 Conference to facilitate broad consultations with non-state actors. They also created the online SDG E-Inventory, a platform for interested stakeholders to outline and disseminate their insights and recommendations for the new global goals. Along with individual contributions, these actions culminated in the Thematic Clusters & Steering Committees, which then formed the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development, which in turn was ultimately responsible for submitting a proposal for Sustainable Development Goals on the 68th session of the General Assembly (September 2013).

It was emphasized that the post-2015 development agenda should be created based on the principles of transparency, multi-stakeholder partnerships and shared responsibilities (UN, 2013). Appendix 1 shows some of the numerous consultations made with civil society actors between the years 2012 and 2014.

In response to the consultations that took place between 2012 and 2014 with Major Groups and other stakeholders and through the OWG, the UN outlined several further opportunities to continue receiving inputs from global civil society about the new development agenda. Appendix 2 summarizes the main steps in this process.

The mechanism created to listen to the inputs of global civil society actors during the creation of the SDGs reflects Kissling and Nanz's idea of the 'transmission belt', whereby global citizens are connected to global governance institutions. Global civil society's concerns and recommendations are then heard and channeled into the global institutions' decision processes.

Results

With this context and process in mind, I will now focus on answering the central question I posed at the start of this paper: did Global Civil Society influence the negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda? Given that only 250 NGOs participated in the first United Nations global summit in Stockholm in 1972 and almost 10,000 civil society representatives were accredited access to Rio +20 in 2012 (Sénit 2019: 2), have those voices influenced the negotiations of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda? If so, how?

To answer this question, I will first present an overview of the profile of the organizations that joined the international negotiations and allegedly influenced them, based on attendance spreadsheets provided by the United Nations database. Then, I will use Sénit's (2019) analysis framework to evaluate the four main criteria she outlined when studying the consultations with civil society led by the OWG while SDGs were being drafted. My analysis of these criteria is based on previous research on the topic, as well as examples extracted from primary sources such as the United Nations on-demand meeting recordings and open feedback documents.

The profile of CSOs present during the consultations promoted by the OWG can be outlined by observing attendance spreadsheets provided by the United Nations open databases. These spreadsheets were generated from an online form that all CSOs filled out before

joining the negotiation meetings. On the registration form¹, filled out by 270 CSOs, the following questions were included: 'name of organization'; 'country of residence'; 'is your organization in consultative status with the United Nations through ECOSOC?'; 'is your organization on the Commission on Sustainable Development roster, or has your organization participated in previous UN summits, conferences, or the 26-27 May 2015 UN General Assembly post-2015 hearings?' and 'if you represent a major group or other stakeholder constituency, please indicate which one?' (UN 2015). During these meetings, OWG Sessions were made open to accredited civil society organizations.

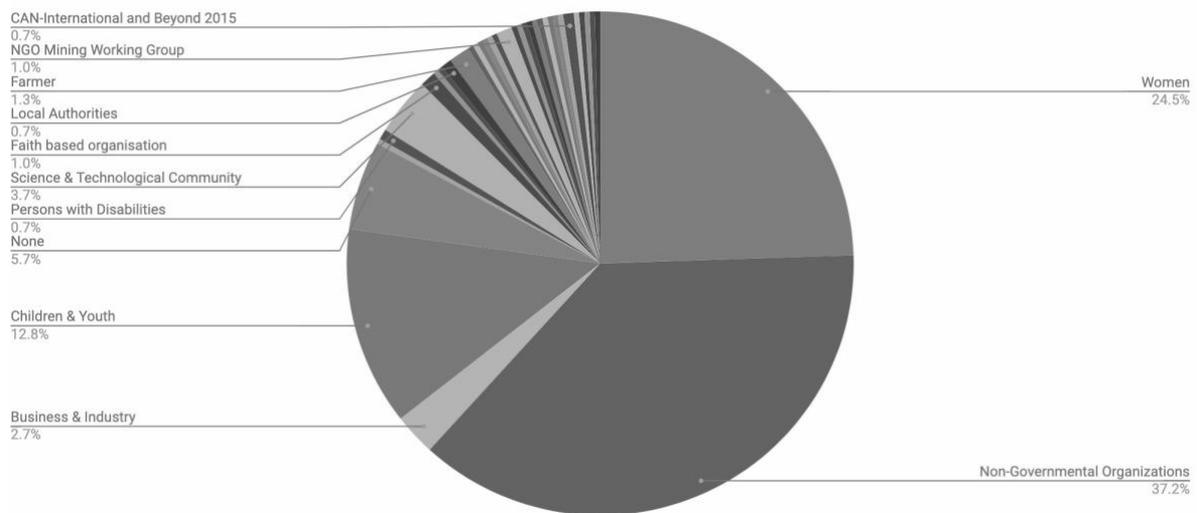
The profile of participant organizations was as follows (UN 2015): 58.5 per cent operated in the Global North, while 41.5 per cent of them were from the Global South. These numbers are not surprising, as the Global North has been dominantly represented in international negotiations since they became open to civil society participation. When studying transnational activism, Tarrow found it was 'geographically unbalanced' (2005: 44). So did Mckeon, when he outlined the 'problematic areas' of civil society participation in the United Nations agenda setting spaces and affirmed there was an 'imbalance in participation among industrialized countries and developing countries CSOs' (2009: 159).

In addition, through the attendance spreadsheets, it is possible to grasp the relationship that the registered CSOs had previously with the United Nations. Almost 75 per cent of them already had consultative status with the ECOSOC. Likewise, almost 90 per cent of them had already participated in other meetings related to the post-2015 development agenda and/or were part of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. That is, they fell under the category of insider groups, perhaps at the cost of outsiders.

Lastly, when asked if they represented a major group or other stakeholder constituency, CSOs represented, in general, 1-2 Major Groups. 37.2 per cent (the majority) claimed to be under the NGOs Major Group. The Women Major Group, in second place, was represented by 24.5 per cent of them. All nine Major Groups were represented. Other stakeholders included: faith-based organizations, persons with disabilities and LGBTQ+ constituencies. 5.7 per cent did not claim to be under any Major Group.

Chart 1: Answers to the question 'If you represent a major group or other stakeholder constituency, please indicate which one?'

¹ The original form mentioned can be accessed on <<http://bit.ly/Submit-CSO-Response-SG-Synthesis>> and the respective responses can be found on <<http://bit.ly/CSO-Responses-Received-SG-Synthesis>>.



Source: Elaborated by the author.

From these charts, it is possible to deduct a general overview on the profiles of CSOs registered to participate in the negotiation meetings of the Open Working Group.

However, it is still not possible to understand *whether* they influenced such negotiations. To analyze their level of influence when discussing the post-2015 development agenda, I will harness Sénit's (2019) criteria framework.

Before introducing my analysis, it is relevant to note that when the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda started, global civil society was already pursuing opportunities to make their voice heard. Such pursuit is deeply linked to the creation of the previous development agenda, the Millennium Development Goals, which did not have a satisfactory level of participation from civil society. The question remains whether the UN got it right when developing the Sustainable Development Goals.

To answer this, Sénit (2019) developed four criteria for civil society participation and influence analysis in the creation of the SDGs: (1) issue framing and (2) position shifting, which are visible in the negotiation process, and (3) goal formulation and (4) influence of future procedures, which are visible in the goals' outcome.

First, 'issue-framing': defined as 'the influence of civil society interventions on the framing of the issues addressed by the negotiations' (2019, p. 10). The 'issue-framing' factor is low when there is no correlation between the framing favored by civil society and those used by negotiators during the meetings or reflected in the final outcome document, moderate when such a correlation is observed in some instances, and high when such a correlation is evident and recurring. During the SDGs negotiations, it was noticeably difficult for civil society representatives to frame the issues they would like to discuss during the meetings. Meeting agendas were set up in advance by the OWG member states, and controversial – yet relevant – issues raised by civil society were often not included. Examples include the topics of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and LGBTQAIP+ rights. The former was brought up several

times by civil society representatives during negotiations. Sara Gold from the International Women's Health Coalition, complained during a meeting on November 22nd, 2013, that SRH was discussed at the fourth Open Working Group session on health and population dynamics, but not included in the summary report to be sent to member states (UN 2013: n.p.), receiving applause from representatives. The co-chair responded that it was not included because they relied on topics that were already 'more or less consensual among member states' (UN 2013: n.p.). Similarly, when submitting feedback on the 'Outcome Document' (June 2015), a group of civil society representatives from LGBTQAIP+ groups drafted a letter expressing that 'it is alarming and quite objectionable that LGBTQAIP+ constituencies on the ground are institutionally denied participation in the follow-up and review mechanisms' and that, even though they 'understand the sensitivity of [these] matters', still they 'cannot be ignored', if the new development agenda were to truly 'leave no one behind' (Mollman et al. 2015: 1). From this and other instances, it is possible to affirm that 'the influence of civil society on the framing of issues addressed by the negotiations was *poor*' (Sénit 2019: 10, my emphasis).

Second, 'position-shifting' is when civil society is able to 'influence the position of key countries or negotiating groups' (2019: 11). This is quite a difficult factor to measure, considering that civil society may have the same ideas as values as some states. For our purposes, we will consider 'position-shifting' low when language or ideas proposed by global civil society do not influence a change on the states' position. Thus, it is moderate when states are influenced in some instances and high when every idea proposed by civil society representatives is absorbed by states.

In this aspect, civil society's expertise contributed to 'the formulation of the positions of delegations and permanent missions of small countries' (Sénit 2019: 11), although the influence on countries that had greater weight in the negotiations was more difficult to exercise.

One example to illustrate this is the inclusion of a goal dedicated to climate change in the negotiations. At the One Day Intersessional Meeting between Major Groups and Other Stakeholders in 2013, Bernadette Fischler, from the Catholic Agency For Overseas Development (CAFOD) and the NGO Major Group, mentioned that MDG 7 ('ensure environmental sustainability') failed because targets and indicators were not clear. She added that climate change needs to be combated, as it is an 'underlying process in combatting poverty', as the SDGs are not 'approaching poverty as a multidimensional issue' (UN 2013: 18). Other civil society representatives agreed with her and added that 'there is a need to radically rethink the relationship between economic development and environmental sustainability' (UN 2013:20). In March 2014, there was very little support for the proposal of including it. Bangladesh and Bhutan were two of a small group of developing countries that agreed with it. After consultations with civil society, in April 2014, this goal gained the support of other small countries, such as the Solomon Islands and Peru. Because of this position-shifting, larger countries such as Mexico, Canada, Israel, Norway and France began supporting the proposal. In general, therefore, 'civil society interventions *moderately* influenced member states' positions (Sénit 2019: 10).

Third, 'goal formulation' is when civil society is able to influence the final agreement on what goals should be included in the new development agenda (2019). The 'goal formulation'

factor is considered low when specific proposals by civil society appear in the final outcome documents or when those documents are consistent with civil society's proposals, moderate when some proposals are included on the final agenda, and high when most proposals are included on the final agenda. Even though civil society representatives were not responsible for drafting the new goals, they contributed to ensure the existence of several SDGs (Sénit 2019). A stand-alone goal on inequality, which became SDG 10, was one of them. Several civil society representatives advocated for a dedicated goal on reducing inequalities in the 5th Open Working Group session in November 2013 (UN 2013: n.p.). In February 2014, the co-chairs released a first draft agreement that included a separate goal proposal on reducing inequalities. However, in sessions held in May and June 2014, this goal was merged with Goal 1 (poverty eradication) and with Goal 8 (economic growth). In response, several CSOs used a Google document to collect input from each other and draft a collaborative statement on the importance of the inequality goal ('A Stand-alone Goal on Inequality is Essential', 2015). In 48 hours, 175 CSOs had already signed this statement. Their lobbying, along with the support of key governments, such as Brazil, Denmark and Norway, guaranteed the inclusion of SDG 10 in the agenda (Sénit 2019). Thus, CSOs meaningfully contributed to the existence of certain SDGs.

Fourth, 'influence on future procedures': defined as civil society's capacity to 'shape procedural rules that [would secure] enhanced participatory opportunities in future negotiations' and to participate in the 'follow-up and review of the SDGs' (2019: 13). This metric is low when civil society does not have opportunities to participate in future negotiations, implementation and evaluation of the goals. It is moderate when civil society has some opportunities to do so, and high when several opportunities are available. Although civil society representatives did not influence the creation of new formal institutions, their interventions were constant and relevant, when compared to traditional international decision-making processes. They were highly involved in formulating the procedures of the Open Working Group, and they were able to access all the reports issued during negotiations and to submit comments on them (Sénit 2019). After the creation of the SDGs, the Open Working Group was replaced by the High-level Political Forum, as stated earlier in this paper, where 'civil society can still attend and intervene in official meetings, access official informational, submit oral and written contributions and formulate recommendations' (Sénit, 2019, p. 13).

In addition, after the creation of the post-2015 development agenda, new non-state actors were recognized by the HLPL, which encouraged Major Groups to maintain effective mechanisms for participation (UN 2013). Allegedly, civil society participation in the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals served to feed a culture of participation and inclusion in international policymaking. For Jeff Huffines from CIVICUS, the HLPL is a 'critical instrument to harness political will for the achievement of the SDGs' and only a robust institutional framework, combined with enabling tools for civil society, will guarantee that (UN 2013: n.p.).

In summary, civil society's influence on the negotiations of the post-2015 development agenda was, overall, moderate. In some instances, civil society representatives were able to voice out their concerns, bring issues to the table, bring real life examples from their grassroots work and emphasize certain aspects. The final result, the 17 Sustainable

Development Goals and 169 targets, had – no doubt – a touch of civil society. The goals were largely disseminated and civil society was (and still is) seen as a key partner to achieve them. When compared to the Millennium Development Goals described earlier, the SDGs are noticeably more comprehensive. The new development agenda went from 8 to 17 goals and added a range of specific indicators that include many more topics on what each goal entails. Among other factors, this was a result of the many consultations done with global civil society.

Still, civil society influence was constrained by member states' agendas, by the amount of resources available to them at the negotiation meetings, by the UN's accreditation system, and numerous others. In the next section, I will reflect more on those, and briefly outline recommendations to increase civil society participation in an effective way.

Reflections on other aspects that influence Global Civil Society engagement with the International Development Agenda

While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) generally excluded global civil society, representing a very simple development agenda for the 1990s, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were created through a much more participatory process (Alves 2015).

A few conclusions can be drawn from analyzing the engagement of global civil society with the UN post-2015 development agenda. For Kissling and Steffek (2008: 209-210), such interactions provide at least three important insights. First, there is an 'increasingly formalized participation of Civil Society Organizations in international and regional organizations'. Secondly, there is an 'increasing willingness of international organizations to turn to CSO participation', as such dialogue increases their legitimacy and credibility (210). Thirdly, that CSOs have become more 'pertinent as interlocutors between an international organization and the public at large', as seen through the Boomerang Model presented earlier in this paper.

Even though the trends of global civil society participation in the international development agendas seem to be increasing, insights into the profile of civil society representatives still suggest that opportunities to engage with international organizations are unequally distributed. At least six factors contribute to this inequality: geographic distribution, access to legal status, access to civic literacy, timing of engagement, access to conditions and degree of formality in the international discussions.

On the geographical asymmetries, as seen earlier in this paper through a brief analysis of the CSOs that joined one of the open negotiation meetings led by the Open Working Group, the Global North tends to be more represented than the Global South in international discussions. In addition, even though the UN Charter's Article 71 allows the ECOSOC to 'make suitable arrangements for consultation with [civil society organizations] which are concerned with matters within its competence' (Otto 1996: 109), it is clear that CSOs are still not satisfied, which makes the UN's relationship with CSOs controversial and inconsistent (Otto 1996).

Global civil society participation also varies in proportion to the population's level of civic literacy. In other words, in countries where society has a high level of political engagement, people are more likely to constitute advocacy groups and associations that will become transnational. In countries where people have lower chances to participate in political decisions, civil society organizations will also be less represented in global forums (Milner 2003).

Other aspects that influence the likelihood of effective global civil society engagement with the international agenda are timing, access to conditions and degree of formality. If CSOs are invited too long before or after intergovernmental negotiations, their input might have no effect on the final decisions. Similarly, if they are given limited time to speak during official meetings, and their contributions are only heard after state actors have spoken, they might not be valued either. In short, civil society representatives have a higher chance to be heard when consultations take place in a balanced manner during the meetings and in comparison to the negotiation process as a whole (Sénit 2019).

Access to conditions that allow civil society representatives to join the international discussions is relevant. Visiting the negotiations venue, such as the United Nations Headquarters in New York City or Geneva, is expensive and bureaucratic. Therefore, 'the most influential participatory spaces are also the most exclusive ones' (Sénit 2019: 15).

The influence of civil society representatives also varies according to the degrees of formality in participatory spaces. Due to the bureaucratic debate formats used by the United Nations, it can be difficult for civil society members to be heard in formal meetings. Therefore, they end up taking advantage of informal spaces by creating personal relationships with negotiators. In short, 'the less formal a participatory space, the more influential civil society interventions' (Sénit 2019: 16).

Evidence of the omissions in these aspects of engagement with civil society is seen on the TAP Network Survey on Strategic Priorities and Advocacy for the 2019 High Level Political Forum. In the survey report, it said 'many [CSO members] highlighted that engagement mechanisms with civil society were not as inclusive they had hoped' (Partnerships for Transparency 2019: 10).

With those aspects in mind, several recommendations have been made to increase the effectiveness of global civil society participation in international negotiations such as those related to the international development agenda. Partnerships for Transparency (2019) has conducted extensive research on the conditions and effects of effective civil society participation. Among them, it was found that combining multiple social accountability tools and promoting continuous engagement enables better outcomes than a few interventions in a short period. It is also important to ensure a closed feedback loop. In other words, once consultations are made and changes are made as a result of these consultations, civil society should have the chance to monitor the results and suggest adaptations to improve them. Official data should be accessible for all actors interested in the decision-making process. Instead of relying on UN reports, CSOs have created their own informal reporting mechanisms. A better way of collecting, interpreting and distributing data would be to collaborate on complementary indicators and measurement tools. ECOSOC has also

stressed that it is important to provide early and informed dialogue opportunities with several stakeholders (Partnerships for Transparency 2019).

With regards to the legal personality/status of CSOs, the UN ECOSOC should follow a few good practices in its accreditation, listed by McKeon (2009) at a UN Research Institute for Social Development report. It is recommended that the ECOSOC provides CSOs with information in good time and clarify expectations, provide access to an online registration portal, ask CSOs to describe the relevance of their work, apply the rule of 'silence means consent' when it comes to government reactions, develop a database to monitor interactions with CSOs, and make efforts to be 'on the side of civil society' (127).

These recommendations warrant more discussion, but that lies beyond the scope of this paper.

In sum, the United Nation's relationship with global civil society must strengthen a larger commitment to international participatory democracy. As CSOs are a vital link between local needs and global decisions, they must be involved in negotiation processes. Otto (1996) suggests such involvement should go beyond a consultation and that CSOs should have an independent status in international decision-making. He also adds that the UN should encourage diverse UN-CSO relations, rather than control them, and that power and information should be dispersed rather than centralized. While advancements are clear, there is much to improve to ensure the international agenda will find a balance between listening to local voices and effectively including them in international negotiations.

Conclusion

Initially, I discussed the general context that allowed the rise of civil society participation in the international sphere, namely, globalization. The phenomenon must be taken into account as a wider historical process, and so should the creation of a global civil society. Looking to the future, it is likely that the globalization process will continue and even intensify.

The United Nations acknowledges that CSOs are indispensable for many aspects of its work, especially with regards to economic and social development. The UN's capacity to create a comprehensive development agenda and to implement this is increased by its engagement with global civil society. It has become clear that, in practice, this relationship has not been easy to manage in a consistent manner. Using a rigorous criteria framework, the influence of civil society on the UN SDGs has been analyzed, with mixed results. More work needs to be done to strengthen this dynamic.

With the rise of communication technologies, there are more opportunities to make processes more transparent and increase the level of participation. The same goes for the likelihood that CSOs with lower access to resources will be able to join international development discourse. Organized civil society is gradually learning to use those tools effectively, making them a potential means to increase the voices of marginalized groups worldwide. At all

governance levels - including the international one - ensuring citizens' participation is key to ensure the integrity and transparency of policy making. Civil society holds governments and international institutions accountable. And it is up to civil society to make sure that decisions regarding a country's economic and social development take into consideration the realities and aspirations of all citizens.

Future research should continue to monitor the effectiveness of international participatory mechanisms. This research should then be widely disseminated amongst civil society groups so they can come to understand the importance of their perspective and consequently their influence in defining and accomplishing the global development agenda. Finally, future research should further define the relationship between the UN, national governments and global civil society.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Main documents and events of consultation with the OWG and with other agencies, networks and groups during the creation of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

Document or Event	Description	Date
United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda	The Task Team was established by the Secretary-General. It included over 60 UN agencies and international organizations, including UNDP, DESA, ILO, IMO, UNESCO, UN Women, UNEP, UNHCR, UNU, WTO and the World Bank. Under its umbrella was the Technical Support Team, which provided inputs to the Open Working Group.	Launched January 2012
Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)	The SDSN is a global and independent network of research centers, universities and technical institutions that work with UN agencies and other international organizations to provide inputs on the progress of the MDGs and the post-2015 development agenda.	Launched August 2012
UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda	The Global Partnerships for Development Working Group, under the Task Team, publishes the report 'Towards a renewed global partnership for development', which included several recommendations to increase participation with global civil society.	March 2013
High-level segment of ECOSOC	A thematic debate on the contributions of ECOSOC to the post-2015 development agenda, which included diverse actors from governments, the private sector, civil society and academia.	4 July 2013
3rd annual report of the Secretary-General on accelerating progress towards the MDGs	This report summarized progress made by MGD 8 and provided recommendations to advance partnerships in the post-2015 agenda.	September 2013
High-level Event on the Millennium Development Goals	A one-day event hosted by the President of the General Assembly to discuss the progress of the MDGs and the post-2015 development framework. It included several non-state actors.	25 September 2013

2014 Development Cooperation Forum (DCF)	A multi-stakeholder forum that addresses trends in international development cooperation. It included civil society leaders.	July 2014
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Source: Created by author based on documents provided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform.

Appendix 2: Post-2015 Consultation Process

Steps of the post-2015 consultation process	Description	Date
Synthesis Report	The UN Secretary-General informally presented his synthesis report on the post-2015 development agenda to the UN member states, 'The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet'.	4 December 2014
Stock-talking	An interactive dialogue with Major Groups and other stakeholders.	19-21 January 2015
Feedback on the Declaration section of the Post-2015 Development Agenda	Comments were collected widely from various civil society groups via a Google Document.	17-20 February 2015
Sustainable Development Goals and Targets	A technical report was issued at the Bureau of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) with a framework for the SDGs and its targets.	19 March 2015
Follow-up and review	The UN DESA division and UN-NGLS conducted open nomination processes for the Steering Committees to ensure broad participation and select speakers for the post-2015 negotiating sessions.	18-22 May 2015
PGA Hearings on the post-2015 development agenda	The President of the General Assembly heard from civil society organizations, Major Groups and the private sector in preparation for the UN Summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda.	26-27 May 2015

Negotiations for the outcome document	On June 2nd, 2015, the zero draft of the outcome document for the UN Summit to adopt the Post-2015 Development Agenda was released. Feedback from civil society organizations was collected through a Google Document. These inputs were compiled and made available to the UN system, UN member states and all stakeholders.	22-25 June 2015
Intergovernmental negotiations on the outcome document	The Open Working Group sessions were made open to accredited civil society representatives. They could speak after political groups and governments. Their interventions were coordinated through the Major Groups organizing partners.	20-31 July 2015

Source: Created by author based on documents provided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform.

Appendix 3: Full list of member states at the Open Working Group

1. Algeria / Egypt / Morocco / Tunisia
2. Ghana
3. Benin
4. Kenya
5. United Republic of Tanzania
6. Congo
7. Zambia / Zimbabwe
8. Nauru / Palau / Papua New Guinea
9. Bhutan / Thailand / Vietnam
10. India / Pakistan / Sri Lanka
11. China / Indonesia / Kazakhstan
12. Cyprus / Singapore / United Arab Emirates
13. Bangladesh / Republic of Korea / Saudi Arabia
14. Iran (Islamic Republic of) / Japan / Nepal
15. Colombia / Guatemala
16. Bahamas / Barbados
17. Guyana / Haiti / Trinidad and Tobago
18. Mexico / Peru
19. Brazil / Nicaragua
20. Argentina / Bolivia (Plurinational State of) / Ecuador

21. Australia / Netherlands / United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
22. Canada / Israel / United States of America
23. Denmark / Ireland / Norway
24. France / Germany / Switzerland
25. Italy / Spain / Turkey
26. Hungary
27. Belarus / Serbia
28. Bulgaria / Croatia
29. Montenegro / Slovenia
30. Poland / Romania