STRENGTHENING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT THE UNITED NATIONS
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

DIALOGUE, DEBATE, DISSENT, DELIBERATION

Study for UN DESA / DSD Major Groups Programme
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I. INTRODUCTION: Governance in the new sustainable development architecture

Context of the study

In its resolution of September 2012 following the Rio 2012 conference, the General Assembly decided "to establish a universal, intergovernmental, high-level political forum, building on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and subsequently replacing the Commission."[2] The high-level political forum (hlpf) will provide "political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development,"[3] and it will likely be the home of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) once they are negotiated by Member States. The hlpf is thus at the juncture of two critical processes for the future of sustainable development: the post-2015 (post Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)) process and the post-Rio process. Building on the experience of Major Groups in the Commission on Sustainable Development and on best practices in the UN system, this study (conducted before Member States adopted a resolution on the hlpf) explores options for public participation in engagement with the hlpf and with the broader sustainable development architecture.

The task ahead and the challenges call for bold and innovative solutions. Time and again, Member States and the UN have acknowledged that civil society and non-state actors should be part of this effort. As the report of the Cardoso panel on UN-civil society relations put it, "today's challenges require the United Nations to be more than just an intergovernmental forum; it must engage others too."[4] Current Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson stressed in a 2010 publication that:

"The CSO community is not the deus ex machina that will solve all problems associated with global governance, yet it demonstrates time and again that things can be done differently. It thus has the potential to become a catalyst for change and to contribute to the evolution of more inclusive and effective forms of shared global governance."[5]

This notion is reflected in the landmark outcome document of the first UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, "Agenda 21." Agenda 21 underscored the need to gather expertise and build on the capacity from all groupings of society. It formalized this concept by recognizing nine sectors of society as the main channels through which citizens could organize and participate in international efforts to achieve sustainable development through the UN, officially known as "Major Groups." The Groups include Business and Industry, Children and Youth, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, Local Authorities, NGOs, Scientific and Technological Community, Women, Workers and Trade Unions.

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[2] A/RES/66/288. "The Future We Want," 11 September 2012, paragraph 84
[3] A/67/L.72, "Format and organizational aspects of the high level political forum on sustainable development," Draft Resolution, 27 June 2013
[4] A/58/817. "We the Peoples: Civil Society, the United Nations and Global Governance: Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations," 11 June 2004, page 8
[5] "Sharing Global Governance: The Role of Civil Society Organizations," Tom Fries & Peter Walkenhorst, Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2010, page 5

Twenty years after the first Earth Summit, Member States gathered in Rio once again expressed strong support for active engagement of the Major Groups and other stakeholders in the post-2015 and post-Rio processes. In "The Future We Want," Member States:

"Acknowledge the role of civil society and the importance of enabling all members of civil society to be actively engaged in sustainable development. [They] recognize that improved participation of civil society depends upon, inter alia, strengthening access to information and building civil society capacity and an enabling environment."[6]

Paragraphs 46 to 53, in particular, acknowledge the role that all Major Groups play in sustainable development through various channels, and stress the importance of the participation of all these groups.

Major Groups' contribution to the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) and other UN processes is well-documented. The 2013 report of the Secretary-General on lessons learned from the CSD stressed that "it is generally perceived that stakeholders bring essential perspectives and expertise to intergovernmental discussions, allowing more informed deliberations."[7]

Major Groups' participation has infused the CSD with new ideas, challenges and information and has thus enriched the inter-governmental debate.[8] According to the Secretary-General's 2001 report on Major Groups, the active participation of Major Groups can "create the basis for transparency and accountability necessary in sustainable development efforts."[9]

UNEP - which also uses the Major Groups framework - identifies the following elements as the added value brought to the sustainable development process by Major Groups and other stakeholders:[10]
- the perspectives they bring to the table
- the valuable research and advocacy functions they perform
- their capacity to raise public awareness and role in helping foster long-term, broad-based support for UNEP's mission
- their role in disseminating relevant information effectively
- their capacity to implement UNEP's work programme far beyond UNEP's capabilities
- their capacity to adapt the global UNEP work programme to national or local realities
- their role as watchdogs to foster accountability

The CSD and UNEP aside, other UN processes have relied on different frameworks to integrate civil society and the private sector. The International Labour Organization relies on a tripartite structure of labor organizations, the private sector and governments. The UNFCCC has adopted

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[6] A/RES/66/288. "The Future We Want," 11 September 2012, paragraph 44

[7] "Lessons Learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development," Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2013, paragraph 57

[8] "Guidelines for Major Groups on CSD-13," CSD Secretariat, 25 October 2003, page 7

[9] E/CN.17/2001/PC/4. "Major Groups," Report of the Secretary-General, 14 March 2001, paragraph 3

[10] Major Groups and Stakeholders, UNEP, http://www.unep.org/drc/ProgrammesActivities/MajorGroupsandStakeholders/tabid/51330/Default.aspx

non-governmental organizations structures reminiscent of the Major Groups. The FAO Committee on World Food Security (CFS) established the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) to facilitate the participation of social movements and CSOs. Many processes have established facilitating mechanisms that are self-organized but have developed efficient relationships with the UN and Member States. The added value that civil society brings to policy processes has been recognized in all areas of the UN system, from development to peace and security.

As Member States set up the future architecture and institutional structure for sustainable development and address its interface with Major Groups and other stakeholders, the time is ripe to build on the experience of the CSD with Major Groups, as well as other good practices in the UN system.

Study methodology

This study was commissioned by DESA/ DSD Major Groups programme (subsequently referred to as "DESA/DSD") in April 2013. Its methodology included three elements:

- Desk review – of UN official documents and reports as well as contributions from Major Groups and reports by independent sources.
- Interviews of Major Groups members and non-members. The authors carried more than 30 interviews and numerous informal conversations, and observed a number of related meetings in April and May 2013.
- Presentation of the preliminary findings at a roundtable gathering both representatives of Major Groups and of civil society active in the post-2015 development agenda on 21 May 2013. Feedback from participants was integrated into the report. A new version of the report was presented at a follow-up meeting on 20 June 2013, and subsequent feedback was incorporated in the final report.

Outline

The first part of the study draws on reviews of the history of Major Groups' engagement with the CSD and highlights examples of practices that were deemed successful and efficient and practices that did not work. The second part identifies lessons learned from the experience and concerns raised by participants. Although the study found support for the Major Groups framework, it also found serious issues and concerns - not all specific to the Major Groups framework - that should be addressed in a future interface with the hlpf. The third part of the study highlights best practices emerging from the CSD experience and other UN processes that should be replicated. Options and recommendations for consideration by Member States, the UN, Major Groups and other stakeholders are identified throughout and highlighted in the conclusion. A summary of the recommendations is included in Annex I.

II. HISTORY / REVIEW OF CSD ENGAGEMENT WITH MAJOR GROUPS

In the context of new participatory practices, the Commission on Sustainable Development has been a "pathfinder," building on participatory experiments at the national and local levels.[11] As a functional commission of ECOSOC, the CSD operated under the rules for NGO participation guided by resolution 1996/31. But, unlike the other commissions of ECOSOC, the CSD used the Major Groups format as mandated in Agenda 21. The model for involving Major Groups during CSD sessions evolved over time in an experimental manner.[12] The CSD's engagement with Major Groups over the past 20 years provides a breadth of experience and examples of what worked and what did not.

The "golden age" of the CSD and multi-stakeholder dialogues - innovative and positive experience

As part of its stocktaking at "Earth Summit+5" in 1997, the United Nations General Assembly directed the CSD to strengthen its high-level policy debate through more extensive interaction with representatives of Major Groups. In response, the CSD integrated two-day multi-stakeholder dialogue segments into its annual sessions. The stated purpose of the multi-stakeholder dialogue was to inform the inter-governmental decision making process, through equal-level and direct exchanges of views and experiences between Major Groups and governments on selected problems, as well as consideration of possible solutions.[13]

The precise form of the dialogues emerged from a mix of prior experience and improvisation to meet the CSD's institutional requirements. Inspiration was in part drawn from the Local Agenda 21 experiences, the National Councils for Sustainable Development, and proceedings at the UN Conference on Human Settlement, (Habitat II), remembered by many as a high point of civil society engagement in international negotiations. Earth Summit+5 (23-27 June 1997) also set important participatory precedents: for the first time in the UN's history, representatives of civil society organizations – comprising each of the nine Major Groups – made statements in an official General Assembly Plenary meeting.[14] This significant breakthrough was helped by the fact that the President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Razali of Malaysia, was a strong supporter of NGO participation.[15]

The form of the dialogues evolved in a process of trial and error. In 1997, the first year in which the idea of a dialogue session was introduced (as a series of five half-day Major Group presentations), the expected "dialogue" failed to materialize as there was limited attendance from Member States, partly as a result of the sessions being held at the same time as the negotiations. Some government delegates did attend, but they tended to be from developed countries with large delegations, and were often not lead members of their delegations. The

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[11] E/CN.17/2001/PC/4. "Major Groups," Report of the Secretary-General, 14 March 2001, paragraph 9

[12] UN DESA, "Review of implementation of Agenda 21," Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (SD21) project, January 2012, page 152

[13] DESA/DSD/PC3/BP4. "Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues: Learning from the UNCSD Experience," Background Paper No. 4, 2002, page 3

[14] Ibid, page 14

[15] "The NGO Steering Committee and Multi-Stakeholder Participation at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development," Megan Howell, Forum International de Montréal, 1999, page 2

Commission took stock of this mixed success, and improvements were written into the work programme for the CSD for the following five years.[16]

The dialogue sessions at the CSD on "Industry" in 1998 - organized under the leadership of the Director of UN DSD through consultations with Major Groups representatives - were more successful, due in part to three significant developments. Firstly, each participating Major Group was asked to produce a paper that had been peer group reviewed; this practice, which continues today, generated higher quality and researched positions. Secondly, governments were given the opportunity to challenge ideas put forward by Major Groups; the procedure until then had been for Major Groups to make isolated presentations and for these to be noted, rather than discussed. Finally, to ensure that governments took the Dialogues seriously, they were moderated by that year's Chair of the CSD, the Minister for the Environment from the Philippines, Cielito Habito. This led governments to provide high-level representation for the Dialogue sessions.[17]

CSD-7 on Tourism in 1999 is generally seen as one of the highlights of this practice in the CSD and one of its most successful sessions. It saw a new breakthrough for Major Groups: the Dialogues outcomes were given higher status as the CSD Chair put them alongside the Ministerial discussion and CSD Intersessional document for governments to draw on.[18] In answer to stakeholders' concerns that little of what had been discussed in 1998 was picked up in formal debate by governments, Chair Simon Upton of New Zealand decided to include his chair's summary of the dialogue as a set of amendments by the New Zealand government to the formal session negotiating text. This meant that governments had to address these issues and actively reject those they did not support, rather than Major Groups having to lobby governments to include their input.[19] This practice continued in the next two sessions of the CSD but was not institutionalized, and at CSD-9 there was no process set up to take forward any of the outcomes. This coincided with a lowering of attention to the work of the CSD and a shift of emphasis to the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development.[20]

Based on the practices of the Commission on Sustainable Development, a number of multi-stakeholder dialogue segments were organized as part of the preparatory committee meetings for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002. The outcome of the dialogues was a Chair's summary, which was submitted to the preparatory committee and incorporated into its records.[21] A half-day multi-stakeholder dialogue was also planned for the Summit itself. The dialogue was designed to involve the highest level of representation from both Major Groups and Governments.[22]

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[16] "The UN Commission on Sustainable Development and Preparations for Earth Summit 2002: Background Information," UNED Forum, 2001
[17] Ibid
[18] "Future of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development," Felix Dodds, WHAT Governance Programme, January 2002
[19] "Only One Earth: The Long Road via Rio to Sustainable Development," Felix Dodds and Michael Strauss with Maurice Strong, 2012, page 84
[20] Ibid, page 94
[21] E/CN.17/2001/PC/22. "Suggested arrangements for involving non-governmental organizations and other major groups in the Summit and its preparatory process", Report of the Secretary-General, 21 March 2001, paragraph 10
[22] Ibid, section III.B, paragraph 14

The WSSD also saw an attempt to get stakeholders more engaged in the preparatory process at the regional and national levels. But the timeline did not work and most countries did not hold consultations in time to feed into the process. Those who did found it difficult to draw conclusions. In the end, there was no real regional analysis based on input from governments and stakeholders.[23]

Despite setbacks, the dialogues experience was seen as broadly positive by all parties. In a survey of Major Groups conducted by the Consensus Building Institute for DESA/DSD in 2002, at least 60% of Major Group respondents rated their experience at the dialogues as "good" or "excellent" for CSD-6 to CSD-8.[24]

These dialogues proved a successful format because of the way they were scheduled and organized. They enjoyed a great level of governmental attendance and participation because they were scheduled between the official start of CSD and the high level (ministerial) segment, rather than before the start of CSD or in conflict with other sessions.[25] And their clear substantive focus on an economic sector (such as tourism, agriculture, or energy) linked with the agenda of the annual session of the Commission made them particularly relevant.[26] The dialogues emerged as a significant component of the official meetings, and grew to become accepted as part of the process, rather than as an ancillary event taking place on the margins of negotiations.[27]

The multi-stakeholder dialogues sometimes influenced CSD decisions and spurred good results. For example, 80% of the international work programme on sustainable tourism development adopted by CSD in 1999 came from proposals made and discussed at the multi-stakeholder dialogue on tourism. Some dialogues precipitated multi-stakeholder processes,[28] and CSD requests to other UN bodies to engage in multi-stakeholder dialogues (such as the request to FAO in 2000).[29]

However, attendance from Member States was uneven. For delegations with limited capacity or whose members tended to be generalists, the multi-stakeholder dialogues could be experienced as an additional burden.[30]

Participants' enthusiasm was sometimes dampened by limited tangible results from the CSD generally, and from the dialogues in particular. However, a series of benefits, from capacity-

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[23] "Only One Earth: The Long Road via Rio to Sustainable Development," Felix Dodds and Michael Strauss with Maurice Strong, 2012, page 112
[24] DESA/DSD/PC3/BP4. "Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues: Learning from the UNCSD Experience," Background Paper No. 4, 2002, page 18-19
[25] "The NGO Steering Committee and Multi-Stakeholder Participation at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development," Megan Howell, Forum International de Montréal, 1999, page 3
[26] E/CN.17/2001/PC/4. "Major Groups," Report of the Secretary-General, 14 March 2001, paragraph 9
[27] "Background Information on Major Groups participation in the CSD," United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1540
[28] "Future of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development," Felix Dodds, WHAT Governance Programme, January 2002
[29] "UN System and Civil Society - An Inventory and Analysis of Practices: Background Paper for the Secretary-General's Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations Relations with Civil Society," UN-NGLS, May 2003
[30] DESA/DSD/PC3/BP4. "Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues: Learning from the UNCSD Experience," Background Paper No. 4, 2002, page 21

building and learning on the part of stakeholders to building enhanced trust between them, did emerge.[31]

Indeed, in the survey of Major Groups conducted by the Consensus Building Institute for DESA/DSD in 2002, the most important objectives motivating participation in the CSD multi-stakeholder dialogues were, in descending order of importance:
- Advocating to include your positions in the final negotiated text
- Informing debate by providing specialized knowledge
- Expressing perspectives and values in an important forum
- Building consensus on policy across Major Groups
- Networking within your Major Group
- Learning about sustainable development[32]

This survey and others showed that the benefits of the multi stakeholder dialogues for Major Groups were not limited to influencing the final negotiated outcome. This finding was confirmed in interviews.

Move to "entry points," decline of the CSD and of civil society participation

In 2002, the WSSD integrated Major Groups into the intergovernmental process through new approaches and formats for participation, including high-level roundtables, expert panels, and partnerships for sustainable development.[33]

Following this experience, a report of the Secretary-General noted that "activities involving Major Groups should be more closely linked to the main activities during the Commission's future sessions. For example, multi-stakeholder dialogues could be spread throughout Commission sessions, rather than organized as stand-alone, two-day segments, in order to make each of those dialogues more relevant to Commission sessions and increase their impact on outcomes and decisions."[34] These recommendations led to the reduction of the multi-stakeholder dialogues and the introduction of "entry points" - with mixed results.

Although DESA/DSD published a favorable analysis of the multi-stakeholder dialogues format in 2002,[35] the dialogue session was reduced to one and a half hours after CSD-11 in 2003. It was replaced by "entry points" to allow for major group input throughout the formal plenary sessions of CSD.[36] This move was originally supported by Major Groups as a trade-off allowing for greater involvement. At CSD-12, however, stakeholders asked for the multi-stakeholder

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[31] DESA/DSD/PC3/BP4. "Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues: Learning from the UNCSD Experience," Background Paper No. 4, 2002, page 5
[32] Ibid, page 24
[33] "Guidelines for Major Groups on CSD-13," CSD Secretariat, 25 October 2003, page 1
[34] E/CN.17/2003/2. "Follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the future role of the Commission on Sustainable Development: the implementation track", Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2003, paragraph 73
[35] DESA/DSD/PC3/BP4. "Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues: Learning from the UNCSD Experience," Background Paper No. 4, 2002
[36] UN DESA," Review of implementation of Agenda 21," Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (SD21) project, January 2012, page 152-153

dialogues to be reintroduced and for the chair's summary document of the multi-stakeholder dialogues to be entered into government negotiations.[37] The Secretariat agreed to re-establish the dialogues, but with the reduced time of 90 minutes. The interactive value of the dialogues was to a large extent lost due to the reduced time, and Major Groups have remained critical of the new systems of integration since 2003.[38]

According to the report of the Secretary-General on lessons learned from the CSD, Member States found the impact of the multi-stakeholder dialogues on decision-making process mixed, and at times limited and indirect.[39] However, this is based on the more recent experience of CSD, after the dialogues' time was reduced.

Some organizations argue that the formal space for Major Groups has decreased since the end of the multi-stakeholder dialogues. In the 2009 session, for instance, there was less room at the high-level segment than before, and opening speeches were reduced from three minutes to one. The Multi-stakeholder Dialogue also took place before the Ministers had arrived.[40]

The shrinking of the space for civil society coincided with a decline in the relevance and effectiveness of the CSD. The 2013 report of the Secretary-General on lessons learned from CSD notes that "many Member States, UN system organizations and Major Groups share the view that the Commission progressively lost its luster and its effectiveness. They point to several shortcomings. Those relate, among others, to the Commission's impact on implementation of sustainable development; to its role in integrating economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in the work of the UN system; as well as to its decision making processes and outcomes."[41]

Interest in the CSD declined. Many NGOs had put considerable efforts into the WSSD and were disappointed. UNFCCC talks were moving to the next stages of the Kyoto Protocol and attracted many NGOs as the process gained momentum.[42] Some organizations that had been active in the CSD also shifted their attention and efforts towards other processes that they considered more relevant and closer to their interests, including the World Trade Organization, and later the Aid Effectiveness Agenda and the G20. These processes also offered more resources for civil society participation, as donors shifted their support. The report of the Secretary-General on lessons learned from the CSD notes that participating NGOs "were mostly from the environmental

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[37] "Only One Earth: The Long Road via Rio to Sustainable Development," Felix Dodds and Michael Strauss with Maurice Strong, 2012, page 112

[38] 38 UN DESA," Review of implementation of Agenda 21," Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (SD21) project, January 2012, pages 152-153

[39] "Lessons Learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development," Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2013, paragraph 56

[40] UNCTAD/NGLS/2009/1. "Strengthening Dialogue: UN Experience with Small Farmer Organizations and Indigenous Peoples," NGLS, 2009, page 47, note 40

[41] "Lessons Learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development," Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2013, paragraph 3

[42] "Only One Earth: The Long Road via Rio to Sustainable Development," Felix Dodds and Michael Strauss with Maurice Strong, 2012, page 135

sector" and that "major NGOs, local governments and the private sector no longer see CSD as a major focus of their work."[43]

With reduced interest and participation in the CSD by Major Groups and other stakeholders, there was less pressure from their side to challenge decisions on participation modalities made after the WSSD and CSD-11 in 2003.

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[43] "Lessons Learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development," Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2013, paragraph 58

III. LESSONS LEARNED AND CONCERNS RAISED

After two decades, the experience of Major Groups at the CSD has generated a number of good practices that have been tested in reality and have proven their value. Any effort to establish a mechanism for engagement between stakeholders and the hlpf has much to build on, especially from the first decade of the CSD. However, Member States should also be aware of the CSD's shortcomings.

Although the Major Groups model has been innovative in integrating stakeholders into the intergovernmental process at the UN, it also raises serious issues about Major Groups' ability to include all stakeholders and their impact on policy-making. These issues are not new and have been documented by various sources. The 2001 report of the Secretary-General on Major Groups, for instance, identified several constraints for this model, including "geographical imbalances in participation, particularly at the international level, growing dependence on mainstream Major Groups as intermediaries, the need for further work on setting accountable and transparent participation mechanisms, lack of meaningful participation in decision-making processes, and lack of reliable funding for Major Groups."[44]

Most of these imperfections, however, are not specific to the Major Groups format but relate to broader issues of effectiveness and quality of the interaction of non-Member States with UN policy processes.

A. Support for Major Group format, differing perceptions of purpose

An online survey of the Major Group format conducted jointly by UNEP and NGLS in early 2013 - to inform UNEP's response to the implementation of the Rio 2012 Outcome Document and the related General Assembly decision to "strengthen and upgrade" UNEP - found broad support for the nine Major Groups concept. More than 35% of respondents rated the concept as "good" and more than 15% as "excellent", while another 25% rated it as "fair." Respondents highlighted that the concept was good for fostering active participation, for its inclusiveness and its comprehensiveness, and for creating good results - by generating and identifying the best opinions for fair decision-making, enabling participation of important segments of society, and making discussions more focused.[45] Interviews with Major Group members and other organizations active in UN processes also found a good degree of support for strengthening the policy interface by building on existing good practices, including the Major Group format.

Many groups have found having a designated Major Group for their constituency to be extremely valuable. According to one participant from the Trade Unions Major Group at the May 21 roundtable, "we haven't felt excluded from processes where there are no Major Groups. But having the trade unions major group has been a great opportunity. In other processes, there was sometimes only one microphone for all of civil society." Similarly, a participant at the 2013 Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues noted that "considering the history (of IP engagement with the UN), the Indigenous Peoples Major Groups is a formidable opportunity to advocate."

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[44] E/CN.17/2001/PC/4. "Major Groups," Report of the Secretary-General, 14 March 2001, paragraph 19
[45] "Models and Mechanisms of Civil Society Participation in UNEP," UNEP / UN-NGLS Civil Society Survey, January 2013, page 33

The Major Groups concept can be used by civil society groups to carve out and increase space for their constituencies in processes that do not use the strict Major Group structure. It has also been used by other parts of the UN to facilitate broader and more diverse civil society engagement with and input into the process. During the meetings of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda in Monrovia in February 2013, the HLP Secretariat used the Major Group concept to organize a space for women, trade unions and youth.

The "non-governmental organizations constituencies" formed under the UNFCCC have organically adopted the Major Groups structure to organize civil society and private sector participation in the process. Initially, there were two constituencies under UNFCCC, the business and industry non-governmental organizations (BINGO) and the environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGO). Other constituencies were then formed and recognized, including the local government and municipal authorities (LGMA), indigenous peoples organizations (IPO), research and independent non-governmental organizations (RINGO), trade union non-governmental organizations (TUNGO), farmers and agricultural non- governmental organizations (Farmers), women and gender non-governmental organizations (Women and Gender) and youth non-governmental organizations (YOUNGO).[46]

Interviews highlighted that not all Major Groups members see the framework as achieving the same purposes. For some, it is mainly a mechanism to provide input into the policy process, while others see it as recognition of a designated space for their constituency. While both these perceptions can overlap, they entail different approaches to measuring the effectiveness of the Major Groups framework in terms on inclusivity and relevance.

B. Concerns raised

Inadequate, incomplete or missing Major Groups

Many civil society organizations (CSOs) saw the Major Groups as a positive step when they were established, as they broadened the possibility for civil society engagement from one "slot" to several and gave a designated space to groups that sometimes felt they had to fight to get their voice heard, such as women's organizations and youth groups. The Major Groups framework also facilitated the engagement of small organizations that did not have the capacity (which larger organizations often enjoy) to follow multiple processes and use informal channels to policymakers.

However, the inclusiveness of nine categories has come to be seen by some as exclusive. Many find that the nine Major Groups model is a reductionist approach that invites scrutiny for its lack of inclusiveness.[47] For example, while "youth" have their Major Group, "elderly" do not. Peter Willetts of City University London notes that this model "only avoids being highly authoritarian because the groups are self-organizing and because, bizarrely, the ninth Major Group of NGOs is

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[46] http://unfccc.int/files/parties_and_observers/ngo/application/pdf/constituency_2011_english.pdf
[47] UN DESA," Review of implementation of Agenda 21," Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (SD21) project, January 2012, page 155

called "nongovernmental organizations" themselves, a residual category that allows for the inclusion of any NGO that is not in one of the other eight groups."[48]

The Rio 2012 outcome document recognizes that in the future, the process must be open to "other stakeholders, including local communities, volunteer groups and foundations, migrants and families, as well as older persons and persons with disabilities."[49] The draft resolution on the format and organizational aspects of the hlpf also identifies "other stakeholders, such as private philanthropic organizations, educational and academic entities, persons with disabilities, volunteer groups and other stakeholders active in areas related to sustainable development."[50] This is one step towards building a more inclusive framework.

But opening the process to new Major Groups will not help solve all the problems raised by the rigidity of the categories, which can force groups to shoehorn themselves into inadequate definitions that they may resent. For instance, the Major Group framework forces Indigenous Peoples to engage with the policy process through a format that defines them as a constituency of a state structure. But Indigenous Peoples argue that they are peoples and nations that constituted themselves long before the formation of Member States and their governments.[51] As one interviewee from this constituency put it: "I'm not an indigenous, I belong to a nation."

The fact that the Local Authorities Major Group is grouped with other Major Groups under the umbrella of "civil society" has also caused mayors participating in UN meetings to feel uncomfortable, as they consider that this ignores the legitimate role of large megacities as global actors.[52] Local and sub-national authorities similarly feel that the denomination of NGO is not correctly reflecting their identity, which is governmental but distinct from national governments. ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) and members of the Local Government Climate Roadmap have led advocacy efforts to have local authorities recognized as a governmental actor.[53] In December 2010 in Cancun, a UNFCCC decision for the first time recognized local authorities as a governmental actor in intergovernmental climate negotiations. Local authorities argue that this recognition is needed in other parts of the UN.[54]

Another concern is that the Major Groups framework arbitrarily groups together organizations that may have diverging priorities and interests. This leads to internal group tensions and imbalances. For instance, within the Children and Youth Major Group, children's issues tend to be marginalized and not given much space in position papers and statements.[55]

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[48] "The Role of NGOs in Global Governance," Peter Willets, World Politics Review, September 27, 2011
[49] A/RES/66/288. "The Future We Want," 11 September 2012, paragraph 43
[50] A/67/L.72, "Format and organizational aspects of the high level political forum on sustainable development," Draft Resolution, 27 June 2013, paragraph 16
[51] UNCTAD/NGLS/2009/1. "Strengthening Dialogue: UN Experience with Small Farmer Organizations and Indigenous Peoples," NGLS, 2009, page 23
[52] UN DESA," Review of implementation of Agenda 21," Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (SD21) project, January 2012, page 192
[53] "Local Sustainability 2012. Taking Stock and Moving Forward. Global Review," ICLEI, 2012, page 73
[54] 54 UN DESA," Review of implementation of Agenda 21," Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (SD21) project, January 2012, page 192
[55] Ibid, page 172

Interviews revealed that there was no agreement on whether the Major Groups model should be open to restructuring. Organizations which consider that their constituency is not currently well-represented in the Major Groups framework were keen to see the format enlarged to new groups - in particular those mentioned by Member States in "The Future We Want." Interviewees from organizations advocating for the rights of people with disabilities, in particular, argued that they should have a separate Major Group. Other civil society organizations currently active in processes that intersect with sustainable development and the area of work of Major Groups, such as Beyond 2015 or organizations working on financing for development, were concerned about being able to participate fully in a way that builds on and recognizes their current mode of organization, but not necessarily having to establish their own Major Group. Their primary concern was that the Major Group framework not be a hurdle to participate in future processes of the hlpf. Other interviewees, in particular representatives from volunteer organizations, voiced a similar concern. Volunteers are asking for their contributions on the ground and to the implementation of the sustainable development agenda to be recognized, and are keen to be able to engage fully in the process.

Strengthening and respecting the diversity of the NGO Major Group, which is the most likely avenue for these organizations to participate, is key to meeting the challenge of inclusivity and effectiveness (see recommendations below).

Some within and outside the Major Groups have expressed concern that opening the format would be "opening Pandora's box," as it could mean jeopardizing some gains of the last two decades. They also pointed out that adding more Major Groups could entail less speaking time for each Major Group, if the allocated time itself is not increased. Some argued that Member States already feel nine Major Groups is too much.

If the Major Groups format is to address the legitimate requests of new groupings to be included, key questions arise: what criteria would be used to add these groups and deal with future requests for new Major Groups, and what process would determine which groups are added, as / if the hlpf becomes the home of the Sustainable Development Goals and their financing and the post 2015 development agenda, and commands interest from other constituencies?

Recommendation 1: Consultations on criteria for new Major Groups
The UN Secretariat should hold consultations with key players, including members of Major Groups and members of organizations that are interested in becoming more active in the Major Groups framework. These consultations would determine criteria for the establishment of new Major Groups, as well as means to recognize and support other forms of organizing within the Major Group framework - including through the use of caucuses or clusters, and a potential "flexible slot" for temporary participation. Criteria for new Major Groups could build on existing experience, for instance civil society membership criteria developed by UNEP, which include the track record and experience of an organization.

Representation vs. facilitation / lack of clarity and transparency

To allow for the involvement of a multitude of groups and organizations based around the world, the Major Groups format for the CSD relies on "Organizing Partners" as facilitators between the year-round policy process and global constituencies. Organizing Partners (OPs), who are well acquainted with the process, can help their constituencies navigate the often complicated and opaque rules of the intergovernmental negotiations.

While this can be successful in widely disseminating information to constituencies and gathering feedback and ideas at the local, national, regional and global levels, it also presents serious pitfalls. Without mechanisms to promote transparency and accountability, the engagement of only a limited number of actors can lead to undemocratic practices. A challenge for the functioning of OPs, it is generally true of any process in which the interface only works with a small number of individuals.

A review of the CSD multi-stakeholder dialogues by DESA/DSD in 2002 cautioned against the "dangers and advantages of what one participant called the 'professionalization' of multi-stakeholder dialogues."[56] The 2001 report of the Secretary-General on Major Groups similarly raised concerns about "the overdependence on the representatives of Major Groups that are well acquainted with the workings of governmental and intergovernmental machinery and that often act as intermediaries for those not so well acquainted."[57] The process can easily become an "insider's game," which those most familiar with the unwritten rules and hierarchies can exploit to their advantage.[58] This can lead to power imbalances and domination by a few, "where individuals who are already resourceful are given yet another arena to influence."[59]

The Secretary-General also noted in his 2001 report that "in many cases, the civil society and business actors that demand accountability from Governments do not always offer the same accountability from within."[60] The lack of transparency within Major Groups can lead to power imbalances when those who are present decide without going through truly open and transparent consultations with their constituencies.

Members of Major Groups based outside of New York City argue that these power imbalances increase in the absence of a formal structure and clear rules, especially at a time when the role of Major Groups is unclear following Rio 2012. While a certain level of informality and spontaneity may be beneficial for individuals present at UN headquarters, it contributes to the perception of an "insider track." As one interviewee put it, "New Yorkers can take power too easily." For those outside of New York City, more structured rules for engagement can bring a clarity and transparency that is currently lacking.

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[56] DESA/DSD/PC3/BP4. "Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues: Learning from the UNCSD Experience," Background Paper No. 4, 2002, page 76
[57] E/CN.17/2001/PC/4. "Major Groups," Report of the Secretary-General, 14 March 2001, paragraph 21
[58] DESA/DSD/PC3/BP4. "Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues: Learning from the UNCSD Experience," Background Paper No. 4, 2002, page 76
[59] UN DESA," Review of implementation of Agenda 21," Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (SD21) project, January 2012, page 155
[60] E/CN.17/2001/PC/4. "Major Groups," Report of the Secretary-General, 14 March 2001, paragraph 22

Because of this lack of transparency and accountability, some organizations may view the Major Group format, in particular the reliance on organizing partners, with suspicion. The Network of Farmers' and Agricultural Producers' Organisations of West Africa (ROPPA), for instance, notes that the practice of working through international organizing partners has had the effect of hampering participation by regional farmers' networks.[61]

Recommendation 2: More structure in Major Groups governance
A predictable and transparent process is important for all organizations, especially those not based at UNHQ. This requires establishing a clear definition of the role of the OPs (see terms of reference for OPs below), of their responsibility to both consult with their constituency and keep it informed of developments, of what constitutes a "Major Group statement" (see recommendation below) and when OPs or other Major Group members can speak in the name of the Major Group as a whole - if ever.

Limited engagement of people's movements

The direct input of people on the ground – as distinct from NGOs that may "represent them" – in UN processes is crucial to ensure that the policies they adopt and the programmes implemented incorporate the insights and proposals of those they are intended to support.[62] And yet participation by grassroots people and communities has been remarkably difficult to achieve. This is due to a number of factors, including lack of knowledge of / interest in UN processes, lack of funding, insufficient outreach, lack of local language use, excessive centralization of the policy process and the disproportionate emphasis on the global level.

As one member of the Farmers Major Group put it during an interview: "The process is too NYC-centric. People's movements sometimes don't even see the value added in participating. Especially since the output is often disappointing."

This greatly affects both the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the Major Groups' representation and participation.[63] Observers have pointed out that some governments can be put off by the fact that the civil society organizations present in UN forums are dominantly northern NGOs.[64]

This has been compounded by the current focus of donors to fund civil society participation through international NGOs (INGOs) rather than national or local organizations. It is further exacerbated by the fact that INGOs tend to be based in and led from the North.

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[61] UNCTAD/NGLS/2009/1. "Strengthening Dialogue: UN Experience with Small Farmer Organizations and Indigenous Peoples," NGLS, 2009, page 23
[62] UNCTAD/NGLS/2009/1. "Strengthening Dialogue: UN Experience with Small Farmer Organizations and Indigenous Peoples," NGLS, 2009, page IX
[63] "Lessons Learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development," Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2013, paragraph 58
[64] UNCTAD/NGLS/2009/1. "Strengthening Dialogue: UN Experience with Small Farmer Organizations and Indigenous Peoples," NGLS, 2009, page 11

Recommendation 3: Make the process more relevant for participation of social movements
The cost-benefit analysis of participation in UN processes often leads social movements to conclude that their time would be better spent elsewhere. They argue that interaction should go beyond a consultative space to a more deliberative space. The Committee on World Food Security is sometimes cited as an example of what such a space could look like, with civil society (and the private sector) participating fully, with the exception of a vote, in the Committee. The hlpf should consider a similar model.   Social movements organizing should also be better recognized in UN processes. For instance, social movements participating in global UN conferences often focus their perspectives and demands through parallel events and activities. The outcome of these should be better integrated in the official process by the UN system and staff, Members States and Major Groups.

Quantity vs. quality / How to shift from access to influence

The quality of participation in the policy process cannot be measured only through the number of opportunities to provide input. While Major Groups may be given opportunity to input into the process - through statements, roundtables, side-events, etc - it is often difficult for them to assess whether their views have been taken into consideration or have had an impact on the process. This can lead to "consultation fatigue" within Major Groups as well as with Member States, as participants are consistently asked to provide input but rarely see the result as a tangible output, or even fail to receive feedback on what happened with their inputs. If Major Group members feel their contributions have not been heard and taken into account by the process, they will either give up or keep on repeating them. This cannot produce a satisfactory dialogue in either case.

Interviews for this study show that Major Groups members are generally concerned that mechanisms for engagement focus on quantity rather than quality. They argue that the role of participating actors must go beyond perspective sharing. The 2001 report of the Secretary-General on Major Groups acknowledges that participation in decision-making "refers to the active presence of Major Groups in the design, execution, and monitoring of sustainable development follow-up activities at all levels, going beyond the passive exchange of information."[65]

Interviewed members of Major Groups pointed out in several instances that having access to a process could not be equated with influencing the process, and warned against the risk of tokenism and civil society engagement becoming a "box-ticking exercise." Major Groups and other stakeholders have made clear that meaningful engagement means being involved in all aspects and at all levels of the process.[66]

Some also raise concerns that the emphasis on quantity and the resulting "consultation overload" is particularly detrimental to smaller organizations more distant from UN headquarters and with

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[65] E/CN.17/2001/PC/4. "Major Groups," Report of the Secretary-General, 14 March 2001, paragraph 3
[66] See for instance: "Statement by Jeffery Huffines, CIVICUS, NGO Major Group Organizing Partner on behalf of Major Groups and other Organizations," hlpf, 14 May 2013

less knowledge of the process. A CAFOD blogpost has noted that "a multitude of differing consultations poses a real risk of losing or muffling valuable voices since only those NGOs with enough time and resources are able to cover all the bases to get heard. [...] In all likelihood, confronted with the sheer amount of input, those receiving the input from these consultations have to pick and choose where to engage and will probably fall back on trusted sources or be drawn to the loudest voices. Vital contributions from marginalized voices will fall by the wayside."[67]

This is a special challenge for the NGO Major Group in light of its nature as a catch-all for organizations that do not fit in other Major Groups. The NGO Major Group is much larger than other Major Groups and can represent a wide range of priorities and interests, making it more difficult to facilitate meaningful input into processes. It also makes it more likely that the diversity of view represented in the Group, which positively characterizes civil society commitments, will be lost.

Declining interest in multilateralism / lack of confidence in the UN

The Rio conference in 1992 and other international UN conferences of the 1990s created great enthusiasm for multilateralism at the UN from a broad change of civil society organizations. But as other more exclusive fora like the G20 have gained prominence and tangible results from the commitments made at the UN can be difficult to quantify, interest and confidence in the multilateral UN policy process have waned. Many organizations have come to believe that their efforts would be better spent in other international, regional or national settings. This has negatively affected the CSD as well as other UN processes.

In discussions of the CSD and the hlpf, a participant from the Trade Unions Major Group at the May 21 roundtable stressed that there is a "tension - not exclusive to Major Groups - between the involvement of local groups and the processes we have in the UN. What makes these UN processes interesting or less interesting for these people? It is becoming less and less easy in trade unions cases to make the case for multilateralism and the UN." The International Labor Organization is the exception for trade unions, which are actively involved in the tri-partite governance of the organization.

A representative of a leading environmental group interviewed for this study similarly stated that multilateralism is not a priority for their organization; their engagement is one of tracking what happens at the UN level.

This decline in interest for multilateralism at the UN negatively impacts the quality of the interface between civil society and UN processes, as many organizations do not see the added value in working to improve it. This decline in quality is in turn often blamed on the nature of the interface itself - such as the Major Groups framework - but is in fact linked to broader issues.

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[67] "The post-2015 consultations – does quantity add to quality?" Bernadette Fischler, Serpent and Doves: CAFOD Policy Team Blog, 21 January 2013, http://cafodpolicy.wordpress.com/2013/01/21/the-post-2015-consultations-does-quantity-add-to-quality/

Recommendation 4: Demonstrating the value of the interface
The UN should take the lead to make its processes more relevant and attractive to Major Groups and other stakeholders. This means building a space and interface that make their interaction with policy processes more valuable. See the best practices below offering many options for meaningful participation.   In addition to ensuring the fulfillment of rights of participation in inter-governmental processes, the UN should also develop and support structures for Major Groups and other stakeholders to have meaningful and timely exchanges with UN senior officials and governance bodies.

Insufficient integration of the "three pillars"

The UN has been eclipsed by other fora in the areas of economic and financial policy-making. Many organizations working on trade and financial issues do not see the sustainable development machinery at the UN as a dynamic policy environment. According to a CSO expert on the international financial system with experience in FfD and the G20, "investment of time and resources (in UN processes) outweighs the possible impact one could have."

Not surprisingly, organizations participating in the CSD were disproportionately focused on the environmental sector. The CSD failed to attract consistent participation from organizations working on economic and financial issues, particularly in its later years. This reflected the broader difficulty of the CSD in integrating the "three pillars" and more generally the perception of some Member States and non-governmental organizations that the UN is not an effective forum for economic and financial issues. Similarly, many NGOs focused on development and social issues did not participate consistently in the CSD and focused most of their engagement at national levels. These groups will actively engage in the hlpf only if Member States successfully integrate processes linked to sustainable development, post 2015 and financing for development.

Inadequate national / regional / global dynamic, too much emphasis on global level

Some UN processes and some of the civil society organizations participating in them tend to put too much emphasis on the global level, to the neglect of the regional, national and local levels. This often reflects a hierarchical interpretation of the dynamic between those levels, with the global level dominant. Some of the offices charged with interfacing with civil society / Major Groups will rarely look for interaction beyond people and organizations working on the global process or at UN headquarters. The reverse is also true, as some processes are solely or overwhelmingly focused on the national level.

While there can be a tension between a top-down, hierarchical understanding of the global-local dynamic and a more bottom-up approach, many organizations do both. Some CSOs active in UN processes also participate in other spaces and at other levels, including through direct interaction with their government at the national level. Some argue that the global level should be shaped by the national and local level, rather than the reverse. They stress that the conversation should not only be about how the local level can implement the decisions made at the global level.

The excessive emphasis on the global level also results in fragmentation, as insufficient efforts are made to bring together processes occurring at various levels and in different settings. This is true for the UN itself and for Major Groups and civil society. The lack of political commitment on the part of the UN to resolve this fragmentation leads to a lack of coherence. It also limits the ability of civil society to be effective in any given setting. If more attention were given to other processes at various levels rather than just the global level, the Major Groups framework would not constantly have to "reinvent the wheel." The interface could be used to give legitimacy and bring to the global level activities and outcomes from other settings, including through statements that were made in other fora.

Recommendation 5: Coherence and improved UN coordination
Most bodies of the UN system, and certainly those with a mandate related to achieving sustainable development, have a unit or function dedicated to engagement with civil society. More coherence is needed from and across these units to support a two-way process of support to CSOs and in-reach to UN system from CSOs. Efforts could build on existing good practices - such as the cooperation between the NGO Section of UN-DESA, UN-NGLS and DESA/DSD during Rio 2012, the cooperation between various UN technical teams on the issues on the agenda of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, and the CSO focal points monthly calls organized by DESA/DSD, which include regional commissions' CSO focal points This could take the form of an ad hoc or time-bound "community of practitioners," convened at regular intervals, with rotating chairs.   Special attention and new modalities are needed to strengthen coherence not only at HQ and global levels but also between global, regional and national levels. The UN Development Group, DESA, UNDP and the resident coordinator system should broaden their attention to fostering coherence in the UN system to include engagement with Major Groups and civil society.   The UN-NGLS has a track record of supporting inter-agency coordination and civil society-UN interfaces. It should be adequately supported to fulfill its mandate of supporting coherence in the UN system with regards to civil society.

Recommendation 6: Put emphasis on the regional and local level
Regional and national initiatives should be leading the content of what happens at the global level, rather than the global level "trickling down" to the regional and national levels. The UN should better showcase what happens at regional level in global policy processes, and Major Groups should build on / reflect the result of national and regional consultations in their statements.

Too much English

Many interviewees argue that the prevalence of English as a work language hampers participation by all. Documents issued in English are not always translated into other official UN languages, and when they are it can take a long time for the translation to be made available. This makes it more difficult for OPs to communicate with their constituency in non-English speaking countries, and it generally disadvantages people and organizations for which English is not a working language or not used at all.

The farmers' movement, La Via Campesina, for instance, points out that the use of English as the default working language and the fact that many documents do not get translated into other UN official languages, let alone non-official languages, are barriers to participation of a broad range of people's organizations.[68]

Recommendation 7: More language diversity
The UN should disseminate information not only in English, and preferably in all UN official languages. Funding should be allocated to providing translation of all relevant hlpf documents, including background documents, documents under negotiation and final outcomes. Within the Major Groups, efforts should be made to ensure that OPs collectively have multi-lingual capacity - by selecting OPs of multi-lingual capacity and/or by making sure that the OPs come from constituencies speaking different languages. OPs should also make use of existing technology that, although imperfect, allows for rough translation of documents, including online translation tools.

Insufficient resources

Lack of funding and support for the Major Groups - and for civil society within the UN system more generally - is not a new issue. The 2003 report of the Secretary-General following up on WSSD noted that "a major challenge is to mobilize adequate extra-budgetary resources to facilitate the involvement of Major Groups, particularly from developing countries."[69]

Inadequate funding is a major obstacle to participation and to ensuring that Major Groups are truly representative of a broad constituency. The 2002 survey of the CSD multi-stakeholder dialogues found that a majority of civil society delegates were financed through the institution that they represented at CSD, and that a sizable minority (14 percent) was completely self-financed. The report noted that "while this shows a remarkable commitment on the part of certain individuals and institutions, it also implies the exclusion of actors without the financial and organizational means and/or who cannot find sponsorship from within their own ranks."[70]

Major Groups can rarely rely on funding granted through UN mechanisms for their participation. The Major Groups Programme of the Division for Sustainable Development does not have a separate budget, although it has had modest access to regular budget resources to support Major Groups-related work. The Division also receives extra-budgetary funds from donors, mainly to support participation of Major Groups from developing countries.[71]

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[68] "The Committee on World Food Security (CFS): A New Space for the Food Policies of the World, Opportunities and Limitations," La Via Campesina notebook, Number 4, 2012, page 8
[69] E/CN.17/2003/2. "Follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the future role of the Commission on Sustainable Development: the implementation track", Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2003, paragraph 77
[70] DESA/DSD/PC3/BP4. "Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues: Learning from the UNCSD Experience," Background Paper No. 4, 2002, page 36
[71] "Division for Sustainable Development," UN-NGLS, http://www.un-ngls.org/spip.php?page=article_fr_s&id_article=844

In addition to DSD, the civil society liaison offices at the UN are under-resourced. UN bodies do not give sufficient priority and resources to their unit in charge of interacting with civil society / Major Groups, resulting in work overload for the staff. As these bodies cannot fully perform their functions, including information dissemination, Major Groups representatives present in New York come to shoulder some of the workload through informal arrangements, effectively performing what should be done by UN staff. This blurs the lines of reporting and accountability and contributes to the perception that some "insiders" are monopolizing the process. According to one member of the Children and Youth Major Group, "OPs become proxies for UN staff."

There is concern that insufficient resources are the result of and reflect the lack of political will and leadership at the top. Members of civil society argue that making the system work for them is not a priority for the UN. According to one member of the Farmers Major Group: "They (the UN and Member States) say they want civil society input but they're not giving us the means to do this." The interviewee added that more support "would allow us to focus on our valuable content input rather than on logistics."

Many CSOs have been deeply affected by the global economic crisis[72] and struggle to fund all their activities. In this context, participation in the intergovernmental process may slide down their list of priorities, leading to low attendance by CSOs from communities most affected, from developing countries and generally not based within easy range of UNHQ.

Recommendation 8: Adequate, predictable and timely funding from Member States
To be more than symbolic gestures, commitments to inclusiveness must be supported by funding. In the past, the CSD Trust Fund helped ensure equitable participation and representation by developing countries and Major Groups. Voluntary donor Trust Funds have been established in other UN processes to allow for civil society participation, including for instance the multi-donor trust fund for the Civil Society Mechanism of the Committee on World Food Security. A wide range of Member States should finance a multi-donor trust fund to support Major Group engagement with the hlpf, and carry over any remaining funds from the CSD Trust. The Trust Fund could follow the model of the CSD Trust Fund and be hosted by DESA, and allocations could be managed by a Steering Committee composed of UN and Major Groups representatives.

Insufficient respect for the consultation process / tight timelines

Although Major Groups can sometimes find consensus on some issues, they represent diverse interests. For some organizations, voicing alternative perspectives and policies is part of their mission. This diversity is not recognized if Major Groups are systematically required to speak in one voice as "civil society" or as "Major Groups." The international peasant movement La Via Campesina, for instance, argues that "debate in UN forums is often de-politicized by privileging technical terms and, in some forums, by requiring a consensus among civil society constituencies

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[72] ST/ESA/2010/DWP/97. "Impact of the Global Economic Crises on Civil Society Organizations," Eva-Maria Hanfstaengl, DESA Working Paper No. 97, September 2010

which in fact have very different positions."[73] La Via Campesina withdrew as an organizing partner for the Farmers Major Groups at the time of WSSD because it found that divergences among different sectors of the farmers' constituency were too deep to allow meaningful consensus positions to be formulated.[74] It has since become an OP again and has gone through a process of self-organizing and dialogue with other OPs, to resolve the question of when and how members can speak in the name of the Major Group and to ensure that a diversity of views can be expressed.

Finding consensus even within one Major Group can be difficult. Major Groups' self-organized structures can facilitate the emergence of consensus, for instance in the Business and Industry and Trade Unions Major Groups, but not all Major Groups are structured in this way. The 2002 evaluation of the CSD multi-stakeholder dialogues recognized that there existed "sharp internal divisions within Major Groups that are not, and cannot conceivably be, reconciled before the CSD, as manifested by the fact that delegates from the same Major Groups sometimes make contradictory claims in their dialogue interventions."[75]

While governments understandably "tend to favor conciseness over a cacophony of voices,"[76] forcing an artificial consensus to emerge among Major Groups negates the diversity of the voices they represent and can only lead to more power imbalances among different groups. This makes it more likely that any consensus will represent the interests of the most organized and powerful groups, rather than those of the most affected communities.

It is particularly difficult for the NGO Major Group to speak "with one voice" in light of its size and diversity. The only thing members of the NGO Major Group sometimes have in common is support for an open and inclusive process. While this is an important message to carry, it often means that more substantive input on specific issues from various organizations within the NGO Major Group will not be expressed. The NGO Major Group structure and functioning should also allow for the diversity of well-developed and articulated positions among its members to be brought forward.

Recommendation 9: Strengthening and supporting the NGO Major Group
Better self-organizing of the NGO Major Groups space is a priority. The NGO Major Group could consider, for instance, a system of regional OPs, with one OP per region or at least one OP for the Global South and one for the Global North, and include focal points on thematic caucuses around issues on the inter-governmental agenda. The NGO Major Group has been innovative in establishing a system of "clusters" during the Rio 2012 Conference - to allow organizations with interest in and knowledge of specific issues to connect and take the lead within the NGO Major Group. This experience could be built on, with thematic caucuses determined to facilitate effective engagement with the inter-governmental process.

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[73] UNCTAD/NGLS/2009/1. "Strengthening Dialogue: UN Experience with Small Farmer Organizations and Indigenous Peoples," NGLS, 2009, page 11
[74] Ibid, page 23
[75] DESA/DSD/PC3/BP4. "Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues: Learning from the UNCSD Experience," Background Paper No. 4, 2002, page 76
[76] Ibid, page 22

The problems generated by externally-imposed consensus are compounded by the fact that Major Groups need to follow the quick-paced or slow-slow-quick-quick-slow-paced policy process of the UN and often must take positions in a timely manner as issues arise. Many OPs interviewed for this study noted that the timeline they were given to provide an input into the process was often too short to allow for adequate consultation. One interviewee highlighted that there were sometimes only given 24 hour notice before a relevant meeting was to take place, making it impossible to consult with their whole constituency - especially when taking into consideration the time difference between New York and where those constituents may be based. The interviewee stressed that "you can't expect a representative view" in these circumstances.

Short timelines and lack of proper notice can exacerbate power imbalances among Major Groups. In a situation where Major Groups have to come up with a statement on short notice, "those who respond early can set the tone, while those who have established more inclusive processes and need to wait for feedback from their wider constituencies may miss opportunities."[77]

The timeline is not neutral. As one participant in the May 21 roundtable put it, "lack of time to plan and reflect leads to lack of real and meaningful participation in consultations."

Recommendation 10: Minimum standards for a "Major Group" statement.
A set of minimum criteria should be established to clarify what constitutes a "Major Group" statement. These could include a minimum consultation period, a minimum number of participants providing input, and requirements for gender and regional balance among those participants. If these criteria cannot be met because of a short timeline, one member or a coalition of members of the Major Group can alternatively make a statement, but it should then be clear in whose name they are speaking.

Insufficient respect for expertise

UN processes often fail to recognize the expertise present in Major Groups and civil society more generally, and to acknowledge that grassroots experience *is* expertise. They make the distinction between the "science track," which usually includes scientists, academics and sometimes representatives from think tanks, and what civil society has to contribute. CSOs and Major Groups are categorized as "outreach and campaigning" rather than expertise, which influences what they get funding for or what they can participate in. But members of civil society argue that Member States cannot make informed decisions on sustainable development without the expertise of those most affected.

The "Participate" initiative demonstrates that communities and people on the ground bring valuable expertise to global processes. "Participate" is co-convened by the Institute of Development Studies and Beyond 2015 to provide "high quality evidence on the reality of poverty at ground level, bringing the perspectives of the poorest into the post-2015 debate." Its

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[77] UN DESA," Review of implementation of Agenda 21," Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (SD21) project, January 2012, page 155

stated mission is to bring the perspectives of those in poverty into decision-making process, embed participatory research in global policy-making and use research with the poorest as the basis for advocacy with decision-makers.[78]

Public / corporate sector tension, unequal support from the UN

UN official documents often use the terms "Major Groups," "civil society," "stakeholders" and "constituencies" interchangeably, creating confusion around their meaning, as these labels are meant to encompass different actors. This generates tensions around the concept of civil society and whether it encompasses the for-profit private sector. These tensions are not limited to the Major Groups.

The Cardoso report attempted to define some of these terms, including "constituencies" and "civil society," but its definition are often at odds with other official UN documents. "Civil society," for instance, "does not include profit-making activity (the private sector) or governing (the public sector)," according to the Cardoso report.[79] But "Major Groups of Civil Society,"[80] an expression used to designate the Major Groups, contradicts this definition: most of the Major Groups are fractions of civil society, but the Local Authorities group is ultimately part of the public sector, while the Business & Industry Major Group constitutes the private sector.[81]

"The Future We Want" identifies separate categories when it mentions a "broad alliance of people, governments, civil society and the private sector."[82] The document also states that the new institutional framework for sustainable development should "enhance the participation and effective engagement of civil society and other relevant stakeholders in the relevant international forums."[83] This suggests that civil society is one of several "stakeholders," which include governments and the private sector. Again, this contradicts the concept of "Major Groups of civil society."

"The Future We Want" somewhat circumvents this problem through the concept of "stakeholders." In the document, "stakeholders" is mentioned 29 times, while "civil society" is mentioned 13 times, "Major Groups" 7 times, and "private sector" 15 times. The document calls on the hlpf to "further enhancing the consultative role and participation of Major Groups and other relevant stakeholders."[84]

In this context, the Major Groups framework requires clarification, as it associates groups that are part of civil society with groups representing the public and private sectors. The Business &

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[78] http://www.ids.ac.uk/participate

[79] A/58/817. "We the Peoples: Civil Society, the United Nations and Global Governance: Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations," 11 June 2004, Glossary, page 13

[80] See for instance "Remarks to the Major Groups of Civil Society, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon," Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), 21 June 2012,
http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocus/sgspeeches/statments_full.asp?statID=1579#.UYJ1w4JcRdo

[81] UN DESA," Review of implementation of Agenda 21," Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (SD21) project, January 2012, page 155

[82] A/RES/66/288. "The Future We Want," 11 September 2012, paragraph 13

[83] Ibid, paragraph 76 (e)

[84] A/RES/66/288. "The Future We Want," 11 September 2012, paragraph 85 (h)

Industry Major Group includes a broad constituency, bringing together a range of actors from different sectors (chemicals, mining, construction, etc) and companies ranging from small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to large corporations. The corporate sector is separate from civil society in terms of interests, motives, and power status, as well as in terms of relations and potential conflicts with other segments of society.[85] Likewise, elected officials representing local authorities cannot be considered part of civil society. This is often disregarded in discussions of the Major Groups through careless references to "civil society" as a whole.

This lack of clarity on "civil society" and who is part of it can lead to tension among Major Groups. Some organizations who define themselves as "civil society" regularly engage with the for-profit sector, but others have found it difficult to accept cooperative relationships with the corporate sector. They are concerned that cooperation may be seen as endorsement of business attitudes and practices, and that collaborative projects may only lead to "lowest common denominator" outcomes.[86] As noted in a report of the Secretary-General in 2001, "there is continuing disagreement in the greater community of nongovernmental organizations on the extent to which they should engage in partnership with businesses. A similar disagreement exists within the greater business community."[87] This is still true today. This tension may lead groups to reject engagement through the Major Groups framework for fear that it will compromise them and confuse or alienate their constituency.

Some CSOs have been critical of the inclusion of the for-profit private sector in the Major Groups, arguing that the Business & Industry can influence government and UN policy without the support they are getting through this framework.[88] Some CSOs are concerned that the private sector is given preferential treatment by parts of the UN, even though it already has considerable independent means to influence policymaking.[89] Is it significant that in "The Future We Want" the private sector is mentioned 15 times, whereas "civil society" is mentioned 13 times and "Major Groups" only 7 times? To avoid power imbalances, distinctions must be made between Major Groups of different natures.
Some organizations and individuals also raised concerns that "multi-stakeholder initiatives" and "partnerships" involving the corporate sector are not meant to enhance effectiveness but in fact to by-pass elected governments and the public interest and fast-track the for-profit sector. There is concern that partnerships are a way for governments to outsource their commitments and responsibilities to the private sector. Some have also argued that "partnerships" policies are favoring well-resourced actors - both in the private for-profit sector and the CSO sector - to the detriment of actors with fewer financial resources.

There was no agreement among interviewees on how to better differentiate "civil society" from the private sector. Some interviewees from both the non-profit and the business sector raised the

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[85] UN DESA, "Review of implementation of Agenda 21," Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (SD21) project, January 2012, page 203
[86] "The NGO Steering Committee and Multi-Stakeholder Participation at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development," Megan Howell, Forum International de Montréal, 1999, page 3
[87] E/CN.17/2001/PC/4. "Major Groups," Report of the Secretary-General, 14 March 2001, paragraph 16
[88] UN DESA, "Review of implementation of Agenda 21," Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (SD21) project, January 2012, page 155
[89] UNCTAD/NGLS/2009/1. "Strengthening Dialogue: UN Experience with Small Farmer Organizations and Indigenous Peoples," NGLS, 2009, page 10

possibility of two separate tracks for civil society and the for-profit private sector, similar to what currently exists at the Committee on World Food Security in Rome and in other settings. During the negotiations on the hlpf, the Business and Industry Major Group submitted a draft proposal to Member States on a potential private sector channel for the hlpf, based on the experience of the CFS, the ILO and other processes.[90]

However, other interviewees raised concerns that this could give more weight to the private sector and reduce the space for civil society to "one slot." They fear that, if civil society was reduced to one group, youth, women, indigenous peoples, local authorities and trade unions would be marginalized or left out.

One interviewee noted that having the corporate sector participating in the process is not an issue as long as "it is clear in whose name and interest they are speaking." Some organizations have long advocated for better public disclosure and conflicts of interest policies to address this issue. In the context of the World Health Organization (WHO), for instance, public interest NGOs have called on the WHO to classify private-sector actors outside of its NGO category, to better make the distinction between public interest and business interest NGOs.[91] To deal with potential conflict of interest in relations with the private sector, the WHO has established "Guidelines for interaction with commercial enterprises to achieve health outcomes," which are directed in particular to commercial enterprises but "can also apply to a variety of other institutions including State run enterprises, associations representing commercial enterprises, foundations... and other not-for-profit organizations..."[92]

Recommendation 11: Public disclosure and conflict of interest policies
All UN entities involved in partnerships for sustainable development and multi-stakeholder initiatives should hold open consultations with public interest NGOs (PINGOs) and business interest NGOs (BINGOs) - from the Major Groups and outside of the format - to establish clear and transparent public disclosure and conflict of interest policies. Such policies, which could build on the work of the WHO, would a) address criteria to differentiate BINGOs and PINGOs, b) establish a clear framework for interacting with the private sector and managing conflicts of interest, in particular by differentiating between policy development and appropriate involvement in implementation, and c) provide guidance for Member States to identify conflicts and eliminate those that are not permissible.   Building on the experience of the World Bank's public information policy (see below), the UN should also provide online access to any information in its possession that is not restricted by exceptions. This would create more transparency around activities and budget items linked to corporate sector contributions.

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[90] "Private Sector Channel for the High Level Political Forum (Draft Proposal)," Business and Industry Major Group, April 2013

[91] See for instance the statement of the "Conflict of Interest Coalition" to the WHO in 2012: http://info.babymilkaction.org/node/458

[92] See "Guidelines for interaction with commercial enterprises to achieve health outcomes," EB 107/20 Annex; and WHO/CSI/2002/WP6, "WHO's Interaction with Civil Society and Nongovernmental Organizations," World Health Organization, 2002

IV. IDENTIFIED BEST PRACTICES IN CSD AND OTHER UN PROCESSES

While there are concerns about the Major Groups framework and the interaction between civil society and UN processes more broadly, experience with the CSD and other processes has led to the emergence of many good practices. As Member States determine how the hlpf will engage with Major Groups and other stakeholders, they can build on decades of interaction between Major Groups and the CSD as well as other members of the UN family. These best practices include modalities for participation by Major Groups and other stakeholders in UN processes and support for stakeholder participation by the UN. Experience with the CSD and other processes also highlights principles that should guide the interaction between the UN and Major Groups and other stakeholders, as well as the self-organization of these groups.

In a survey of Major Groups and other stakeholders conducted by UNEP and UN-NGLS in early 2013, the organizations most frequently identified by respondents as examples for effective Major Group and civil society participation were the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, mentioned by 18% of the respondents); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 10%); and the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD, 8%). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), including the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and the Aarhus Convention within the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) were also identified as good examples.[93] Other reports and interviews have shown that the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the International Labor Organizations (ILO) and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are also considered good examples of UN engagement with civil society / MGs and other stakeholders.

However, there is no entirely satisfactory process, and the expectation is that the **hlpf** not only adopts best practices already in use in other processes, but also **sets a new benchmark as an inclusive process**. **Best practices that should be considered helpful options for the hlpf are bolded throughout the text.**

Recommendation 12: Rights of participation
Respecting both the intergovernmental nature of the hlpf process and the proven contributions of Major Groups, the hlpf should include equal rights of participation for Major Groups and other stakeholders, enabling them to contribute to the decision-making process. Participation rights involve access to information, access to all meetings, speaking rights, the right to submit documents, the right to provide expertise, and the inclusion of Major Groups and stakeholders' contributions in official documents and to agenda-shaping.

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[93] "Models and Mechanisms of Civil Society Participation in UNEP," UNEP / UN-NGLS Civil Society Survey, January 2013, page 11

A. Modalities for participation of stakeholders in policy processes

Access to information

Stakeholder engagement with policy processes is most relevant and efficient if they can access all information in a timely manner and in a language accessible to their own constituency. Meaningful input and participation cannot be expected in situations where stakeholders are given last minute notice and documents only in English. In such circumstances, it is likely that only stakeholders present at headquarters and/or already familiar with the process will be able to respond and be involved.

The UNEP guidelines for Participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders in Policy Design offer good benchmarks for information sharing, including:
- Giving early notice of the themes for each Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum to allow MGs and other stakeholders to prepare
- Enhanced facilitation for information dissemination from UNEP
- Quick translation of relevant documents into UN languages to allow regional balance in views and representation.[94]

The World Bank has recently established new policies to ensure that stakeholders have full access to documents relevant to their work. The World Bank's Policy on Access to Information (AI Policy), put in place July 2010, makes possible the public's access to any information in the institution's possession that is not restricted by the policy's exceptions, rather than listing specific categories of information that can be made publicly available. **The World Bank created a dedicated public Access to Information website**, which enables the public to directly search and browse nearly 120,000 documents. In addition to the information that is readily accessible online, the World Bank responds directly to members of the public on their individual requests for information. If the World Bank denies a public request for information, the notice of denial informs the requester of the opportunity to file an appeal.[95]

Access to all meetings / processes / bodies

To make meaningful contributions to a policy process, Major Groups and other stakeholders need to be involved in all of its aspects, which include preparatory meetings, formal and informal meetings, roundtables and panels.

The reformed Committee on World Food Security (CFS) has established effective standards for such participation. The 2009 reform of the CFS stresses that "participants" (which include representatives from civil society and the private sector) "take part in the work of the Committee with the right to intervene in plenary and breakout discussions to contribute to preparation of meeting documents and agendas, submit and present documents and formal proposals." In addition, participants "commit to contribute regularly to intersessional activities of the

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[94] "Guidelines for Participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders in Policy Design at UNEP," UNEP, 26 August 2009, paragraphs 17-19
[95] "World Bank Access to Information Annual Report FY 2011: Moving Forward Transparency and Accountability," World Bank, 2012

Committee at all levels and interact with the Bureau during the intersessional period through the Advisory Group established by the Bureau."[96]

In some processes, representatives from civil society and the private sector have been invited to participate in roundtables with ministers and heads of state. The International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey (2002) and the subsequent High-level Dialogue of the General Assembly on Financing for Development included civil society and private sector representatives in roundtables with ministers.[97] During the Millennium Summit in 2010, representatives from civil society and the private sector participated in six roundtables with heads of states.[98]

More recently, at the Rio 2012 Conference, Major Groups and other stakeholders had access to all negotiations, in addition to participation at all stages of the preparatory process.[99]

Speaking rights

While stakeholders respect the intergovernmental nature of policy processes, they have found their engagement most valuable when given speaking rights on par with those of other participants, including Member States.

The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) represents a best practice in terms of speaking rights for stakeholders. For the purpose of the rules of procedures of SAICM, **a "participant" means any governmental, intergovernmental or non-governmental participant**. All participants have the same rights concerning the participation in the sessions of the Preparatory Committee and any open-ended subsidiary body, the inclusion of specific items in the provisional agenda, the right to speak, the raising of a point of order and the introduction of proposals and amendments.[100]

The Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council has also adopted rules giving stakeholders equal speaking rights. During the UPR, "one hour is set aside for the adoption of each outcome. That hour is equally divided among the State under review, other States, national human rights institutions, and NGO observers to deliver oral statements commenting on the UPR review."[101]

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[96] CFS:2009/2 Rev.2, "Reform of the Committee on World Food Security, Final Version," Committee on World Food Security, October 2009, paragraph 12
[97] A/CONF.198/11, "Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development," Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002 and FfD website (http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/hld/HLD2003/RoundTables/index.htm)
[98] A/RES/64/184, Annex II, 5 February 2010
[99] A /RES/64/236, "Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development," 31 March 2010
[100] SAICM/ICCM.1/6, "Rules of Procedure for the International Conference on Chemicals Management," Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management," 18 November 2005
[101] "Universal Periodic Review: A Practical Guide for Civil Society," OHCHR, page 2

Right to submit documents

In several UN fora, stakeholders are given the opportunity to submit documents that are formally integrated into the process. In the framework of the Universal Periodic Review of the HRC, for instance, input from stakeholders is officially incorporated into the review of a state. The review is based on three documents: a national report prepared by the State under review; a compilation of United Nations information on the State under review prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); and a summary of information submitted by other stakeholders (including civil society actors), also prepared by OHCHR.[102]

Dedicated time for stakeholder dialogue, maximizing member state participation

The history of the CSD shows that the experience with the multi-stakeholder dialogues was broadly positive. Although the CSD moved from dialogues to "entry points" for Major Groups (throughout the session) in recent years, both options could conceivably be implemented. Major Groups can be involved in all the meetings and processes of the future hlpf while having a dedicated time for dialogue with Member States.

Given existing concern around the concept of "multi-stakeholder" initiatives, special attention should be paid to making clear that multi-stakeholder dialogues are meant to facilitate engagement between Member States and Major Groups and other stakeholders, not to fast-track partnerships between well-resourced NGOs and the for-profit sector.

The Open Working Group (OWG) on the Sustainable Development Goals has adopted a model similar to the multi-stakeholder dialogues of the second phase of the CSD. In its sessions of May and June 2013, the Working Group organized hour-long "hearings" with Major Groups and other stakeholders in the mornings before the start of the official Working Group sessions. The hearings were moderated by the co-chairs of the Working Group and held in the same room as the official meeting. They opened with a short presentation by a panel of civil society representatives followed by interventions from participants in the room.

Although a positive step in involving Major Groups and other stakeholders in the work of the OWG, the hearings were too short (one hour as opposed to the full two-days of the CSD's first phase), which prevented all participants who wanted to speak to do so. Participants at a June 20 roundtable of Major Groups and CSOs working on post-2015 noted that, although the quality of the interventions during the hearings was high and the co-chairs shared some of what had been discussed with Member States, attendance by delegations was low. Several participants mentioned that there were a number of concurrent events during the hearings, and that the Secretariat had encouraged organizations to organize breakfast meetings that overlapped with the hearings time- and content-wise. Finally, some felt that the organizing process and selection of speakers should be more transparent. These comments were noted as "lessons learned" that should inform the organization of the hearings for the November session of the OWG. It was also mentioned that Member States had requested a day-long event with Major Groups and other stakeholders in the fall.

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[102] "Universal Periodic Review: A Practical Guide for Civil Society," OHCHR, page 2

Recommandation 13: Re-establish multi-stakeholder dialogues
Multi-stakeholder dialogues - in addition to full participation of Major Groups and other stakeholders in all aspects of the process - constitute a valuable dedicated space for exchange between Major Groups and other stakeholders and Member States. The experience of the CSD multi-stakeholder dialogues provides a blueprint of how to make this type of dialogue work. As the CSD precedent shows, multi-stakeholder dialogues can enjoy a greater level of governmental attendance and participation if they are scheduled between the official start of the hlpf and the high level segment, rather than before the start of the hlpf or in conflict with other sessions. The dialogues can also be better integrated in the official process if moderated by a high level official of the hlpf, who can include a summary of the dialogue in the formal text of the hlpf session. The length of the dialogue should be discussed to find the appropriate balance between giving enough time and space for all relevant stakeholders to effectively participate and avoiding the perception by Member States, especially those with smaller delegations, that this will be an additional burden.

Right to provide expertise, recognition of diversity of expertise

To be valuable to the policy process, "expertise" cannot be limited to the traditional understanding of academics or members of think tanks. The expertise of people living on the ground must also be recognized.

The CFS has adopted some good practices in this area. The CFS' work is supported by a High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE), in which the expertise of farmers, indigenous peoples and practitioners is recognized alongside academics and researchers.[103] When the Steering Committee of the HLPE was formed, a call for applications was launched for both academic and civil society experts. Fifteen candidates were selected by a committee formed of four representatives from FAO, WFP, IFAD and civil society.[104] Today, when the Steering Committee draws on project teams for the realization of reports, these teams sometimes include civil society experts.[105]

Recommendation 14: Drawing on Major Groups and civil society expertise
Civil society experts - including people from the grassroots - should be involved in any panel of experts, working group or equivalent bodies set up to support the work of the hlpf. The CFS HLPE can be used as a model of how to involve civil society both in the preparatory process of a panel of experts (through a Steering Committee) and in its work per se.

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[103] "The Committee on World Food Security (CFS): A Guide for Civil Society," Civil Society Mechanism of the Committee on World Food Security, March 2012, page 25

[104] "The Committee on World Food Security (CFS): A New Space for the Food Policies of the World, Opportunities and Limitations," La Via Campesina notebook, Number 4, 2012, page 9

[105] "The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE): Key Elements," Committee on World Food Security, February 2013, page 3

Inclusion of stakeholders' input in official documents and outcome, "need to be heard"

Participants must sense and have confirmation that their input is valued and taken into consideration, otherwise they will either keep on repeating the same input or stop trying. The recognition that they "have been heard" is beneficial to all parties and allows the process to move forward. **The UN has the responsibility to demonstrate that stakeholders' input is officially taken into consideration, even if there is no consensus on the views expressed**. The process can make distinction between issues on which consensus emerged and others where there was no consensus and why.

In the context of the post-2015 development agenda and the major reports created to shape it, both business and industry and the scientific community have been able to present their analysis through the Global Compact report on "Corporate Sustainability and the United Nations Post-2015 Development Agenda" on the one hand, and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) report on "An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development" on the other. This creates imbalances between Major Groups' contributions. The UN should take additional measures to address these.

A "Statement on Civil Society Participation in UN Processes related to Post 2015" signed by CIVICUS, GCAP, Beyond 2015 and dozens of individual organizations states that: "Before engaging in consultations and providing input to any of the processes, civil society must have a commitment that all inputs will be fully considered, this includes: i) clarity on when review of CSO input is taking place ii) ensure that a response will be formulated which outlines how this input is being taken forward iii) Civil society representatives are present in discussions to support their case."[106]

A good practice was started at the CSD on Tourism in 1999, when the chair decided to **include the outcome of the multi-stakeholder dialogues in the negotiated text**. This was repeated for two CSD sessions, but it was not sufficiently institutionalized, and so the practice eventually ended. A future framework for Major Groups and other stakeholders' engagement with the hlpf could build on this precedent.

Such a framework could also build on the experience of other processes, such as Financing for Development. Following past FfD sessions, **UN-NGLS processed all inputs from civil society into/ and created an official document, which it then delivered to key points in the process**. UN-NGLS also compiled a report on civil society consultation for the HLP meetings in Monrovia, Liberia and Bali, Indonesia in early 2013. The report gathered just under 800 responses from 134 participating organizations, international networks and individual respondents through online submissions and email.[107]

Rio 2012 also provides relevant practices. Major Groups and other stakeholders made 493 official contributions in the formation of the zero draft of the outcome document, and during the

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[106] "Statement on Civil Society Participation in UN Processes related to Post 2015," CIVICUS, GCAP & Beyond 2015 (with others), 18 September 2012

[107] "UN-NGLS Civil Society Consultation for the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda," NGLS, December 2012-January 2013

process a compilation of Major Groups' proposed amendments to the negotiated text was created and circulated to member states.[108]

Recommendations 15: Official record of Major Groups and other stakeholders' input
Major Groups and other stakeholders' inputs - including analyses, statements, interventions during roundtables, compilations of national and regional consultations, and other forms - should be circulated in official documents to Member States and other relevant points in the process. Such documentation would not simply transcribe and aggregate the inputs but organize them for better analysis and use during by the policy and deliberative processes.

B. Support for stakeholder participation by the UN

Capacity-Building

Capacity-building ensures that a wide range of stakeholders can participate, not just those with the most knowledge of the process. This allows Member States to hear from people on the ground and from the most affected communities. The 2001 report of the Secretary-General on Major Groups suggested that "empowerment and capacity-building efforts at the national and regional levels may be a step towards closing the 'geographical divide'."[109]

Within the UN, the Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (UN-REDD) has strongly committed to build stakeholders' capacity to engage with its processes. The Guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement in REDD+ put the onus on REDD to ensure that stakeholders have sufficient capacity to engage fully and effectively in consultations. They acknowledge that "**certain stakeholders may require capacity building or training in advance of a consultation to ensure that their understanding of the issues and ability to contribute are sufficient**." REDD makes a strong commitment to the effectiveness of such capacity building efforts as the guidelines stipulate that the awareness and capacity of indigenous peoples and forest-dependent communities to engage with REDD+ discussions should be assessed with the use of questionnaires, surveys, focus group discussions, and/or workshops. If their existing level of information and knowledge is not sufficient, proper steps should be taken to provide information, prior to the start of the consultations.[110]

Capacity-building requires funding from Member States. In the lead-up to Rio 2012, UN DESA held capacity-building meetings for Major Groups and other stakeholders prior to each national, regional, thematic and informal meeting with financial support from the European Union.

Funding

Adequate, predictable and timely funding for participation - including but not limited to attending meetings - has long been identified as key to meaningful engagement by Major Groups

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[108] "Major Groups Engagement and Participation," Chantal Line Carpentier, Rio 2012 Secretariat

[109] E/CN.17/2001/PC/4. "Major Groups," Report of the Secretary-General, 14 March 2001, paragraph 20

[110] "Guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement in REDD+ Readiness With a Focus on the Participation of Indigenous Peoples and Other Forest-Dependent Communities," UN-REDD, 20 April 2012, page 10

and other stakeholders. The 2001 report of the Secretary-General on Major Groups suggested the following good practice: "Some Member States and other stakeholders consider that funding should be provided to support participation of developing countries and Major Groups from those countries in the forum, in order to assure better representativeness. National and regional preparations would also need to be supported."[111]

In other parts of the UN, the CSM of the CFS has established a number of good practices when it comes to funding and support for stakeholders' engagement. When the CSM was created, a fund was established to ensure its financing. The fund covers cost the work of the secretariat as well as the o**rganization of several face-to-face meetings of representatives from the different constituencies** of the CSM before each session of the CFS. These meetings are essential, as they enable civil society and social movements to agree on positions to be taken and to share speaking arrangements. As La Via Campesina noted, this gives civil society a more close-knit character.[112] It also enables the presentation of more positions of consensus, appreciated by Member States and which can facilitate the advocacy process.

Adequate resources to support the proper functioning of the interface allowing for stakeholder engagement are key. The work of the CSM, for instance, is facilitated by a small Secretariat of three people. The Secretariat maintains a politically neutral role within the CSM to facilitate its functions, including organizing an annual CSO Forum, maintaining the CSM website and providing inter-sessional support to the CSO representatives on the CFS Advisory Group and the CSM Coordination Committee. The Secretariat also provides overall coordination, logistic, financial and communication support to increase the overall capacity of the CSM and its members. It engages in outreach activities and awareness-raising to continually expand participation in the CSM. The Secretariat is independent from the UN and accountable to the Coordination Committee representing the constituencies of the CSM.[113]

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[111] "Lessons Learned from the Commission on Sustainable Development," Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2013, paragraph 92
[112] "The Committee on World Food Security (CFS): A New Space for the Food Policies of the World, Opportunities and Limitations," La Via Campesina notebook, Number 4, 2012, page 6
[113] www.csm4cfs.org/

Recommendation 16: Better administrative support for the Major Groups - An independent secretariat?
Current arrangements for information dissemination to the Major Groups and other stakeholders rely excessively on voluntary commitment of the Organizing Partners of the Major Groups. Options to provide better administrative support to the Major Groups should be explored, including the possibility of a small independent Secretariat modeled on the Secretariat of the CSM. The Secretariat - which could be funded through a multi-donor trust fund, as is the case in the CSM - would perform a facilitating role and would be accountable to the Major Groups, rather than to the UN. It could take on some of the activities currently performed by the OPs, which would make the process more transparent, timely and neutral. For instance, all relevant information for Major Group members could be posted in UN languages on a website or through social media, rather than be channeled through individuals. This would neutralize the information flow and make it more even.   The secretariat would provide administrative support to OPs to organize capacity-building meetings (particularly at regional levels) for Major Groups and other stakeholder, and to reach out to organizations that are not currently participating in the Major Group framework (see recommendation below). For instance, if the hlpf is addressing the issue of financing for development, the independent secretariat could assist the OPs to actively reach out to organizations active in the FfD process at the UN, as well as and in cooperation with the official UN counterparts.

Outreach

The UN is also responsible for reaching out to groups and communities that may not know about UN processes and still have an important stake in these processes and/or relevant and valuable input to contribute. The report of the Secretary-General following WSSD noted that "the United Nations Secretariat could play a more proactive role in identifying, through a transparent process, individuals or organizations that could bring particular expertise or experience to the Commission (regarding the role of Major Groups in implementation)."[114]

Although some of the practices established by UN-REDD have yet to be realized, the intent guiding them could be applied to other processes. UN-REDD has stated that it is committed to making specific proactive efforts to include indigenous peoples and other forest-dependent communities in its decision-making, implementation and review process, recognizing that they are "often more vulnerable than other stakeholders" in the context of REDD's work.[115] UN-REDD has also committed to bring theses populations' own working methods to the UN, rather than just bringing the UN's working methods to them. As part of UN-REDD, consultations with indigenous peoples must be carried out through their own existing processes, organizations and institutions, e.g., councils of elders, headmen and tribal leaders.[116]

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[114] E/CN.17/2003/2. "Follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the future role of the Commission on Sustainable Development: the implementation track", Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2003, paragraph 73

[115] "Guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement in REDD+ Readiness With a Focus on the Participation of Indigenous Peoples and Other Forest-Dependent Communities," UN-REDD, 20 April 2012, Introduction, paragraph 4

[116] Ibid, paragraph 8

Recommendation 17: Regular briefings
Each year, the UN should arrange at least one "town hall meeting" style briefing for Major Groups and other stakeholders and other relevant parties, to discuss key input and processes. For instance, six months ahead of the hlpf meetings, a town hall meeting could be organized in the form of a briefing involving high-level representatives from the UN and the hlpf, which the Secretariat would have the responsibility to calendar like a prep-com. During the preparatory process, the meeting's organizers should particularly reach out to people and organizations that are distant from the daily workings of the hlpf (or equivalent) and the information flow at UNHQ, to enable them sufficient time for organization, consultation and contribution. Efforts should also be made to encourage and include participation by organizations working at the regional and national levels. Similar meetings could be organized by regional commissions, and for specific programmes, such as to facilitate Major Groups and other stakeholder's input into the global sustainable development report.

Recommendation 18: Better use of ICT
Better use of ICT should be made to ensure participation by a wide range of individuals outside of UNHQ. Though it comes with its own set of concerns regarding inclusivity of those beyond the "digital divide," ICT has the potential to facilitate openness and fair and inclusive sharing of information, as well as collective organizing and coalescing around positions. The work of the Major Group for Children and Youth provides a good example. Steps have been taken in this direction that could be built on, for example and the "World We Want" web platform for the post-2015 process. The "World We Want" platform states that its purpose is to "enhance the ability of citizens around the world to express their perspectives, organize deliberations, take actions and increase their participation and engagement in the creation and implementation of a transformative post-2015 development agenda," and to include all non-governmental entities, organized or not. Although the platform has yet to realize its potential, it has demonstrated positive features, including its governance by a UN and civil society steering committee The agreement to make all relevant background documents, draft decisions, etc, publicly available on the Internet in multiple languages – and partnerships with organizations on the ground who can access those stakeholders without internet – would go a long way in improving the inclusivity as well as sharing of access and influence of the Major Groups.

C. Emerging principles guiding the interaction between the UN and Major Groups and other stakeholders

A set of principles that would support higher quality interaction between Major Groups and UN policy processes emerged during conversations and interviews on experience with the CSD and with other parts of the UN. These principles can help overcome some of the issues and concerns mentioned above and should inform the creation of the interface between the hlpf and stakeholders. They include no regression on past good practices, the recognition and respect for stakeholders' right to self-organize, and the recognition of and respect for diversity and dissent.

No regression

All interviewees agree that the modalities adopted by the hlpf for engagement with Major Groups and other stakeholders should not regress with respect to either current formal and informal practices at the CSD or internationally agreed principles and rights.

Autonomy and respect for self-organization

Members of Major Groups affirm their right to self-organize and the **importance of having UN policy processes recognize and respect the product of this self-organization**. This right is acknowledged by the UN itself, including in a report of the Secretary-General recognizing that "respecting and working with self-organized mechanisms of Major Groups" is one of the "approaches that enable more meaningful inputs from Major Groups."[117] However, it is not always respected.

Many interviewees cited the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) as good example of autonomy and self-organization by stakeholders. During the reform process of the CFS in 2009, Member States recognized the right of CSOs to "autonomously establish a global mechanism for food security and nutrition which will function as a facilitating body for CSO/NGOs consultation and participation in the CFS."[118]

Several interviewees were quick to point out that **self-organization and autonomy do not mean the absence of rules**. In the context of the Major Groups, interviews have shown that the Children and Youth and the Women Major Groups were considered as good examples of self-organizing through the establishment of internal governance rules. The Children and Youth Major Group has adopted a document on processes and procedures that defines criteria for membership, rights and obligations of members, rules for the decision-making process, and the role and selection of OPs.[119] In early 2013, talks started among Major Groups to establish governance guidelines, including the responsibilities and selection of Organizing Partners.
Recognition of diversity - no one size fits all, no externally imposed consensus

Interfaces between UN policy processes and civil society / stakeholders have shown success when they have given **space for the expression of diversity** and have not forced civil society to speak with one voice. **Diversity of views is precisely what civil society brings to the table**. For a number of Major Groups – including the Women, Indigenous Peoples, Trade Unions, and (small) Farmers Major Groups – the essence of organizing relates to their role as rights holders. Respect for diversity is crucial to give space to the rights-based approach.

As one employee of aid agency CAFOD puts it: "The world is a complicated place, development is complex; and the challenges for the post-2015 agenda are by default also going to be complex.

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[117] E/CN.17/2003/2. "Follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the future role of the Commission on Sustainable Development: the implementation track", Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2003, Annex VI
[118] CFS: 2009/2 Rev.2, "Reform of the Committee on World Food Security," para.16
[119] "Processes and Procedures Document," Major Group for Children and Youth, April 2011

This may be an inconvenient truth but reflecting it is a responsibility, not a failure, of civil society."[120]

Stakeholders recognize the value of being seen as well-organized and not sending contradictory messages when there is in fact broad agreement. However, they point out that this is not the same thing as "consensus," and that such organization must be achieved organically and through self-defined processes rather than artificially imposed from the top.

Many UN entities have made an active commitment to welcoming and fostering a diversity of inputs and recognizing that "civil society" is by nature plural. UNEP, for instance, has taken steps to ensure that "consensus" will not be artificially imposed on a diversity of positions, by recognizing freedom of expression as one of the fundamental principles of engagement between UNEP and MGs and other stakeholders. While the MG Facilitation Committee aims for consensus, individual Major Groups can reserve the right to express their own positions and issue their own statements.[121]

Similarly, one of the guiding principles of the United Nations Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation's (UN-REDD) engagement with stakeholders, for instance, is that the diversity of stakeholders must be recognized, "in particular, the voices of forest-dependent and vulnerable groups must be heard, whether they are indigenous or not." UN-REDD recognizes that "different stakeholders have different stakes and/or interests in REDD+. Some may be positively impacted, others negatively."[122]

The CSM of the CFS is another entity that has committed to preserving diversity. The CSM **enables common positions to be presented to the CFS where they emerge, and a range of different positions where there is no consensus**.[123] Consequently, "there is no such thing at a 'CSM position.'"[124]

D. Emerging principles in Major Groups and other stakeholders' self-organizing

Although Major Groups members support their right to self-organize in ways that are most relevant to their needs and interest, interviews have also found agreement on a set of principles that should guide the process of self-organization, to ensure that the Group is inclusive and democratic and to make for better interaction within its constituency. These include clarification of the role of the OPs, a commitment to transparency and accountability, including on funding arrangements, gender and regional balance, and active efforts to ensure inclusiveness.

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[120] "Consultation or Conscription? Civil society input on the content of the post-2015 framework," Amy Pollard, Serpents and Doves: CAFOD policy team blog, 13 November 2012, http://cafodpolicy.wordpress.com/2012/11/13/consultation-or-conscriptioncivil-society-input-on-the-content-of-the-post-2015-framework/
[121] "Guidelines for Participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders in Policy Design at UNEP," UNEP, 26 August 2009, paragraph 29, b), c) and d)
[122] "Guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement in REDD+ Readiness With a Focus on the Participation of Indigenous Peoples and Other Forest-Dependent Communities," UN-REDD, 20 April 2012, Introduction, paragraph 8
[123] "Practical Guide for CSOs to Participate in the CSM Forum & CFS 39 Session," Civil Society Mechanism of the Committee on World Food Security, October 2012, page 1
[124] Ibid, page 5

Clear mandate / terms of reference

As noted above, some members of Major Groups, in particular those based outside of New York, argue that the framework is too informal and leaves too much space for those present at UNHQ to make decisions for and act on behalf of the Group without necessarily going through proper consultations.

Major Groups OPs have started working on a set of guidelines for the governance of Organizing Partners, in recognition that "being able to demonstrate enhanced and improved governance of Major Groups and the organizing partners is of primary importance to ensure efficient Major Group input and performance, as well as to create a flexible and open system that all stakeholders can support," as an early draft put it. The guidelines, which seek to increase transparency without imposing modalities, cover the main responsibilities of OPs, the criteria and process for the selection of OPs, and the role of the DSD Major Groups programme to support OPs.

Such guidelines can build on the language and experience from other processes, including the UNEP guidelines for Participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders in Policy Design provide extensive terms of reference for the Major Groups Facilitation Committee (MGFC), the equivalent of the Organizing Partners for CSD. The UNEP guidelines attempt to clarify the role of the Facilitation Committee and the tasks it is meant to perform, which include promoting a good representation of the Major Group at meetings, ensuring that the participants have received the necessary information relating to the agenda beforehand, facilitating the involvement of Major Groups members with specific issue knowledge in UNEP related work, providing general information, training and capacity building on UNEP processes, maintaining a web-based information hub, issue based list-serves, as well as general informational sites, and coordinating the work of the Major Groups policy papers.[125]

The CSM of the CFS has also adopted draft terms of reference for the Coordinating Committee (CC) – the governing body of the CSM comprised of 41 focal points representing 11 constituencies and 17 sub-regions. The terms of reference define the role of the CC, its composition, its functioning, the selection criteria for CC members, the tenure of membership, administrative support, resources and accountability.[126]

Accountability and transparency

Accountability and transparency are of particular concern to many Major Groups members. The guidelines on governance currently being discussed within Major Groups deal with this issue by clarifying how OPs can be selected and re-selected. After a basic term of two years, OPs could be re-selected following review of their performance by their constituency and the secretariat. In particular, their Major Group would have to share a report on how the OPs have delivered on their functions and the selection process with the constituency.

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[125] "Guidelines for Participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders in Policy Design at UNEP," UNEP, 26 August 2009, paragraph 39
[126] "DRAFT Terms of Reference for the Coordination Committee," International Food Security & Nutrition Civil Society Mechanism for Relations with the CFS (UN Committee on World Food Security)

A similar process already exists within the CSM of the CFS. The Terms of reference for the Coordinating Committee of the CSM outlines some criteria for accountability. Each Coordination Committee member is required to write reports on how they are facilitating participation within their constituency or sub-region. Participants in the CSM can also **give feedback on the quality of their participation**, the performance of the Coordination Committee and Advisory Group Focal Points and make suggestions as to how to improve the functioning of the Mechanism.[127]

Gender and regional balance

There is widely shared agreement that both gender and regional balance in the composition of the Major Groups and the Organizing Partners are absolutely essential to ensure that the framework is inclusive and representative. Although Major Groups have made a formal commitment to ensuring both – as other processes have, including the UNEP Major Group framework – this is not always achieved in reality.

To ensure better regional balance, several interviewees raised the idea of increasing the number of OPs from two to five or more, to create **"regional Organizing Partners"** with at least one OP per region. According to interviewees, this would ensure that the process is not overly focused on what happens at UNHQ in New York and would help bridge the perceived disconnect in some Major Groups between OPs and their constituency. Organizing Partners could also be selected to focus on thematic issues, and temporary focal points could be chosen to address time-bound processes.

Inclusiveness, including outreach

Organizations for which an effective Major Group structure is most needed are those without a presence at UNHQ and which are less familiar with UN processes. These include, in particular, small community-based organizations. Unlike larger and/or international groups, these organizations do not have many opportunities to express their views, much less to informally interact with delegates from Member States or UN staff. Major Groups should actively reach out to these organizations to facilitate their participation and give them the priority.

Recommendation 19: Prioritize people on the front lines
Given that the space for Major Groups and other stakeholders' participation and input is limited - in particular when it comes to opportunities for speaking - it should be occupied in priority by those on the front lines (such as forest-dwellers, slum-dwellers, those living in poverty, small farmers, etc). Such priority requires appropriate direct funding for participation from the UN and Member States.

Inclusiveness requires not only giving space to these organizations but also actively reaching out to them and including them in the process. The 2001 report of the Secretary-General on Major Groups noted the importance of "exploring and creating incentives that encourage the more

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[127] "DRAFT Terms of Reference for the Coordination Committee," International Food Security & Nutrition Civil Society Mechanism for Relations with the CFS (UN Committee on World Food Security), page 4

mainstream stakeholder organizations to mobilize new non-governmental leadership and to revitalize their links with the grassroots" as a potential good practice.[128]

Some interviewees point out that the best way to include these voices extends beyond supporting physical presence. Such an experience can be disappointing and with limited effectiveness without capacity support. Innovative methods should be explored to better integrate contributions from the local and national levels and through the use of new tools. Participants at the June 20, 2013 roundtable meeting of Major Groups and CSOs raised the possibility that, in addition to having distant people come to New York to participate, more accessible local meetings and consultations should also be organized. These should be attended by one or several "rapporteurs" from UNHQ charged with bringing the outcome back to New York.

Respondents to the UNEP/NGLS survey on Major Groups often mentioned better use of online tools as one way to allow participation by a wider range of groups. According to one respondent, strengthened online participation could increase inclusiveness and participation and limit the dependency of the outcomes on the persons physically attending the meetings.[129] However, respondents were polarized on this issue, with 42% of the respondents in favor and 47% opposed to the view that ICT could replace physical presence.[130]

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[128] E/CN.17/2001/PC/4. "Major Groups," Report of the Secretary-General, 14 March 2001, paragraph 21
[129] "Models and Mechanisms of Civil Society Participation in UNEP," UNEP / UN-NGLS Civil Society Survey, January 2013, page 18
[130] Ibid, page 46

V. CONCLUSION: Beyond formal consultation to dialogue, debate, deliberation.

This study has identified many good practices in the sustainable development track and throughout the UN system that could be built on in the next iteration of the institutional framework for sustainable development. It has found the Major Group framework to be neither a panacea nor an impediment to participation in the future sustainable development architecture, and highlighted many options that could help make the Major Groups more inclusive and effective. These include structural, technical and financial improvements, in particular:

• More predictability, to respect and support the consultation process of organizations with decentralized constituencies and/or distant from UNHQ, in particular people's' and social movements. More predictability can be achieved through efforts by all parties, including through better internal Major Group governance as well as a commitment from the UN and Member States to provide adequate information to Major Groups and other stakeholders and to respect their consultation process by neither imposing impossible timelines nor pushing for false or forced consensus.

• Improved coherence between processes at the national, regional and global levels to enable full engagement of Major Groups and CSOs focused at the national and regional levels.

• Greater commitment on the part of the UN to seriously and meaningfully engage Major Groups and civil society, including through coherence and improved funding. This in turn requires regular and predictable financing and a clear mandate from Member States.

These recommendations aim to improve both the quantity and quality of the inputs that Major Groups and other stakeholders can provide into the future hlpf policy process - and the official space to receive and debate these inputs. However, they are not sufficient to guarantee truly valuable engagement. Technical solutions must be accompanied by strong commitment from all parties, and at leadership levels, to engage in good faith. This responsibility rests with Major Groups, the UN system and Member States.

• Major Groups members who find the process valuable and helpful have a responsibility to reach out to people and organizations not involved in the framework, and to be more proactive in making space for other forms of organizing.

• UN DESA/DSD has a similar responsibility to reach out to other parts of the UN system. The UN as a whole, while remaining neutral, has a responsibility to implement its and Member State pronouncements to improve the quality of the engagement with non-state actors.

• Member States have the responsibility to engage meaningfully with Major Groups and other stakeholders, to listen to and debate with them, to engage them in deliberative and decision-making processes and to respect and support their organizing structures and activities.

Ultimately, engagement by Major Groups and other stakeholders must go beyond formal consultation to active participation in the deliberative process. The opportunities to provide input have generally grown in recent years and constitute a valuable space that must be enhanced,

certainly not reduced. However, this style of participation cannot be considered as the be-all and end-all for non-Member States. The full engagement of the diversity of civil society, including through Major Groups, is an essential ingredient for policy development and implementation and is a true test of effective multilateralism.

ANNEX I : Summary of recommendations

UN DESA
- Consultations on criteria for new Major Groups
- Make the process more relevant for participation of social movements
- Demonstrate the value of the interface
- Coherence and improved UN coordination
- Put emphasis on the regional and local level, improved coherence between global, regional and national processes
- More language diversity
- Public disclosure and conflict of interest policies
- Rights of participation, building on best practices throughout the UN system
- Recognizing and drawing on Major Groups and civil society expertise
- Official record of Major Groups and other stakeholders' input
- Better administrative support for the Major Groups
- Regular Briefings
- Better use of ICT
- Prioritize people on the front lines
- No regression
- Autonomy and respect for self-organization
- Recognition of diversity
- Clear mandate/terms of reference

Major Groups
- More structure in Major Groups governance
- More language diversity
- Strengthening and supporting the NGO Major Group
- Minimum standard for a "Major Group" statement
- Put emphasis on the regional and local level
- Recognition of diversity
- Clear mandate/terms of reference
- Accountability and transparency
- Gender and regional balance
- Inclusiveness, including outreach
- Prioritize people on the front lines

Member States
- Adequate and predictable funding from Member States
- Re-establish multi-stakeholder dialogues
- Apply the no regression principle
- Public disclosure and conflict of interest policies
- Rights of participation, building on best practices throughout the UN system
- Recognizing and drawing on Major Groups and civil society expertise
- Official record of Major Groups and other stakeholders' input
- (Participate in) Regular Briefings