



global public policy institute

GPPi Research Paper Series No. 2

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(One World Trust)

The Accountability of International Organizations

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About the Authors

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GPPi Research Project on Accountability in Global Governance

In recent years, the concept of accountability has emerged as one of the key approaches in the search for new modes of democratic governance beyond the nation-state. While the call for greater accountability of global governance has become pervasive in popular political discourse, there is only limited conceptual understanding of what the term, its potential and limits of accountability in facilitating democracy, and the various ways and means in which accountability of actors and processes of global governance can be improved.

The goal of this research project on “Exploring and Analyzing the Role of Accountability in Global Governance” is to take a first step towards developing a “pluralistic system of accountability” both conceptually and operationally. It seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the role and significance of accountability in global governance, and the various ways in which it is put in practice.

For more information on this project, please visit our website at www.globalpublicpolicy.net.

We gratefully acknowledge financial support from the Fritz Thyssen Foundation.

Executive Summary

As the responsibilities of international organisations (IGOs) have multiplied, so have calls for greater responsiveness and accountability. Burall and Negligan set forth a four-dimensional accountability framework for international organisations, whose emphasis is on the ongoing, participative nature of accountability. Accordingly, IGOs must ensure the participation of internal and external stakeholders, including civil society and government. They must be transparent, both in disclosing information and in their decision-making processes. The activities of IGOs must be subject to evaluation by external agencies and through an internal, self-critical organisational culture. Finally, a complaints and regress mechanism must supplement the protection of internal “whistleblowers” who uncover abuses of power. The true challenge, Burall and Negligan conclude, lies in operationalising and implementing these accountability principles in a manner that reflect the nature and needs of the individual organisations.

Introduction - The Political Landscape¹

There were over 300 inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), including regional intergovernmental organizations, operating at the end of 2001 (UIA, 2002). The last century has seen a dramatic rise in the number of such organizations as governments identified an increasing number of issues to be dealt with by global organizational structures. Excluding regional organizations, the number of IGOs rose from 37 in 1900 to 260 in 2000 (Infodrome, 2000)². Intergovernmental organizations are defined by the Yearbook of International Organizations as, “*being based on a formal instrument of agreement between the governments of nation states; including three or more nation states as parties to the agreement; possessing a permanent secretariat performing an ongoing*” (UIA, 2002). IGOs perform a wide range of tasks affecting, in one way or another, nearly every person on the globe. While some of these IGOs have considerable prominence, the majority are little known by either policy makers or the general public. Their responsibilities

range from regulating the international postal system (the Universal Postal Union), international telecommunications (International Telecommunications Union) and developing codes for international food standards (Codex Alimentarius), to maintaining international peace and security (the United Nations Security Council) and regulating global trade (the World Trade Organization).

Calls for IGOs to take responsibility for their actions and decisions and to become more accountable to the people that they affect have been on the rise for many years. As IGOs have taken on an increasing range of tasks and responsibilities, citizens have started to increasingly question their legitimacy and accountability. This protest movement reached a peak, in terms of public profile at least, with the demonstrations outside the World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings in Seattle in 1999. Of particular concern to many of those protesting is that many IGOs in general, and the WTO in particular, are performing an increasing range of tasks that affect many aspects of life and which go beyond their original mission, and therefore affecting an increasing number of people. As a consequence, this ‘mission creep’ makes it difficult to hold an organization to account according to its stated mandate (Einhorn, 2001). This problem is exacerbated given the fact that these institutions are so large that the chain of responsibility, and therefore accountability, is usually not clearly

¹ The authors would like to thank Monica Blagescu and Anna Baxter for valuable comments and research support.

² See http://www.infodrome.nl/download/rtf/eng_rapport.t.rtf (accessed 22 December 2004).

defined (Woods, 2003). It is perhaps no coincidence that protests became more strident just as the penetration of the internet began in earnest. On the one hand, the emergence of novel information and communication technologies (ICT) has helped to make the somewhat secretive world of international cooperation more transparent, exposing some of the most obvious accountability gaps that exist in international organizations and international regimes. At the same time, ICT has also made it much easier for civil society groups to communicate, share information and plan.

These calls for greater accountability, though, are not entirely new. In the 1960s, barely a decade after the creation of the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs), there was vocal criticism of the impact of the World Bank policies and projects on the environment and the livelihoods of communities (Blough, 1968). In more recent years, these calls have gained much greater visibility.³ In particular, since the late 1990s, the anti-globalization movement has been prominent at the meetings of not only the WTO, but also the BWIs, calling for different models of economic development as well as wholesale reforms of the organizations in order to increase their accountability to those directly affected by their decisions. More recently still, since the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001, global civil society has been attempting to develop an alternative agenda for development and poverty reduction that require the participation of those most affected by the decisions of IGOs in the belief that this will make these institutions more responsive and therefore more accountable to them⁴.

³ One of the more prominent watchdog groups of the BWI's is the Bretton Woods Project (www.brettonwoodsproject.org). Their online resources also provide links to many other organizations and groups monitoring the World Bank and the IMF.

⁴ See for example proposals for reform discussed at the World Social Forum at www.forumsocialmundial.org.br

The failure of IGOs to respond adequately to these calls for increased accountability and participation in decision-making is all the more notable given they mirror, in many ways, the demands that these IGOs themselves frequently place on poorer countries in receipt of either aid or loans.

To date the accountability debate in relation to IGOs has tended to be quite narrowly focused on a small group of IGOs; the 'usual suspects' of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the WTO. But there are other influential and powerful inter-governmental players. For example, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs)⁵ and the United Nations agencies. This paper will highlight some of the major accountability issues that apply to the IGO sector broadly, and will use examples to illustrate the type of mechanisms which are being developed to fill these gaps and discuss how effective (or not) these mechanisms are. This paper will draw on the work of the One World Trust's accountability program, and in particular its Global Accountability Project (GAP), to analyze the current debate and suggest the reforms that are needed in order to strengthen the accountability of these organizations.

In this paper we explore what is meant by the term accountability and attempt to answer the key, perennial question: "accountability to whom?" Using the One World Trust's accountability framework which is based on four dimensions of accountability, we analyze the strengths and weaknesses of current accountability mechanisms. Space constraints prevent the use of full case studies but the paper provides examples where possible to give an

⁵ The Multilateral Development Banks are: The World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

overview of the types of mechanisms used by IGOs at present. Within this section the paper also highlights some of the key reforms which we believe would, if implemented by IGOs, go some way towards promoting greater accountability within individual organizations as well as the sector as a whole. The conclusion highlights the problem of turning principles of accountability into fully operational mechanisms and processes suggesting at least one area where more research is required.

What is Accountability?⁶

Accountability is not only the way in which individuals and organizations are held responsible for their actions. It also provides a way for organizations and individuals to take responsibility for developing policies and procedures, for shaping mission and values, and for assessing performance in relation to goals.

Traditional models view accountability to be a retrospective process where judgment is passed on results or actions already taken (Behn, 2001). These models allow only those individuals, nation states or organizations identified as formal members, to pass this judgment. However, this view of accountability is being increasingly challenged by approaches that argue for a more participative and ongoing process (Moncrieffe, 2001). In addition, proponents of this more novel view argue that organizations must account for their performance to a much broader group of stakeholders than simply those who have formal authority over it (Young, 2000). This view, while often based on making the moral case for the right to participate (that individuals and communities have a right to be involved in the decisions affecting their lives), also makes claims for the increased

efficiency in relation to organizational mission that results from such participatory accountability.

This paper takes this broader, more participatory, view of accountability arguing that it does indeed lead to greater organizational efficiency. This is not to say that the benefits for organizations from establishing accountability processes always outweigh the costs. The overwhelming majority of accountability mechanisms will require resources including financial, and both staff and management time. In the end, IGOs will have to decide whether the cost of implementing a particular process exceeds the benefits accrued or not. In addition to undertaking a cost benefit analysis there are a number of difficulties facing organizations as they attempt to implement effective accountability mechanisms. One problem is that IGOs, as well as operating in numerous national and local cultural situations, have their own very specific organizational cultures. This presents them with particular difficulties as they try to develop global mechanisms which work in these multiple cultural contexts. An accountability mechanism which works in one place may not work well in another; notions of what constitutes effective redress, for example, can vary widely between different communities even within the same country. Another problem is that the requirements for one accountability process may run counter to the requirements for another. For example, it may be necessary to reduce transparency in order to ensure maximum participation. Finally, a badly implemented accountability process can actually hinder an organization's pursuit of its mission. This means that much planning must be undertaken before any process is developed.

There is little evidence to indicate which accountability mechanisms bring the most benefit and under what conditions this is true. The One World Trust is beginning to collect anecdotal evidence from IGOs, transnational corporations and international NGOs about processes which work and which

⁶ Parts of this section draw from internal One World Trust Working Paper 101, "What Makes Global Organizations Accountable: Reassessing the GAP framework," which is due to be published soon.

don't, but this is currently not enough to provide clear answers. At this stage all it is possible to say with certainty is that there are organizations which have put in place even costly accountability mechanisms which have proved effective, yet there are others where these benefits are much less clear cut. As the accountability debate develops, this is one area which needs considerably more empirical work.

In the more complex view highlighted above, accountability concerns may sometimes be satisfied simply through the provision of information. In other cases accountability is not achieved until processes are in place to ensure that those ultimately accountable can be rewarded, or, perhaps more importantly, penalized when necessary. In addition, external stakeholders must be able to see that this is the case if they are to have confidence in the mechanisms in place. Accountability therefore involves some element of control, exposure and potential sanction. It is different from oversight, monitoring, or auditing which do not involve this element of control. Internal and external stakeholders, and the specialized agencies to which IGOs must account, have to be able to impose some sort of sanction in cases of poor decision-making. For this to be possible, IGOs must provide information to stakeholders, engage them in decisions, and justify these decisions to stakeholders and any agencies.

If this complex view of accountability is to be turned from theory into operational practice, organizations require a clear framework and guidelines to guide them. One way to consider the accountability of IGOs is therefore to look at the key elements, or dimensions, that would constitute an accountable organization and use them as the organizing framework. The One World Trust has developed a framework with four key dimensions of accountability to stakeholders: participation; transparency; evaluation; and complaints and redress. Before going further into this framework of

accountability, the paper addresses a more basic question: to whom should IGOs be accountable?

Accountable to Whom?

The One World Trust's Global Accountability Project (GAP) focuses on the accountability of global organizations to all of their important stakeholders. It adopts Freeman's definition in which a stakeholder is, "*any group or individuals who can affect or is affected by ... an organization*" (Freeman, 1984). GAP distinguishes between two sets of stakeholders, those internal and those external to an organization. An organization's internal stakeholders will differ depending on its formal constitution but will include one of the following groups; its shareholders, members or supporters. An organization's external stakeholders, by contrast, will be a much less clearly defined group and will consist of individuals or groups who are affected by an organization's decisions and activities but who are not formally part of the organization (GAP, 2003).⁷

The accountability of IGOs has traditionally been built on accountability of the organizations to their members, nation states. Yet, this accountability is severely compromised for a number of reasons. Firstly, the poorest nations lack the capacity, or power, within the organizations to hold them to account effectively. Secondly, citizens of even those nations with the capacity and formal power within IGOs are unable to

⁷ This definition could be taken to suggest that an organization must consult with all of its stakeholders however limited their stake in a particular decision might be. For some organizations dealing with global goods, this might mean that an organization should consult with the whole of the world's population. This is clearly impractical and, as we explore to a limited extent below, instead requires an organization to undertake a stakeholder analysis to identify those groups and individuals with the greatest stake in a particular decision and prioritise engagement with them. Proportionality must guide the use of this definition; the size and scope of the stakeholder engagement should be related to the likely impact of any decision.

engage effectively with the organizations' decision-making structures. The Trust's model assumes that the development of effective accountability mechanisms that are directly responsive to the needs of all key stakeholders, both internal and external, is vital if IGOs are to achieve their aims more efficiently.

As we highlight below, the reality is that many IGOs are more answerable to some members than to others; the accountability mechanisms in place to ensure formal accountability do not work. This leads to one type of accountability gap. However, the problems in relation to the accountability of IGOs to their members pale significantly in contrast to the problems they have of ensuring meaningful accountability to their external stakeholders. Ensuring greater accountability of IGOs will therefore require more robust internal accountability processes and a greater openness to external stakeholders.

Accountability would be relatively simple to conceptualize (if not to turn into practice) if all IGOs had to do was to open their doors to all stakeholders. But the reality is considerably more complex. Some stakeholders will have more at stake than others in particular decisions and this stake will shift between stakeholders depending on the decision being taken. Different stakeholders have different resources, including both financial, and capacity to engage. Yet it is often groups with vested interests who have the greater capacity to participate and hence those to which IGOs find it easiest to respond (Olson, 1965). Organizations themselves have interests in their stakeholders. These differential levels of resources, and sets of interests and stakes, can cause a power imbalance not only between stakeholders but also between stakeholders and the organization itself. Identifying this complexity highlights the need for organizations to undertake systematic stakeholder analysis to ensure that they identify and engage effectively with their key stakeholders

for all major decisions. Finally, it suggests that IGOs need to find ways to ensure that all relevant stakeholders have the capacity to engage in processes where their stake is large enough.

Ultimately there is no one answer to the question of to whom IGOs should be accountable. The answer will depend on the particular activities being undertaken by the IGO and by the issue area in which it is dealing. Yet as will be shown, IGOs, in common with all types of global organization, are currently ill-equipped to answer this question adequately. They provide external stakeholders with limited ways to participate in decision-making and it is all too often those that have the least power and involvement in decision-making who are most directly affected by the activities of IGOs.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Existing Accountability Mechanisms

This section examines the four key dimensions of accountability making up the Trust's accountability framework and explores some of the mechanisms that are in place in these areas in the IGO sector in order to provide an overview of these mechanisms. In addition, it highlights a number of key gaps that exist within each dimension. Finally, a series of potential reforms for each dimension to promote greater IGO accountability are described. It is worth noting that accountability reforms cannot be prescriptive and applied in the same way to every organization, not least because an organization's stakeholders differ radically depending on the organization. The policies and processes which will work for one organization's stakeholders may well make it harder for another's stakeholders to participate. The principles behind the reforms, though, should remain applicable to all.

Participation

As discussed earlier, all organizations have two main types of stakeholders. The first are those who are internal to the organization, its members, who have formal control over it. The second are those external to it

and have no formal authority over decisions that are taken and yet are directly affected by its decisions and actions. Formally, IGOs are accountable to the countries which make up their membership. Yet, this provides an inadequate route for citizens to participate in the decisions taken by these organizations because the majority of nations have little real influence over these decisions. A further problem is that elected representatives do not play an effective role at the national level in holding governments to account for their actions at IGOs while the vast majority of IGOs (except for example NATO, the Council of Europe, and the European Union) have no formal mechanism for democratically elected representatives to participate at the global level. This means that at both the national and global level, there are few mechanisms for elected representatives to hold those with power within IGOs to account. There is therefore a need for other ways to be found to engage external actors to ensure that decisions meet the needs of those the organizations are supposed to be serving. This section therefore looks at the ways in which IGOs do, or do not, allow full participation of all members and the ways in which they are increasingly trying to increase their engagement with external stakeholders.

Even at the level of the formal membership, many IGOs, including BIS, World Bank, IMF, WTO and the UN Security Council, have structures and processes which give some members considerably more power within decision-making processes than others. For example, the US, UK, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Russia and China all have direct representation at the World Bank's executive board, and therefore have one vote each, while all other nations are grouped within constituencies. Each constituency is of a different size and is represented by one Executive Director with one vote. At its most extreme this results in forty-six of the African nations being grouped into two constituencies and therefore sharing

only two representatives and having only two votes between them.

At the BIS the founding six members (Belgium, France, Germany, UK, Italy and US) hold the majority of votes. They dominate representation on the executive and control key changes to the governing articles. At the executive body, a maximum of twenty-one member representatives are entitled to sit at any one time. The six founding members have two seats each, giving them a permanent majority. The additional nine places are open to other member representatives on a rotating basis, but are subject to appointment by the founding members (GAP 2003).

Barriers to participation exist not only in terms of formal rights of representation but also in more informal ways too. The WTO, which has 148 member countries, takes its decisions by consensus, which in theory, gives all members veto over any decision. Yet, despite the fact that the WTO's governance structure provides mechanisms for the representation of all members at the governing body level, the reality is that the informal decision-making structures, which exist to improve the efficiency of the organization, reduce the ability for all members to affect the decisions made by the organization (Woods and Narlikar, 2001). For example, officially all members can add items to the agenda of governing body meetings, but much of the agenda is set in private meetings. These are known as 'Green Room' meetings and are rarely publicly announced in advance. Attendance is subject to invitation by a committee chairperson or the Director-General and developing countries are routinely excluded. Despite recent attempts by the WTO to report back from these meetings to the full membership, the structural problems underlying this particular accountability gap remain. While it is neither practical nor desirable to prevent informal meetings of small groups of states from being organized, these informal meetings should not be the forums for carrying out the formal

business of the organization. Further reforms will be necessary to ensure that the organization is able to develop negotiations efficiently (a problem with 148 members each with one vote) while at the same time ensuring genuine accountability to all of the members.

In addition to the negative effect that informal processes have on member participation in decision-making at the WTO, some members lack the capacity to engage meaningfully in decision-making. For example, over twenty of the smaller developing country members do not even have an office in Geneva, making it difficult for them to attend the huge number of meetings which are held through-out the year by the WTO. This problem is replicated at the World Bank where many executive directors lack the advantage of resources and staff working on Fund and Bank issues in their constituency (Evans 2001)

Over the last decade or so, IGOs have increasingly engaged with external stakeholders through forums, committees, conferences and consultations. Comparing the number of CSOs attending different UN conferences illustrates this change. The UN held a World Conference on Human Rights in Tehran in 1968 and there were no CSO participants present. By contrast, 2,100 CSOs participated in the 1995 UN Conference on Woman in Beijing. The UN World Summit for Sustainable Development in South Africa in 2002 had 'tens of thousands' attending, with representatives from governments, civil society, and the private sector.⁸

There are numerous explanations for this rise in engagement, two of which stand out and deserve attention. One is the idea that IGOs are facing a 'crisis of legitimacy' as a result of the 'democratic deficit' in international decision-making (Held, 1997) Citizens around the world increasingly feel impacted upon by decisions taken at the global level, but

⁸ See <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/> for more information about the Johannesburg Summit (accessed 31 December 2004).

feel alienated and frustrated at their inability to have a meaningful say in these choices. The result has been a questioning of the legitimacy of many IGOs. In response, IGOs have sought to expand their engagement with other stakeholders and involve them more closely in the decisions that impact their lives (Nye, 2001).

The second explanation is the increasing acceptance of the argument that 'ownership' and 'participation' are crucial elements for development and poverty reduction. It is people living in poverty, after all, who are the experts of the reality of poverty in their context. If policies and projects are devised without their input, it is argued then it is likely that these policies will fail to tackle the root causes of poverty. The World Bank has, in theory at least, embraced this emerging paradigm and its research initiative conducted at the beginning of the 21st century, '*Voices of the Poor*' put the testimonies of poor people themselves as central to the issue of poverty and development (Narayan, 2000). This research was then used to prepare the World Development Report 2000/01 (World Bank, 2000). This annual report is influential in setting policy priorities for the coming year not only within the Bank but also by other influential decision-makers at the national and global level. But there is a difference between putting in place structures which enable stakeholders to participate in discussions, and structures which engage them in meaningful dialogue about particular decisions and policy formulation.

As highlighted above, for an organization to engage successfully with external stakeholders, it must ensure that those with the greatest stake are afforded the best opportunity to become involved within decision-making processes while at the same time ensuring that those with vested interests and the capacity to make those interests heard are not the only ones who influence the process. In the end, the decision over the choice of stakeholders all too often requires a political decision

by IGOs which lack the right processes and effective oversight mechanisms to ensure that the correct stakeholders are engaged in each decision. Some IGOs, both within and outside the UN system, have built engagement with civil society into formal organizational processes right from the start. For example, the OECD, the ILO and UNAIDS have done this in very different ways.

Founded in 1919, the ILO has two main decision-making bodies, the annual International Labor Conference and the Governing body which meets three times a year.⁹ The ILO's constitution gives its key stakeholders, business and unions, specific powers within the organization. The two governing bodies have a tripartite structure and involve government, employers and workers in a ratio of 2:1:1. Unlike any other IGO, the stakeholders are given both speaking and voting rights on a par with the governments (ILO 2000). Yet the ILO is seen by some to be an ineffective and bureaucratic organization particularly because of this tripartite structure. Perhaps the main lesson from this is for IGOs to tread carefully as they develop structures for engaging their stakeholders, especially as stakeholders will vary depending on the decision being taken. Formalizing engagement structures with some, but not others, may not take this into account.

UNAIDS is a joint venture, bringing together the efforts and resources of UN system organizations (the cosponsors) to help the world prevent new HIV infections, care for those already infected, and mitigate the impact of the epidemic.¹⁰ It was established in 1994 by a resolution of the UN Economic and Social Council and launched in January 1996. UNAIDS is guided by a Program Coordinating Board (PCB), which acts as its governing body.

⁹ See <http://www.ilo.org> (accessed 31 December 2004) for more information.

¹⁰ See <http://www.unaids.org> (accessed 31 December 2004) for more information.

The PCB consists of representatives from 22 governments from all regions of the world, the 9 UNAIDS Cosponsors, and 5 NGOs, including associations of people living with HIV/AIDS. Unlike the ILO, the Cosponsors and NGOs are non-voting members.

The OECD, in contrast, does not have the engagement of external actors built into its governing document and mission in the way that both the ILO and UNAIDS do. As a result, the OECD engages external stakeholders in an advisory capacity only. The organization has engaged with civil society since its inception in 1961 through its two advisory committees, the Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC). Both these committees are officially recognized by the OECD and are involved in consultations across a wide range of OECD committees which concentrate on specific issues dealt with by approximately a dozen OECD Directorates. However, business and trade union organizations are the only type of CSO officially recognized by the OECD. Despite increasing engagement with other types of CSO over the last few years, this dialogue is largely informal and certain CSOs, for example development NGOs, are much less active in OECD policy fora than other (Gaughran, 2003). This highlights the ongoing problem that IGOs have of developing organizational structures and processes which enable meaningful engagement of all relevant stakeholders.

It is now common practice for most IGOs to consult on both their projects and policies at the local, regional and, increasingly, the global level. The World Bank, for example, is seeking to mainstream the engagement of a wide range of external stakeholders in the development of all of its country level policies and lending. While other IGOs, such as the UN, WTO and BIS, consult at the policy formulation stage and open-up their committees to a wide array of actors.

Many IGOs are continually refining the way that they engage with external actors. The UN is no exception and, in February 2003, Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed a high-level panel to consider this issue. In June 2004, the panel, headed by former Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, released its report containing 30 proposals for changing the practices for civil society engagement in the UN (United Nations 2004). This report highlights the importance of the engagement of civil society and other stakeholders within the UN, but notes that there are a number of key challenges both to the principle and practice of such engagement. The report touches on the central concern of this paper, that while the *"substance of politics is fast globalizing (in the areas of trade, economics, environment, pandemics, terrorism, etc.)... the process of politics is not, [because], its principal institutions (elections, political parties and parliaments) remain firmly rooted at the national or local level."* (United Nations, 2004). It continues by outlining the distinction between traditional democracy which brings together citizens through geography (or their electoral areas) and participatory democracy where citizens aggregate in communities of interest. It is these communities of citizen (or civil society interest) that now often brings an issue to global attention with initial action being taken by a coalition of different actors including governments, civil society and others. This therefore requires the UN to become much more than just an inter-governmental forum. It has to engage these other actors too, but this will extend the organization's already stretched capacity to breaking point (just in terms of meeting rooms and agendas let alone in other ways) and so the organization must develop more selective and representative forms of engagement rather than simply increasing its level of engagement.

The Cardoso report was less than six months old when this paper was written and it remains to be seen how

much real reform the members of the organization allow, but it is a useful starting point for the organization. It contains recommendations which could be of use for other IGOs outside the formal UN system. However, despite the increased efforts of a number of IGOs to involve civil society groups in their decision making, participation within the decision-making processes of the vast majority remains informal and, once again, is largely dependent on the resources and capacity of CSOs to participate.

As IGOs wrestle with this issue of engaging effectively and efficiently with their stakeholders, a key constituency to consider is democratically elected representatives. With the number of nations holding democratic elections steadily increasing, these actors would appear to be a key group to involve in decision-making, yet most IGOs have effectively ignored their role. NATO, though, has long recognized the importance of parliamentarians in supporting its work. The independent NATO Parliamentary Assembly was formed in 1955 to act as a forum for parliamentarians from the NATO countries to debate issues of common concern and to link them to the organization itself. The assembly also plays a role in legitimizing the organization as it *"acts as a permanent reminder that intergovernmental decisions reached within NATO are ultimately dependent on political endorsement in accordance with the due constitutional process of democratically elected parliaments"* (NATO Handbook¹¹).

Over the past couple of years, a little more attention has begun to be paid to this element of the accountability chain. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) was granted observer status to the

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See <http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001/hb1601.htm> (accessed on 22nd December 2004)

United Nations (UN) in 2003.¹² This privileged position recognizes the particular role that parliamentarians can play at the UN though it falls short of providing any meaningful accountability mechanisms of the UN to parliamentarians at the IPU. The World Bank has also recognized the special role that can be played by parliamentarians. It organized a conference in 2000 to facilitate discussion on its poverty reduction strategy. By 2003, the network of parliamentarians developed as a result of this conference had formed a legal entity called the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank to engage more effectively with the Bank.¹³ Parliamentarians, working with CSOs, with the launch of a parliamentary petition in May 2004 have just begun to organize internationally and call for a greater role in the oversight of the BWIs (Bretton Woods Project, 2004).

With ever increasing demands for civil society voices to be taken into account within IGO decision-making processes, IGOs are finding themselves in the position of having to decide who they listen to. This opens them up to charges of acting as 'gatekeepers' of civil society. With IGO legitimacy being increasingly challenged, this political aspect of the choice of external stakeholders means that, in the end, the process of engagement, including the choice of stakeholders, must take place in the open.

Reform of the power differential in the governing bodies is essential if IGOs are to be considered to be legitimate both by their members and also by citizens throughout the world. Improved transparency, participation and open dialogues may go some way to

improved governance but they can not solve the core accountability deficit.

For example, failure to reform the UN Security Council, where five nations have power of veto, casts doubts on the entire project of organizational reform. All IGOs also need to become more representative of the concerns of poorer countries. In the IMF and World Bank, for example, the representation embodied in voting rights that are based on quotas is far too unequal between member countries. The lenders are the principal shareholders, but the borrowers are the principal contributors to the income of these organizations. Reform of the governing boards of IGOs, where control rests with richer nations, will not, on its own, lead to greater accountability, but it will be a visible step towards increasing the overall legitimacy of these organizations.

IGOs need structures of representation that better reflect the stakes of all member states. They should have stronger, more independent executive bodies to oversee the work of staff and management, a transparent set of operating rules that enables others to monitor how they do their work, and an open and participatory process for appointing the head of each organization (Woods, 2003).

Regarding the 'mission creep' of some IGOs such as the IMF and the World Bank, Woods stresses the need for the powerful members of each institution to restrain their urge to have the Fund and Bank engage in conditionality across a wide range of issues. As a rule of thumb, the scope of the activities of the Fund and Bank should not exceed the scope of their accountability. If they represent and negotiate with Central Banks and Treasuries, their work should not stray beyond the mandates of such agencies (Woods, 2003).

IGOs need to pay much more attention to how they identify and engage with stakeholders. They need to have much clearer processes for identifying the legitimacy of the stakeholders with which they engage and

¹² For more information on the work of that organization consult <http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm> (accessed 31 December 2004).

¹³ For more information on the work of the network consult www.pnowb.org/ (accessed 31 December 2004).

must include the organization of such engagement, where appropriate, within staff incentive schemes. A few IGOs are better than most global organizations at engaging stakeholders at a local or even national level, but all can improve the processes by which they feed the results of these engagement processes back into their organizational decision-making cycle, and in particular that top level policy making is connected to relevant stakeholder engagement processes. All must ensure that the mechanism they use to identify stakeholder groups contains a complaints procedure. This complaints procedure must enable stakeholders with a genuine grievance who have been excluded from the engagement process to gain access to that process.

Transparency

The transparency dimension of accountability is, at the level of principle at least, the easiest to develop broader political pressure for as there is general acceptance that access to timely, relevant information about an organization's activities and policies is vital to ensure that both internal and external stakeholders are able to hold an organization to account effectively (Florini, 2003). It is worth pointing out, though, that there is a difference between access to information (providing access to agendas, policy papers and other key documents) and broader transparency (providing access to decision-making processes themselves).

The debate about this dimension normally begins at the level of what information should be made available to stakeholders and what information would not be in the public good (because it is market sensitive, is based on secret intelligence in relation to peace and security etc.). What makes these debates so important is that movement towards greater transparency may be the first step towards broader organizational reform. As these reforms will often require a shifting in the balance of power, there is the possibility

of some actors within IGOs resisting transparency reforms as the first line of defense.

Many IGOs actively demand greater transparency from national governments and other actors by attaching 'good governance' conditions to their loans. In addition, the majority of members within most IGOs are democratic governments, taking decisions on behalf of their electorates. Despite this, none of the IGOs studied by the One World Trust appears to apply the principle of access to information within their own decision-making bodies. In the assessment of IGOs undertaken by GAP, only the UNHCR made public the agenda, draft papers and minutes of its governing body meetings. Of the rest, all except the BIS' G10 provide a summary of decisions taken at governing body level (GAP, 2003). Disclosure of executive body meetings is even worse. None of the IGOs studied publish the agendas of meetings (ibid). The World Bank and the BIS provide summaries of key decisions but only the WTO provides draft papers and minutes for its executive meetings (ibid). The release of summaries in particular is inadequate as the organization has the power to decide what is important and what is not.

The OECD provides an interesting example of how external pressure can lead to increased disclosure. After considerable public pressure relating to the controversial Multilateral Agreement for Investments (MAI), the OECD has published the minutes of all committee level and governing body level meetings relating to this agreement. Though these did not identify the positions of taken by the representatives of member states, arguably reducing the ability of electorates to hold governments accountable for the position they take at these bodies, this was at least a move towards greater access to information. Normally the public would not be privy to such a discussion for 20 years. Public pressure for increased transparency has also resulted in the World Bank, the WTO and the OECD producing information disclosure policies.

In addition to the transparency of formal governance processes, there are a number of other organizational processes that need clear transparency guidelines. For example, for stakeholders to effectively engage in an organization's decision-making processes they not only need clear policies about how stakeholders will be chosen, but also require access to adequate information in a form that can be effectively understood. Transparency of both evaluation, and complaints and redress processes are also important to ensure their integrity and legitimacy.

A number of IGOs are leading the way in developing greater transparency, but there is a long way to go before stakeholders both inside and outside IGOs can access all of the information they need.

All IGOs need to ensure that they have an adequate information disclosure policy which clearly states the types of documents which the organization will and will not disclose. They must also be clear what criteria will be used in cases of non-disclosure. IGOs generate considerable amounts of information. The presumption must be on disclosure. Notwithstanding this last point, IGOs should guard against the opposite problem of 'dumping' information and preventing stakeholders from accessing it effectively through the way it is organised and accessed. Indeed, it is possible for an organization to hide information in a deluge of irrelevant information which is badly organised and difficult to access by those that need it most. IGOs have a duty, as public bodies, to assist those who are interested in their work in locating the information they need as easily as can be allowed. IGOs also have a duty to ensure that the information they provide is accessible to all stakeholders. This may require translation into a number of different languages depending on the location and will therefore require the organizations to have a very clear idea of who their primary stakeholders are in particular situations and processes (see above). Finally, there is good practice

happening in other sectors. For example, IGOs can learn from some NGOs about ways to present information to stakeholders who cannot read or understand standard financial presentations.

As a group, IGOs must provide better access to their governing body and executive body meetings. This information must be available far enough in advance to give stakeholders who wish to the opportunity to make their views heard. This recommendation should not be taken as a blanket call for all board papers and minutes to be available, as there are very clearly times when market sensitive information or issues of national security are discussed when this will not be possible. In the end, such papers are only a special case for the information disclosure policy and again the presumption must be on disclosure.

Evaluation

The evaluation dimension, while having less appeal than the transparency dimension, is perhaps better understood by practitioners and by academics in terms of how to operationalize it at local and national levels. At its most basic level the monitoring and evaluation and of policies and projects is important if an organization is to understand the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of its work.

Many IGOs undertake evaluations at the national and local level. Some of these are effective and involve external stakeholders and meaningful learning, while others are less so. Nonetheless, assessing organizational performance is a huge task for IGOs given the scale not only of activities but of geographical scope. An additional challenge facing IGOs is how to capture this learning and feed it up the organization back into the global policy making processes. Best practice clearly indicates that these results should be provided to the public and their leaders in both donor and recipient countries providing a final challenge for these organizations (OECD, 1991).

The evaluation of World Bank projects are rated on three measures: outcome, institutional development impact and sustainability. Results are measured only at the final disbursement of funds and projects are not subject to continual monitoring and evaluation. *"Evaluation should be a repetitive process spread over many years, including well after the final disbursement of funds when an operational history is available"* (International Financial Advisory Commission, 2000). Moreover, the World Bank is inconsistent in its provision of evaluation material, often abdicating responsibility for publication to borrowing countries (BIC 2001). Although the MDBs devote significant resources to monitoring procurement of inputs, they do little to measure the effectiveness of outputs over time (International Financial Advisory Commission, 2000).

In terms of evaluation of the IMF, there is very little external oversight of its operations. Stiglitz stresses the need for an outside agency or agencies to assess the performance of the IMF, evaluate the accuracy of the assessments of the impacts of its programs, and help explain the failures (Stiglitz, 2003).

Within the UN, the focus of evaluation and monitoring has shifted from assessing inputs and implementation processes to assessing the contributions of various factors to a given development outcome. Such factors include outputs, partnerships, policy advice and dialogue, advocacy and brokering or coordination (presentation by UN Evaluation Group at the DAC/OECD Workshop, Paris 25-26 March 2003). Increasingly the focus at the UN is turning to performance thus increasing both the importance and scope of accountability and evaluation in the organization. The General Assembly Resolution 56/201 emphasizes *"the importance of monitoring and evaluation of operational activities of the UN system to enhance effectiveness and impact."* In contrast to both the World Bank and the

IMF though, the evaluation mechanisms are not independent. In addition, rather than reporting straight to the governing body, these mechanisms report to line managers. This suggests that, for internal stakeholders at least, the UN has less effective evaluation mechanisms.

Evaluation should be undertaken on an ongoing basis and learning should feed into future decision-making. Use of independent and impartial evaluation and the input of external stakeholders is also a crucial aspect of evaluation and monitoring processes and helps increase the credibility of, and lack of bias, in the findings. In the end, robust internal and external scrutiny and accountability cannot be achieved without meaningful evaluation processes as organizations have few other mechanisms for promoting learning.

IGOs need to provide much better access to their evaluation materials in order to enable stakeholders to identify when these organizations are meeting their objectives. This will mean that IGOs also need to ensure that there is real clarity about their mission and objectives (see the point above about mission creep). Unless and organization is clear about its mission, stakeholders will have difficulty understanding the results of evaluations.

In addition, trends in evaluation are moving away from large scale, external evaluations as the best way to learn, towards ongoing, internal monitoring exercises. IGOs will need to develop a more self-critical organizational culture if they are to benefit from this trend and will need to find ways to feed this learning around the organization both internally and to their external stakeholders. This may not be easy in organizations which have a tradition of secrecy and non-disclosure.

Complaints and Redress

This dimension is the one that is least well researched or understood. As a result, it is often missing from discussions about accountability. Yet a robust complaints and redress process is

a vital aspect of accountability as it gives stakeholders with a genuine complaint about an organization the possibility of having that complaint recognized. Such complaints could include the decisions taken themselves, or the policies which led to the decision. Complaints may also be filed against an organization, or individuals within it, who fail to follow correct procedures, or against cases of corruption or criminal misconduct. Such complaints and redress processes should help to reassure stakeholders that mistakes will not be made in the future and that some form of redress might be available. Without an effective complaints and redress process there is little that the other dimensions of accountability achieve in the prevention of willful abuses of power. A rigorous complaints mechanism will also provide an incentive for IGOs to ensure that other accountability mechanisms are consistently implemented and adhered to in all areas of their work.

In 1993, the World Bank established an Inspection Panel for projects financed by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Development Association (IDA). This panel was charged with investigating claims from project-affected peoples regarding projects that allegedly violate Bank policy, procedures, and loan agreements. Several of the Regional Development Banks including the Asian Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development followed with the creation of similar institutions¹⁴. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), as one example, is in the process of instituting an Independent Recourse Mechanism (IRM) "*whereby local groups that may be directly and adversely affected by a Bank-financed*

project would be able to raise their complaints or grievances with an arm of the Bank that would be independent from project operations" (EBRD Website¹⁵). The IRM will be run by a Chief Compliance Officer and draw upon a roster of experts selected by an internal selection committee and appointed by the President. The IRM will have two components: a compliance review function focusing on issues of non-compliance by the Bank with specified EBRD policies; and a problem-solving function to be used where complaints or grievances can benefit from problem-solving techniques which try to resolve the underlying issues raised in the complaints.

It can be nearly impossible for outsiders to access information about the abuse of power by an organization or individuals within it if active steps are taken to hide the evidence. Another critical element of this dimension therefore is the protection of whistleblowers, individuals either inside an organization or on the outside, such as contractors, who provide information to external actors about the abuse of power. The Government Accountability Project based in Washington, USA, undertook a survey of the whistleblower protection policies at four of the MDBs: the World Bank, the ABD, the IADB and the EBRD. This survey found that the policies of all four of these banks exhibited substantial deficiencies in policies designed to protect whistleblowers (Government Accountability Project, 2004). The survey was based on a 24-point check-list which was used to evaluate whether the banks' policies: are comprehensive in scope; offer the chance for a hearing in an impartial proceeding; provide modern legal standards to adjudicate claims; provide sufficient relief for those who win their cases; and provide the whistleblower with the chance to make a difference in fighting abuses of power if

¹⁴ For more resources on these mechanisms visit http://www.bicusa.org/bicusa/issues/accountability_at_the_mdbs/index.php (accessed on 22 December 2004)

¹⁵ See <http://www.ebrd.com/about/policies/irm/main.htm> accessed on 22 December 2004

he or she risks retaliation to speak out. While the survey uncovered serious deficiencies at each bank, it is also clear that a number of the banks are developing new processes for whistleblower protection as a management tool for increasing efficiency and reducing fraud and waste. As the individual reports for each bank make clear though, all have considerable work to do in order to ensure that potential whistleblowers feel secure enough to publicly expose fraud, corruption and law breaking and so assist the organizations in saving public funds and in reaching their objectives more effectively.

There are two clear areas where IGOs can increase their accountability.¹⁶

The first is in the area of whistleblower protection. There are now a number of model national whistleblower laws which lay out both the principle and practice for effective whistleblower protection which IGOs could draw on. These policies must be more than just a management tool for identifying potential challenges. If they are going to reduce waste and corruption and so increase IGO efficiency then they must be comprehensive in scope, offer the chance for an impartial hearing and provide sufficient redress for those who win their cases. A number of IGOs are already moving forwards in this area; the rest must follow.

Finally, there is a much more general point. There appears to be a disconnect between the existing policies of IGOs and the implementation of these policies. IGOs must ensure that they put in place sufficient resources and staff incentives to ensure that policies, which may on paper even exceed best practice, are implemented. They will need to ensure that management and governing bodies can adequately monitor this implementation and this may mean establishing clear channels and

responsibilities right up to the board level.

Conclusion

It is clear that the reforms identified above will not be easy to implement. The identification of the accountability principles and guidelines is in many ways the easy part. The challenge comes first in persuading IGOs to agree to the principles and then to actually operationalize them. Operationalization of accountability principles requires considerable thought and attention to both detail and the processes by which organizational change occurs. It is incumbent on these huge public bodies to reform and demonstrate much more clearly that they are acting in the public good, but it is also incumbent on those of outside these organizations calling for the reforms to demonstrate the case that enhanced accountability mechanisms lead to more efficient public policy formulation and efficient use of public resources.

¹⁶ For a more in-depth study of this dimension see the recently published paper by the One World Trust (de Las Casas 2005).

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