Making Multilateralism Work: Policy Recommendations

By Occidental College ©Kahane-United Nations Interns 2025

Eliza Boden
Sonia Brems
Mary Ellen Coaty
Arden Courtney
Kavita Dasilva
Ian Ericsson
Aminah Gassama
Ruby Gower
Erica Greenberg
Taylor Miller
Chloe Peyton
Noelle Puvak
Tejas Varma
Clio Vos
Maya Watanabe

Compiled by Azza Karam

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Introduction

This book is a *minimally edited* compilation of Policy essays - or Briefs - presented by fifteen Occidental College (Oxy) students, who were selected, in their final/senior year, to benefit from a unique opportunity, to serve in and around the United Nations system, as Professional Interns.

The William and Elizabeth Kahane United Nations Program at Occidental College offers an unparalleled opportunity to gain firsthand experience at the UN through internships and coursework in New York City—as well as immersive, on-campus events. The [Kahane Fund's flagship program, Oxy at the UN](#), is the only program of its kind. Each fall, following a competitive selection process, a highly qualified group of Occidental students moves to New York City to conduct high-level, full-time internships at United Nations agencies, country missions to the UN (government offices), and related international non-governmental organizations.

These placements are complemented by two rigorous Occidental classes that provide the student interns with opportunities for deeper reflections on their work within the sphere of the United Nations, in development, peace and security and human rights: DWA 401 - "Multilateralism and the United Nations: Challenges and Opportunities for Global Cooperation" taught by Azza Karam (PhD), and DWA 402 - "The United Nations: Humanitarian Intervention, Humanitarian Response" taught by Emily Krasnor.

The Kahane Fund empowers Occidental students to engage both in, and with, the United Nations system, and take on active roles as informed and engaged global citizens.

The Student Interns of this 2025 Cohort whose essays are showcased in this book, served full time in jobs at the United Nations - specifically within [the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)](#), and [the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)](#); as well as within two Missions/Embassies to the United Nations, one from the North (the United Kingdom) and one from the South (Costa Rica). They also served in two international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) - the [International Planned Parenthood Federation/IPPF](#) and [We are Noor,](#) and one served in an international Foundation dedicated to peacemaking, and named after one of the first Secretary- Generals of the United Nations: [the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation](#).

Throughout their study and service, the Student-Interns learned, participated, questioned, and analyzed, together, in their work with their supervisors, as well as during their studies and reflections with their professors. Some of their essays deal with aspects of what they worked on in their respective UN sites. Some are a culmination of thoughts influenced by what they studied. All are reflections on what they learned, and what they believe to be needed, for multilateralism to serve our common good.

Emily Krasnor and I were privileged to be their Professors. As Director, I took over just before the Semester began, from the indomitable Cynthia Rothschild, who lovingly and ably led the Oxy Program with the late Professor Jacques Fomerand, for many years. This year's cohort and UN system placements would not have been possible without Cynthia's tirelesss efforts including in very difficult moments.

I found the class discussions and reflections of the Student Interns refreshing, engaging and no matter the context, always engendering of hope. Their writing skills delighted us. Their ability to articulate their ideas and civilly discuss their opinions with one another, enlightened us. The outstanding reviews they received from their respective work supervisors both humbled us and made us so proud of them.

This book is to offer them an opportunity to see the fruits of their own intellectual labor and legacy. It is also a concrete means to thank them by documenting their own wisdom. This book is a gift for the students - by them.

This book is also a gift to a number of dedicated servants of knowledge: the Professors who supervise them from when they first develop an interest in international affairs at Oxy's Department of World Affairs - especially those who also form part of the Advisory Committee of the Kahane UN Program - Kathryn Leonard, Madeline Baer, Laura Herbert, and Anthony Chase; as well as the carers who developed the tools and means to ensure the student welfare was not only in the books and statutes, but also provided for through human nurture - Robin Craggs, Marisa G. Mofford, Priscilla Falter and Karl Rivera.

And last but by no means least, this book, and the entire journey of Internship and service to the international community, is thanks to the visionaries who make this Program possible year after year - William and Elizabeth Kahane.

Azza Karam and Emily Krasnor

New York, December 2025

Humanitarian Assistance for LGBTIQ+ Communities in Myanmar

By Eliza Bodden

Introduction

Following the February 2021 military coup, Myanmar has deteriorated into one of the world's most severe contemporary humanitarian emergencies. By mid-2024, the country had registered the world's second-highest level of conflict intensity, and the International Rescue Committee's 2025 Emergency Watchlist ranked Myanmar third among countries most at risk of deteriorating humanitarian conditions—underscoring both the scale and volatility of the crisis (IRC, 2024; Humanitarian Action Info, 2024). The situation is marked by escalating armed conflict, mass displacement, economic collapse, and widespread human rights violations (Human Rights Council, 2024). Within this context, LGBTIQ+[1] individuals face heightened and intersecting risks shaped by discriminatory laws, entrenched social stigma, and targeted violence (International Commission of Jurists, 2019). Despite growing recognition of marginalized populations' unique needs in conflict settings, LGBTIQ+ communities remain largely invisible within mainstream humanitarian response (Outright International & Edge Effect, 2024). This case study examines the vulnerabilities of LGBTIQ+ individuals in Myanmar, assesses limitations in humanitarian programming, and offers evidence-based policy recommendations informed by international standards and emerging Myanmar-specific practices.

Intersecting Vulnerabilities

LGBTIQ+ individuals in Myanmar experience multidimensional vulnerabilities that intersect across legal, social, and economic domains, producing a persistent climate of marginalization and risk. Colonial-era laws, entrenched social norms, and state practices collectively limit the rights of queer populations, exposing them to systemic violence, exploitation, and exclusion. Section 377 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes "carnal intercourse against the order of nature," carries penalties ranging from ten years to life imprisonment, while vague provisions in police and public nuisance laws enable arbitrary arrest, extortion, and harassment, often carried out with impunity (ICJ, 2019). Recent state policies, including conscription, have intensified these risks. Queers of Burma Alternative (QBA) documents that authorities have used conscription to "correct" queer identities, targeting individuals perceived as gay, transgender, or gender diverse, while subjecting them to financial extortion, abuse, and coercion. The State Administration Council (SAC), along with police, local authorities, and other state actors, has targeted LGBTIQ+ individuals through gendered and sexualized forms of violence, including sexual assault, intimidation, and coercion, often justified by stereotypes about sexual orientation or gender identity (Human Rights Council, 2024; ICJ, 2019; QBA, 2025). Judicial bias compounds these

challenges, as courts routinely fail to recognize gender identity, use gender-affirming pronouns, or take the testimonies of LGBTIQ+ individuals seriously (ICJ, 2019).

Social marginalization further exacerbates structural vulnerabilities. Widespread stigma, family rejection, and community exclusion compel many LGBTIQ+ individuals to conceal their identities to avoid verbal, physical, or sexual abuse (QBA, 2025). One transgender man reflected, "Life was difficult for LGBT people in Myanmar. Some people think that being gay is against nature and a sin... I still haven't come out to my family" (Fortify Rights, 2022). Discrimination and fear of exposure also restrict access to formal employment, leaving many LGBTIQ+ individuals dependent on informal labor, migration, or community support networks (Outright International, 2021). These economic challenges are compounded by the fact that many LGBTIQ+ people are forced into hiding to avoid harassment, extortion, arbitrary arrest, or retaliation for their participation in activism—such as involvement in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). Combined with rising living costs and limited access to financial resources, economic disparity increases vulnerability to exploitation, abuse, and forced displacement. As one queer individual from Myanmar explained, "Many individuals are in hiding from the military and police because they are doing activism and joining CDM in their respective areas... For us remaining in Myanmar, we need financial support to move to safer places, rental cost, food, medical needs, and safe communication" (Outright International, 2021). Further, the cumulative effect of legal persecution, social exclusion, economic insecurity, and targeted violence impacts both physical and mental health, contributing to chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic conditions (Fortify Rights, 2022; QBA, 2025). Addressing these complex and intersecting vulnerabilities necessitates comprehensive humanitarian interventions that integrate legal protection, psychosocial support, and economic empowerment, while simultaneously advancing mechanisms of accountability to confront systemic discrimination and gender-based violence.

Humanitarian Response

In Myanmar, over 17.6 million people require urgent humanitarian assistance, with more than 1.6 million people internally displaced and thousands fleeing to neighboring countries (OCHA, 2025). Within this landscape of escalating conflict and mass displacement, the pre-existing marginalization of LGBTIQ+ populations has deepened. Although overall humanitarian needs have surged, responses have not kept pace with the specific risks facing sexual and gender minorities, leaving them disproportionately exposed to violence, exclusion, and socio-economic insecurity.

The 2025 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) emphasizes interventions in food security, shelter, health, protection, and gender-based violence, explicitly prioritizing women, children, and displaced populations (OCHA, 2025). LGBTIQ+ communities, in contrast, are mentioned only twice—compared to

46 references to women, 97 to children, and 73 to displaced people—highlighting their effective marginalization and near-erasure from formal humanitarian planning. This omission highlights the structural and institutional barriers that block sexual and gender minorities from accessing protection and essential services. The criminalization of homosexuality under Section 377, pervasive societal stigma, and assumptions among humanitarian actors that LGBTIQ+ inclusion is too difficult to operationalize, actively constrains both planning and service delivery, leaving these populations particularly vulnerable and critically underserved. (International Commission of Jurists, 2019; Outright International & Edge Effect, 2024). As Outright International and Edge Effect observe, "Addressing or even acknowledging the unique vulnerabilities of LGBTIQ people in emergency contexts has long been cast in the 'too hard' basket," reflecting how systemic barriers shape operational decisions and contribute to the invisibility of sexual and gender minorities in humanitarian response.

In the absence of inclusive large-scale humanitarian mechanisms, local civil society organizations have assumed a disproportionate burden in meeting the community's needs. The Rainbow Foundation provides a clear example: originally focused on advocacy, it rapidly pivoted to emergency response after the coup, relocating staff and resources to Thailand to continue supporting LGBTIQ+ individuals inside Myanmar (Outright International & Edge Effect, 2024). By stepping in where formal mechanisms did not, The Rainbow Foundation and similar organizations demonstrate that meaningful, community-centered inclusion is both possible and effective. Their commitment and adaptability illustrate what can be achieved at the community level, yet no single organization can bear the full responsibility for systemic gaps. This reality underscores the urgent need for formal humanitarian systems to integrate LGBTIQ+ needs into mainstream planning, ensuring that protection, services, and assistance are not left solely to local actors. Addressing this gap requires that mainstream humanitarian assistance take responsibility for LGBTIQ+ inclusion by systematically embedding these needs across all aspects of planning and delivery.

Humanitarian Programming Considerations

Operationalizing inclusive programming for LGBTIQ+ people in Myanmar requires building on the proven dedication of local organizations and translating it into concrete strategies, policies, and practices across all sectors. Systematic integration of LGBTIQ+ inclusion must move beyond localized initiatives and become a core part of the broader humanitarian response. Programs must be grounded in principles of safety, participation, and cross-sectoral coordination, responding to vulnerabilities shaped by criminalization, stigma, displacement, and economic precarity (IASC, 2015; GiHA WG Myanmar, 2024). Protection services, psychosocial care, health interventions, and livelihood support should be integrated into a unified framework to ensure holistic, community-centered support.

UNFPA's interventions between 2022 and 2024 provide a clear illustration of integrating inclusive programming for LGBTIQ+ people; In partnership with local LGBTIQ+ civil society organizations, UNFPA combined vocational training in makeup artistry, hairstyling, and floral design with business start-up grants, psychosocial support, gender-based violence awareness, and sexual and reproductive health services (UNFPA Myanmar, 2025). By centering local expertise and participatory design, these programs demonstrate that institutional actors can operationalize inclusive approaches that address both immediate needs and structural vulnerabilities.

Local civil society organizations remain central to these efforts, providing contextual knowledge, credibility, and guidance on safety that allows formal actors to reach populations that would otherwise remain invisible. Partnerships must be built on trust, respect for autonomy, and flexibility, especially in contexts where registration, data collection, or service access can place LGBTIQ+ individuals at risk (Outright International & Edge Effect, 2024). Yet, as the earlier example of the Rainbow Foundation shows, no single organization can carry the full responsibility for systemic gaps—highlighting the urgent need for mainstream humanitarian actors to assume structured, sustained responsibility.

Systemic barriers persist. Humanitarian actors often lack training on LGBTIQ+ issues, and limited disaggregated data constrains evidence-based planning (Outright International & Edge Effect, 2024; Equal Asia Foundation et al., 2024). Criminalization under Section 377 and pervasive societal stigma discourage participation and suppress reporting of abuse, while rigid funding mechanisms limit organizational flexibility (Outright International & Edge Effect, 2024). These challenges illustrate that small-scale successes, while important, cannot substitute for structural reform within the broader system.

Inclusive humanitarian action also requires centering LGBTIQ+ leadership in assessments, data collection, and documentation to ensure interventions reflect lived experience rather than extractive practices (Outright International & Edge Effect, 2024; IRC & USAID, 2021). Long-term, flexible support for local organizations strengthens both immediate service provision and community resilience, enabling adaptive responses to evolving threats. The Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar (2024) emphasizes that recognizing LGBTIQ+ leadership—in both humanitarian response and resistance—is critical to designing interventions that are equitable, effective, and rights-affirming.

Taken together, these considerations reinforce the central argument: while community-led initiatives illustrate the potential of meaningful inclusion, formal humanitarian systems must assume responsibility for systematically integrating LGBTIQ+ populations. Doing so is essential to protect those most at risk and to ensure that humanitarian practice in Myanmar adheres to internationally recognized principles of safety, participation, and dignity.

Policy Recommendations

To strengthen humanitarian response for LGBTIQ+ communities in Myanmar, a comprehensive, evidence-based approach is required:

1. Recognition in Planning and Strategy: Explicitly include LGBTIQ+ populations in HRPs, cluster plans, and UN agency strategies across protection, health, shelter, livelihoods, and WASH sectors (GiHA WG Myanmar, 2024).

2. Community-Led, Survivor-Centered Programming: Prioritize partnership and flexible funding for trusted local LGBTIQ+ organizations, highlighting safety, confidentiality, and participation in design, monitoring, and implementation (IASC, 2015; Outright International & Edge Effect, 2024).

3. Integrated Livelihoods and Protection: Combine economic empowerment with psychosocial support, GBV risk mitigation, and SOGIESC rights education to address immediate vulnerabilities and foster resilience (UNFPA Myanmar, 2025).

4. Capacity-Building for Humanitarian Actors: Provide targeted training to humanitarian actors on SOGIESC issues, safe referral protocols, and non-discrimination principles, including practical guidance for interacting with LGBTIQ+ survivors (GiHA WG Myanmar, 2024; Equal Asia Foundation et al., 2024).

5. Advocacy for Legal and Policy Reform: Promote access to justice, legal gender recognition, and the repeal of discriminatory laws in line with Myanmar's obligations under international treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (International Commission of Jurists, 2019).

6. Ethical Data Collection and Monitoring: Collect disaggregated data on LGBTIQ+ populations to inform program design while maintaining strict confidentiality (IRC & USAID, 2021).

Conclusion

LGBTIQ+ communities in Myanmar experience intersecting legal, social, economic, and protection vulnerabilities that are often overlooked in mainstream humanitarian response. Addressing these challenges requires interventions that are inclusive, participatory, and integrated, combining immediate service delivery with structural and rights-based approaches. Evidence from UNFPA programming and other community-led initiatives demonstrates that linking economic empowerment, psychosocial support, and GBV awareness fosters resilience and enhances safety.

Humanitarian actors must recognize LGBTIQ+ populations in planning documents, partner meaningfully with local organizations, integrate protection and livelihoods programming, and advocate

for legal and policy reforms. Such strategies will not only fulfill international human rights standards but also respond to the urgent, context-specific needs of LGBTIQ+ populations. In a complex and politically volatile setting like Myanmar, a rights-based, survivor-centered, and community-informed approach offers the most effective path toward ensuring dignity, safety, and resilience for LGBTIQ+ individuals.

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[1] LGBTIQ+ is used in this paper to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and other individuals across diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions, acknowledging the wide spectrum of experiences and vulnerabilities within these populations.

UN Security Council Reform

By Sonia Brems

Background

       The United Nations Security Council remains the international community's central mechanism for safeguarding peace and managing conflict. The Council has far-reaching powers and can adopt resolutions that are binding under international law (Geneva Centre for Security Policy, 2025). However, leaders such as those included in the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism (HLAB) call the Security Council the "highest profile example of failure in the multilateral system" (High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, 2023). Critics argue that the current structure, dominated by the five permanent members (P5), China, France, Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, does not reflect the geopolitical realities of the 21st century. Closely linked to this is the controversy regarding the veto power held by all five members, as deliberation continues over whether it should be abolished, limited, or extended. Furthermore, beyond composition and power, a large portion of the conversation centers on the Council's operational effectiveness and accountability. This policy note urges the United Kingdom to pursue lasting reform of the Security Council to address the structural deficiencies that impede the Council's ability to forge a cohesive response to global security issues (Nadin, 2016, #2-4).

       Reform is vital to ensure that the Security Council, and more broadly the United Nations, is capable of addressing global humanitarian crises. Previous attempts to restructure the Security Council have been stalled due to disagreements on the specifics of expansion, highlighting the complex nature of multilateral debates (Joseph et al., 2024). Notably, Secretary-General António Guterres, addressing Ambassadors on United Nations Day, urged members to consider substantial reforms to the Security Council (Aitken, 2025). Calls for reform have been discussed within the Council for many years. In 1993, the General Assembly passed Resolution A/RES/48/26, which established an open-ended Working Group to consider aspects of expanding the Security Council (*History of Reform*, n.d.). Moreover, the United Nations' inability to prevent or adequately address the Rwandan genocide underscored the institutional weaknesses of the Security Council. This failure sparked renewed advocacy for reform both within and outside the UN system. More recently, appeals for revision within the Council have become more urgent, as the Security Council's membership no longer reflects the growing influence of regions such as Africa, Latin America, and South Asia.

       At a meeting on the Council's future, UK Ambassador Kariuki claimed that the UK supports changes to both the permanent and non-permanent membership of the Council, naming Germany, Japan,

India, Brazil, and, more broadly, the continent of Africa, as States that are deserving of permanent representation (Kariuki, 2025). For too long, the United Kingdom has made commitments to reform the Security Council without real action. As a permanent member, the UK is uniquely positioned to lead the reform effort. With the United States increasing its skepticism regarding the United Nations' relevance, the UK can stand out as the P5 member most dedicated to protecting multilateral governance and rebuilding global trust in the Council's credibility (Amiri, 2025). Leading reform would not only reaffirm the UK's leadership, but also help ensure that the United Nations can effectively tackle today's most urgent threats to peace and human rights and commit to equity, legitimacy, and modernization (High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, 2023). It is time for the UK to take a stance on Security Council reform and build momentum to create lasting change in the Council, while realistically maintaining its influence as a permanent member. This memo outlines three policy options for Security Council reform, their corresponding political dimensions, and the overall recommendation to achieve lasting UK-led change in the Security Council.

Policy Option 1: Van Herpen

The first policy option for consideration is a suggestion put forth by Marcel Van Herpen. The reform proposal introduced by Van Herpen is characterized as a "slightly more radical suggestion," as a key element of his proposal is to abolish the veto power. The veto has been widely cited as the primary factor in paralyzing the United Nations, preventing it from responding effectively and cooperatively to global crises. (López-Claros, 2022). Furthermore, Van Herpen suggests adding new permanent members to the Security Council, namely Germany and Japan. To rebalance the Council, Van Herpen also proposes adding members from the Southern Hemisphere, but only in temporary positions (Van Herpen, 2003).

Van Herpen's proposal would result in a Security Council configuration with seven permanent seats, all without veto power, and ten non-permanent seats, plus new representatives of the southern hemisphere, holding two-year terms (Hosli et al., 2011 #176). The proposal offers notable benefits, including a more than 27 percent increase in the probability of decision-making, along with improved fairness and legitimacy within the Council. It would also recalibrate the balance of collective influence between permanent and non-permanent members (Hosli et al., 2011 #178).

Political Dimensions:

It is unlikely that this proposal, which would significantly reorganize the Council's power structure, will pass P5 member clearance. Former US Ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, stated that none of the permanent members are willing to relinquish their veto power, including the United States. Furthermore, she noted that the United States believes removing the Security Council's veto power would ultimately make the body more dysfunctional, emphasizing that the US views the veto

as an essential tool (Nichols, 2024). Similarly, Russia would not find this proposition acceptable, as political tensions over Ukraine have risen, and as more member states bring resolutions concerning Ukraine, Russia wants its veto power more than ever (Jochecová, 2025). From the UK's perspective, while the Van Herpen suggestion may dilute the UK's individual influence, it could enhance the Council's overall effectiveness and legitimacy, aligning with the UK's commitment to multilateralism and global governance.

Policy Option 2: Russett et. al

The second proposal for consideration is Russett, O'Neill, and Sutterlin. This method is characterized as a more pragmatic approach that seeks to balance what is desirable with what is achievable in the context of UN reform, while creating the conditions for substantive changes moving forward (Kelly, 2001). The core elements of Russett et al. focus on expanding non-permanent membership from 10 to 16 seats, curbing veto use, and increasing the voting threshold required for a decision to 13 or 14. If the reform is successful, regular reviews of the Council voting rules and representation would be established to prevent the institution from becoming outdated (Hosli et al., 2011 #182). Such a mechanism could build on UN Resolution A/77/L.52, which the General Assembly adopted to review the politically charged and self-interested use of vetoes (United Nations, 2022).

The Russett et al. proposal would improve fairness and distribution of influence, benefiting non-permanent members by significantly enhancing their influence relative to the P5. It would increase the collective power of non-permanent members, thereby reducing the individual P5 powers. Although the permanent members would retain the veto, the proposal suggests curbing its use, addressing a key criticism of the current system. It is important to note that the Russett et al. proposal involves a trade-off: a decline in decision probability. The likelihood of forming a winning coalition is reduced from the current 2.6% to 1.9% for a threshold of 13 members and 1.3% for a threshold of 14 members (Hosli et al, 178).

Political Dimensions:

Non-permanent member states would generally respond favorably to Russett et al.'s proposal. Expanding the number of non-permanent seats from 10 to 16 enhances regional representation, particularly for African and Asian countries. Higher voting thresholds mean their votes hold more sway in shaping consensus. However, Latin American countries may argue that this approach does not go far enough, as political representatives of Paraguay, Honduras, and Bolivia have placed a particular emphasis on removing the veto power (Torres Garrido, 2025). Germany, Japan, India, and Brazil may find Russett et al.'s proposal incomplete, as it does not provide sufficient permanent representation, which is a main priority for these countries (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

Policy Option 3: Group of Four

Finally, the Group of Four (G4) reform is the last policy option for consideration. The G4 reform initiative emerged in 2005, amid the post-Iraq War paralysis of multilateral institutions and the declining trust among major powers. It reflects that flexible and informal arrangements could "inject energy into a stagnant" United Nations System (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2025). The proposal aims to expand the Security Council to 25 members, adding six new permanent seats without veto power, two of which will be from Africa. The suggestion also advocates for adding four new non-permanent seats, allocated by region. The collective voting power of non-veto holders in the Council would be further increased as individual voting power for permanent members with vetoes would be 12.51%. The collective power for the permanent members with vetoes would be 62.53%, while the collective power for the rest of the members, permanent without vetoes and non-permanent, would be 37.47% (Hosli et al., 2011 #180).

Political Dimensions:

The G4 proposal has found widespread support in the past. However, it ultimately failed in the summer of 2005 due to opposition from a range of countries. The main opposition to the G4 reform comes from the Uniting for Consensus group, who argue that this reform model is anti-democratic, unequal, and would create new centers of privilege (*Coffee Club Vs G4: Security Council Reform Shows Regionals Rivalries*, 2025). Significantly, opposition came from the U.S. Ambassador, John Bolton, in cooperation with China, who claimed the suggested formula was divisive regarding the unity of every UN regional group. Furthermore, the African Union declined to support this proposition in the summer of 2005, as it did not provide sufficient representation for their countries (Hosli et al., 2011 #175).

Recommendations

While the UK has supported a G4-like position, the United Kingdom should publicly endorse a pragmatic reform package modeled on Russett et al. that expands non-permanent membership, introduces regular review mechanisms, and modestly curbs veto use. This is particularly important as the United Kingdom itself has not used its veto power since 1989 (The Veto: UN Security Council Working Methods, 2024). The UK should also signal openness to future expansion of permanent membership for key partners. This approach allows the UK to demonstrate credible reform leadership while preserving its core influence and veto authority within the Security Council. While the Russett et al. proposal results in a decline in decision probability, which could impact effectiveness, the single percentage-point decline is slight enough to warrant the increase in representation.

Van Herpen's proposition is politically unfeasible, as none of the P5 members, including the United Kingdom, will give up veto power. Supporting this position would isolate the UK diplomatically and strain relations with the P5. The G4 proposal has symbolic value but has repeatedly failed due to opposition from key powers. Backing it again risks aligning the UK with a plan that cannot secure consensus.

The Russett et al. proposal offers achievable, incremental reform, expanding representation and curbing veto use without dismantling the P5 structure, which the UK undoubtedly benefits from. It enhances Council legitimacy while maintaining operational functionality. The proposal safeguards the UK's veto, while supporting a progressive reform process. By championing procedural review mechanisms, the UK can position itself as the creator of long-term reform. Furthermore, while enhancing British inclusion, it will also expand the number of non-permanent seats, appealing to countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia seeking greater representation. Emphasizing regular review cycles ensures reform remains dynamic, appealing to improvement-driven allies like Germany and Japan, who seek eventual permanent representation. The UK can frame this as a bridge proposal, which balances the ambitions of the G4 with the caution of the P5. The UK should emphasize that sustainable reform necessitates consensus and operational viability, rather than symbolic restructuring. Publicly, the UK can highlight its commitment to a more representative, transparent, and effective Security Council. Simultaneously, the Mission should engage with Germany, Japan, and India to explore pathways for eventual permanent representation, contingent upon achieving consensus and meeting performance standards within the reformed structure.

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Reforming the International Climate Regime

By Mary Ellen Coaty

Saudi Arabia has exhibited leadership in water diplomacy while consistently obstructing global climate mitigation efforts. The state's shortsighted approach to environmental diplomacy prompts the question: How does the international climate regime allow national interests to outweigh global and generational costs? This Brief posits that Saudi Arabia's diplomatic behavior is both a feature and a product of a weak global climate regime, one that allows powerful states to manipulate multilateral processes to protect their national economic interests while shifting the responsibility of climate action onto vulnerable states with lower capacities. This Brief uses Saudi Arabia as a case study to illustrate how a state's approach to environmental diplomacy reflects both realist self-interest (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979) and the failures of international systems to enforce equitable climate action (Rietig et al., 2023). The Brief also recommends reforms based on the principles of climate justice (Roberts & Parks, 2006; Shue, 2014) that could better align national policies with global preservation.

Saudi Arabia has actively engaged and led in water and sustainability initiatives. The state's geographical features, including its aridity and lack of freshwater (Suhail et al., 2024), makes it crucial for its government to prioritize water security and water technology. Accordingly, Saudi Arabia is the world's largest producer of desalinated water and holds 20% of global desalination capacity (Tarawneh & Chowdhury, 2018). Additionally, the state has built desalination plants and wastewater treatment facilities through programs like the Saudi Green Initiative (SGI)[1], and has even experimented with solar-driven desalination to reduce the energy burden of producing freshwater[2]. Saudi Arabia has also led by financing international water projects abroad, like the Global Water Organization in Riyadh in 2023[3] and the forthcoming 2027 World Water Forum[4]. Notably, this activism aligns with Saudi Arabia's own interests (e.g. water security and technology) without threatening its sources of revenue, fossil fuels.

By contrast, the state's approach to international climate change negotiations has been disruptive, to say the least, and Saudi Arabia has been cited as a major opponent of of strong global climate commitments[5][6]. Saudi delegates have opposed language that would shift the world away from fossil fuels in nearly every United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP) since the 1990s. They have fought against references to phasing out coal, oil, or gas in official texts and insisted on keeping loopholes or weak terminology when referencing climate mitigation. The 2015 Paris Agreement negotiations are a key example of this, where Saudi Arabia leveraged bilateral and informal communication to ensure the treaty contained no mention of "fossil fuels" or "carbon pricing", and that commitments remained voluntary (Depledge, 2008; Rajamani, 2016). In following years, Saudi negotiators continued leveraging their influence. They also watered down the Glasgow Climate Pact at COP26 in 2021, which resulted in a pledge to "phase down" rather than "phase out" unabated coal (Cursino & Faulkner, 2021). At COP27 and COP28, Saudi Arabia and a small coalition of countries that export oil resisted international efforts to phase down all fossil fuels, instead promoting an approach that left room to continue using oil (Al-Shehri et al., 2023). These efforts culminated in COP30's declaration that did not mention fossil fuels at all, despite wide international support for a "phase-out" timeline. Instead, Saudi Arabia continued pushing their Circular Carbon Economy (CCE) framework, which prioritizes carbon capture while dismissing the need to reduce fossil fuel extraction (Al-Shehri et al., 2023). In sum, Saudi Arabia consistently reframes and delays global climate efforts that might threaten their ability to use fossil fuels. So while Saudi Arabia's proactive water initiatives contribute to national and regional prosperity, their climate obstructions contribute to global warming, which is projected to intensify droughts and heat extremes in the Gulf region (Al-Wabel et al., 2020), two major threats to water security.

A realist lens clarifies this counterintuitive behavior. Realism reasons that states prioritize their national interests and security and typically use international cooperation to achieve these priorities. (Morgenthau, 1948; Mearsheimer, 2001). For Saudi Arabia, the national interest is oil-based revenue and the political stability it promises. As such, climate change mitigation presents the following national dilemma: even though global stability and a livable planet are collective goods, achieving them could undermine Saudi Arabia's national priorities and sources of power.

Saudi policymakers have chosen to protect immediate national interests and their climate diplomacy aims to minimize the effects on oil use. Scholars suggest this is a calculated strategy to slow the pace of global decarbonization to match Saudi Arabia's timeline for economic diversification (Depledge, 2008; Al-Shehri et al., 2023). Strengthening water security abroad does not threaten Saudi Arabia's economy; if anything, it opens opportunities for Saudi desalination companies. So, cooperating in water diplomacy costs less than it returns, while cooperating in climate diplomacy is too costly in the short term to seem rational. According to realist theory, Saudi Arabia will cooperate when the situation is without cost or is beneficial, but will not cooperate when it imposes disproportionate costs on itself (Mearsheimer, 2011).

However, realism does not fully explain Saudi Arabia's success in shaping outcomes. We can use regime theory to understand the international systems of multilateral climate change diplomacy. The UNFCCC works by consensus[7], which is different from other international regimes, like the World Trade Organization, that use majority voting. In the UNFCCC, all countries effectively have their own vetos. Saudi Arabia, often backed by a handful of allies, leverages this veto in its national interest. It is widely reported that during climate summits, the Saudi delegation formally objects when most other nations agree, or proposes edits to weaken language (Depledge et al., 2023). Since chairs are reluctant to break consensus, agreements are usually weakened or the contested language is removed. This is known as the "lowest common denominator" outcome: the ambition held by the many is limited by the resistance of the few (Rietig et al., 2023). In other words, the current rules reward uncooperative behavior. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has exploited the climate regime's (and multilateral system's, more generally) distinction between developed and developing countries. Saudi Arabia claims they should not be held to the same expectations as industrialized countries because they are formally designated as a developing country under the UNFCCC, despite its relatively high income per capita and high levels of emissions (Khan et al., 2015). Saudi negotiators frequently call for "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR) to argue that the majority of burden of climate mitigation should be led by the U.S., EU, UK and others to cut emissions first and fastest (Roberts & Parks, 2006). While the notion of CBDR is certainly important to ensure global fairness and equity, Saudi Arabia has been criticized for using it to defend their oil interests rather than to protect poor nations (Depledge, 2008). The climate change regime lacks a

mechanism to penalize a country like Saudi Arabia for blocking progress, such as a climate security council or weighted voting. Therefore, there are few direct costs of acting in narrow self-interest, other than finger-pointing. In sum, Saudi Arabia's behavior is allowed by a multilateral system that prioritizes consensus over action (Rietig et al., 2023).

By delaying its own action and that of the global community, Saudi Arabia contributes to inadequate global mitigation, affecting vulnerable countries that contribute least to global warming, like small islands and least developed countries. Climate justice theorists criticize the international system for its lack of enforcement to prevent powerful states from passing climate risks onto weaker ones (Shue, 2014). This is a form of intergenerational injustice. Saudi Arabia today reaps economic benefits of oil while future generations are left to inherit a more dangerous climate without the ability to change course. Admittedly, Saudi Arabia is not the only actor that has stalled progress on climate change. The United States, for example, a major emitter, has withdrawn from the Paris Agreements and is attempting to rid itself from climate accountability. The difference is the duration and scale of obstruction. While the U.S. engagement varies depending on the administration in power and in 2025, the delegation was absent in Second Committee climate negotiations, Saudi Arabia has played a unique role as a consistent voice of obstruction and delay in a process that cannot afford to wait (Depledge et al., 2023). In other words, the U.S. delegation watches from the sideline whilst the Saudi delegation plays defense against climate ambition. Saudi Arabia claims that they are protecting their citizens' welfare, which has some validity; every government must consider economic impacts on its citizens. However, according to climate justice theory, no county's national interest can justify jeopardizing the planet's livability. Wealthy countries like Saudi Arabia have more capacity to adapt their economies than vulnerable and poor countries have to adapt to climate threats (Roberts & Parks, 2006; Shue, 2014), but there is still a lack of political will because oil is so profitable.

Saudi Arabia's environmental diplomacy highlights the need for reform in the climate regime to mitigate exploitation and to align individual and collective interests. One solution is for the international community, including G20 and development banks, to alter the cost-benefit analysis that Saudi Arabia has responded to by offering stronger incentives for transitioning away from oil. For instance, countries leading in climate efforts could create a "Just Energy

Transition Fund" for major oil producers, providing grants and investment to develop alternative industries like renewables, hydrogen, sustainable desalination, etc., on the condition of climate cooperation. Saudi Arabia has already shown interest in emerging industries like green hydrogen and carbon capture (Al-Shehri et al., 2023). Essentially, the multilateral system can help reduce the short-term costs for Saudi Arabia to pivot its economy. Simultaneously, the multilateral system and each person who participates in it must continue integrating a climate justice lens into their actions. This means centering affected populations and prioritizing equity. For Saudi Arabia, this means recognizing that while their concerns about economic disruption are valid, their current policies disproportionately endanger vulnerable states and future generations.

Saudi Arabia's environmental diplomacy is one example of a central contradiction in the global climate regime: states can support sustainability in areas that align with national interests while obstructing climate mitigation with little consequence. A realist lens explains why Saudi Arabia protects its petro-based political economy, and regime theory explains how it is able to do so. Climate justice theory adds moral clarity that the system is missing by recognizing that allowing wealthy, high capacity states to externalize climate shocks is a form of injustice. Therefore, reform should focus on building institutions that make ambition a rational option for oil-dependent states. Climate-responsible behavior must become the path of least resistance so there are no longer weaknesses in the system for powerful states to exploit.

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Reparations for the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade

By Arden Courtney Collins

Based on arguments made by African states in the 6th Committee of the UN General Assembly, this policy brief recommends the UN Security Council create a special tribunal for the purposes of litigating civil liability for states and corporations' involvement in the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade.

Background

In the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7 defines Crimes Against Humanity (CAH) as a list of acts committed "as part of a widespread or systemic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack" (ICC Article 7, 1998). These qualifiers are key: if enslavement is to count as a CAH under the Rome Statute, it must be large scale or methodically planned (widespread or systemic), against a non-military population (civilian), and perpetrators must know their actions are part of such an attack (knowledge of). This list includes enslavement. Between 1501 and 1867, 12.5 million African people were kidnapped and forced into ships: almost two million died on the Middle Passage, with 10.7 million enslaved in the Americas.

The Trans Atlantic Slave Trade (TAST)

The Trans Atlantic Slave Trade (TAST) was both widespread and systemic (seen in its large scale and multifaceted, international planning and execution). 70% of these Africans were free people who had been kidnapped inland by enslavers attempting to meet coastal European demand for slaves (Equal Justice Initiative, 2022) - therefore, an attack against civilian populations. Lastly, those engaged in the slave trade at all points and levels, knew exactly the horror and atrocity that they were participating in, and supporting.

Justice for the TAST cannot be found through pre-existing international legal mechanisms. The International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutes individual criminals for genocide, war crimes and Crimes Against Humanity that were committed on or after July 1, 2002 (ICC, 1998). Though the TAST was a Crime Against Humanity, it falls far outside the court's jurisdiction by a few hundred years, and no individuals who committed it, are alive to prosecute.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ), on the other hand, is a civil court which will only hear a dispute when states have recognized its jurisdiction. It is extremely unlikely for political reasons that Global North states will recognize the court's jurisdiction on the matter. Moreover, the ICJ also only hears disputes between states, meaning corporations could not be targeted, so litigation would be on a

state by state basis (UN, 1945). This process would be slow and protracted, uncoordinated, and exclude localizing justice to specific communities. Thus, this memo recommends the creation of a special court by the UN Security Council, to investigate and determine corporate and state responsibility for the TAST, and rule on reparations and redress. I propose a two court system, one for state responsibility and a second for corporations.

Reparations:

The truth of reparations is that no amount of money, or debt relief, or jail time, or any other measure (economic, political, social) known to man, can ever truly repair the harm done by the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade.

> "George Bernard Shaw writes about the meeting of the cardinals, the bishops, the priests, to congratulate Joan of Arc after she has been elevated to sainthood. 30 minutes to burn her, 400 years to recognize her as a saint. And when the time comes for Joan to speak, she looks at all of them and says, can you unburn me?" Otis Moss Jr. (ABC 7 Chicago, 2019).

Nothing will bring the almost two million people who died in the Middle Passage. Nor the millions who died enslaved deprived of their dignity and right, nor repair the families torn apart. Nothing can erase the racial violence and discrimination that generations have lived through.

It is also important to stress that the TAST is part of systems of racial hierarchy and neocolonialism that continue to the present day. "Racism is the oil in the system of colonial power that makes a sustained discrimination of and violence against certain people not only possible but also invisible and acceptable" (Pallister-Wilkins 'Decolonizing humanitarianism', 2021). In order to target these systems we must name their roots and their causes, as well as their impacts. One way to frame radical change for systems of oppression is through reparations. While reparations can never truly mend the wrongs done, they have a role to play in combating continued injustice in the modern day.

African states, through [T]he Abuja Proclamation, emphasized that the damage is not purely historical but "[P]ainfully manifest(s) in the damaged lives of contemporary Africans from Harlem to Harare, in the damaged economies of the Black World from Guinea to Guyana, from Somalia to Surinam." First Pan-African Conference on Reparations 1, 1993). The Proclamation also emphasizes responsibility, rather than guilt, of countries whose "economic evolution" depended on slavery and colonialism (First Pan-African Conference on Reparations 1, 1993), which created "[U]nique and

unprecedented moral debt" that has "yet to be paid" (First Pan-African Conference on Reparations 2, 1993).

One way to measure this harm is the "loss of productive life methodology" that was used in the September 11 Victim Compensation Fund (Bazelon et al. 14, 2023). This method includes both loss of life and uncompensated labour through estimating the value of a lost life as the amount expected to be earned by a person if they had not died prematurely (Bazelon et al. 13, 2023). Compensation for loss of life and unpaid labor, wrongful incarceration, physical injury, mental trauma, and gender based violence during the enslavement period sum to 107,799 billion dollars (Bazelon et al.). This 100 trillion number fails to capture the suffering of the enslaved's descendants after the end of slavery. This racial violence and discrimination has continued for over a hundred years in both law and practice, creating harms including wealth disparity, lower life expectancy, loss of liberty through disproportionate incarceration, income disparity, unemployment disparity, and healthcare disparity (Bazelon *et al.*).

Former colonizing countries may well be uninterested in repairing these harms because many have benefitted from the past era of colonial extraction. In plenary debate in the Sixth Committee of the United Nations this year, the political divides on the issue became clear. The African Group, including numerous African countries including Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Zimbabwe mentioned the importance of slavery's inclusion in a future CAH Convention. The only non-African countries to comment on the importance was Haiti and the Philippines, with Sierra Leone, the African Group, and Haiti explicitly mentioning reparations for the TAST. The United States, EU, CANZ (Canada, Australia, New Zealand), and Latin America, did not comment on slavery's inclusion. One of the common arguments that the Global North uses to sidestep TAST reparations is that the issue is *ex post facto* (having retroactive effect). According to Anghie (2023:100) the *ex post facto* argument claims that to determine the legality of any action, the action must be compared to the laws of that time. Because slavery and colonization were widely practiced and considered legal in the 1800s, retroactive litigation of wrongdoing in the time period is impossible or unfair. However, the laws of the era of colonialism and TAST were constructed by the powers committing those abuses. Tendayi Achiume is quoted by Antony Anghie as saying, "international legal doctrine has a longer history of justifying and enabling colonial domination than it does of guaranteeing equal rights to all human beings" (Anghie 100, 2023). It is worth noting that this *ex post facto* critique was used by Nazi lawyers during the Nuremberg trials to argue that, since there were no explicit laws against the Holocaust, it would be unjust to try the Nazis for those crimes. The Nuremberg judges dismissed this however:

"The maxim 'nullum crimen sine lege' is not a limitation of sovereignty, but is in general a principle of justice. To assert that it is unjust to punish those who in defiance of treaties and assurances have attacked neighbouring states and are guilty of the most appalling atrocities in the conduct of war, is to advance a proposition which is at once alien to the spirit of the Charter, and also unacceptable to common sense." (International Military Tribunal, 1946:219)

States and Corporations

States are the primary subjects of international law, having both responsibilities and rights under it (Duruigbo 2000). Human rights law bestows rights upon individuals and responsibilities upon states to honor them, as seen through individual criminal prosecutions of the International Criminal Court. Corporations are generally seen to also hold human rights, but "international law is virtually silent with respect to corporate liability for violations of human rights" and "has neither articulated the human rights obligations of corporations nor provided mechanisms to enforce such obligations." (Duruigbo 223, 2000). Secretary-General's Special Representative on the issue of Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises held in his report that corporations do have responsibilities under international criminal law (Duruigbo, 2000). Therefore, the incorporation of corporations into the international legal system via enumeration in laws and mechanisms for accountability, is only a matter of time (Duruigbo, 2000).

Under international law, corporations have rarely been held liable or responsible for human rights violations (Anghie 100, 2023). Somehow though, both colonizing states and corporations have managed to attain reparations for themselves (Anghie 100, 2023). This can be seen in modern day debt servicing, where corporations are allowed to continue to extract money from the global south through loans and accumulating debt. In 1980, the debt of developing countries was 618 billion, but by 2007, developing countries' debt was 3.3 trillion and had already paid 7.7 trillion in debt (Anghie: 102). The UK inserted a reparations clause in the Treaty of Nanking for China to pay the UK. After Haiti's wars of independence France forced the country to pay for its own freedom from slavery creating a debt worth 21 billion in today's dollars, which the country would pay for the next 122 years, sometimes devoting 80% of the country's annual revenue to paying it off (Roy, 2025). The Abuja Declaration cites two historical precedents for reparations, German payments to Jews after the Holocaust, and US compensation for Japanese American internment (First Pan-African Conference on Reparations 1, 1993). The prosecution for civil liability of corporations and countries for the TAST would be a new legal precedent, but it is one grounded in morality, and with historical precedent would be a moral one, grounded in the unique jurisdiction of a special tribunal set up by the UN Security Council.

Conclusion

  The creation of an adequately conducted special court could pinpoint both beneficiaries and victims of the TAST, in order to make the liable states and corporations pay up, and give victims, both in Africa and across the diaspora needed compensation. These special courts can give needed specificity that other measures like a general fund that all countries contribute to, cannot. Without explicitly naming those responsible, we are unable to achieve true justice, because we allow the mechanisms of racism and colonialism to continue invisibility. If we do not name the fact that poverty (for example) was imposed on the Global South through colonialism, then we allow the racist idea that these countries are to blame for their own exploitation to fill the void. When we render racism and colonialism invisible, we make it more effective, through its ability to elude blame and pose as a solution to its own devastation. We must also understand the multidimensionality of suffering across the diaspora, and use specificity to appropriately compensate different states, communities, victim populations, and civil society organizations.

  Monetary reparations for slavery are by no means the only form of justice available to the international community. W.E.B. Du Bois argues, in his draft appeal to the United Nations for Redress, not for financial reparations, for descendants of slaves. He argues for an international intervention into the country to address injustices against Black Americans, securing human rights, democracy, and justice. He says "no nation is so great that the world can afford to let it continue to be deliberately unjust, cruel and unfair toward its own citizens." (Du Bois 5, c. 1946). He frames this as an obligation of both the US as a signatory of the UN Charter and the international community at large, claiming the treatment of Black people was not an internal matter but a "problem of humanity" (Du Bois 5, c. 1946). One could argue, as Du Bois does, that numerous descendants of the enslaved face continued oppression and subjugation in the present that necessitates international intervention.

  Other reparative measures from the Abuja and Accra Proclamations include the return of stolen goods and artifacts (First Pan-African Conference on Reparations, 1993), and the creation of national committees in Africa and the diaspora for studying the experience and information education on enslavement, colonization, and neocolonialism (First Pan-African Conference on Reparations, 1993). As the Abuja Proclamation argues, the aforementioned neocolonial debt cycles must be cancelled, and continued systems of racism and neocolonialism dismantled (First Pan-African Conference on Reparations, 1993).

  According to the African Union, structural reform is needed to combat entrenched neocolonialism, including reforming the UN Security Council to have more African representation, as well as rendering the global finance architecture more equitable according to a "common but

differentiated responsibility" (African Union recommendation 14, 2023). Further, the African Union argues that International financial institutions (IFIs) must have more voice from the Global South, reducing dependency on extractive economics, and mechanisms for loss and damage, as climate change continues to cause significant challenges.

In sum, reparations for the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade are not only morally imperative, but have legal precedent. These reparations must take into account the compounding, multidimensionality of the harm caused. It is crucial to name the historical and current beneficiaries of that slavery, to unveil the systems of colonialism and oppression that are denying justice and continuing harm in the present day. A special court, created by the UN Security Council, would have the ability to pinpoint the relevant populations as well as the modern states who were beneficiaries of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade. In addition to monetary compensation, other reparations could be informed by the courts' rulings and research, including debt relief, artifact return, historical education, and international financial institutional reform, to mitigate against ongoing systems of harm.

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Long-term UN (Economic and Social Council) ECOSOC Accreditation for Civil Society Organizations

By Kavita Dasilva

The strength of the United Nations (UN) rests in its multilateral collaborative capacity. Civil-society participation within the UN is critical to legitimizing and upholding this multilateralism by bringing the voices of local expertise to global policy. By offering independent monitoring, civil society organizations (CSOs) help hold governments accountable, especially amid a global trend of shrinking civic space and reprisals (Roggeband & Krizsán 23, 2021). Governments are moving to obstruct and restrain CSOs that are not in line with and are critical of their government ideology and are simultaneously expanding space and state support for organizations identified as pro-government (Roggeband & Krizsán 23, 2021). In this environment, this Policy Brief argues that it is necessary for civil society to have a safe haven within the UN, to give voices to their constituents and hold states accountable. The long history of civil society working to shape United Nations agendas and provide nuance to global struggles must be upheld in order for the UN to continue to be exposed to new ideas and adapt accordingly (Smith & Wiest, n.d.).

Given the value of civil society within the UN system and structural difficulties CSOs face in their attempts to participate in UN forums, the NGO Committee should implement the recommendations proposed in this Policy Brief.

Origins and Legal Foundations

The primary legal basis for engagement between NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and the UN rests in Article 71 of the UN Charter. Article 71 provides the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) with the capacity to "make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence" (*Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs — Codification Division Publications*, n.d.). Article 71 establishes the NGO Committee, a subsidiary body within ECOSOC responsible for granting long term ECOSOC accreditation.

Long term ECOSOC accreditation grants no negotiating or voting rights, but it provides proximity and voice: accredited NGOs may submit written statements, make oral interventions, and interact with member-state delegations across UN fora. Importantly, ECOSOC-accredited NGOs automatically gain access to major UN conferences and the Human Rights Council, where much of civil society's advocacy occurs.

Beyond the UN Charter's establishment of the NGO Committee, ECOSOC has further defined its relationship with civil society through Resolution 2/3. This resolution clarified two main principles

governing the consultative relationship between civil society organizations (CSO) and ECOSOC: The Council and its bodies are empowered to seek expert information and advice from CSOs and enables CSOs to present public opinions and their own views (Desai 4, 2025).

ECOSOC has further quantified its relationship to CSOs by both expanding which types of organizations can acquire ECOSOC accreditation and by establishing clear accountability mechanisms. Resolution 1996/31 broadened eligibility beyond international NGOs to include national, regional, and sub-regional entities; introduced more rigorous accountability standards; and required quadrennial reporting to ensure organizations continued to uphold UN principles (Desai 5, 2025). It also empowered ECOSOC to suspend or withdraw status from NGOs that violated these standards (Desai 5, 2025).

Further, the adoption of ECOSOC Decision 1996/297 specified that efforts to update the consultative relationship between the UN and NGOs would continue, noting an effort to extend consultation arrangements to include all areas of the UN beyond ECOSOC (Desai 7, 2025). This was later reflected by the Secretary General (Desai 7, 2025).

ECOSOC Accreditation and the NGO Committee

The NGO Committee meets twice yearly (January and May) to review applications, pose questions, and recommend organizations for ECOSOC approval. The Committee has 19 geographically distributed seats (5 from Africa, 4 from Asia–Pacific, 2 from Eastern Europe, 4 from Latin America & Caribbean, and 4 from Western Europe & Others).

To qualify for long term ECOSOC accreditation, an organization must:
- Be operational at the time and have been established for at least two years with a permanent headquarters and constitution.
- Maintain a representative and democratically accountable governance structure.
- Derive most resources from members or affiliates rather than governments.
- Demonstrate expertise in issues within ECOSOC's mandate.
- Adhere to the UN Charter and refrain from politically motivated attacks or activities contrary to international law.

It is at the discretion of the Members of the NGO Committee to judge these criteria and if any questions are raised by a member, the application will be reviewed again at the next session. However, this poses a key challenge. The NGO Committee's questioning process can function as an informal "non-objection" procedure. Applications are sometimes deferred repeatedly for political rather than technical reasons.

This politicization and stagnation has crippled the Committee's capacity to carry out its mandate. The Committee is "notorious for lengthy delays in granting approvals", and several Committee Member States have been accused of silencing NGOs they disagree with, particularly CSOs critical of that state's human rights (Pai & Pérez, 2024).

A notable example of such delays and obstructions is the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN). The IDSN is a nonprofit that works to combat discrimination against members of the Dalit caste (Pai & Pérez, 2024). The IDSN applied for long-term accreditation in 2007, but it took until December 2022 (15 years) for it to receive approval (Pai & Pérez, 2024). While this is only one example of the politicization and gridlock, it demonstrates a systemic problem. In the review period between 2023 and 2024, This session, the Committee reviewed 508 applications for consultative status. Of these, only 214 NGOs were new applicants and 294 had been deferred from previous years (Pai, 2024). Furthermore, in the January 2024 session, only 24 percent of applications were approved for consultative status, a significant decrease from the 38 and 33 percent accreditation rates in 2023 (Pai & Pérez, 2024).

Broader Fora and Engagement

Although Article 71 formally links NGOs to ECOSOC, civil society participation has been implemented within other organs of the UN. The General Assembly (GA), the UN Security Council (UNSC), and special accreditation for short term access are some of the alternatives to ECOSOC accreditation.

While the General Assembly (GA) Charter contains no explicit provision for NGO participation, through practice and precedent, the GA and its Committees permit attendance at open meetings, address informal sessions by invitation, and attend as keynote speakers or panellists (Desai 23, 2025). Due to the absence of a formal relationship between the GA and CSOs, participation depends largely on each Chair's discretion and the political will of Member States. As a result, there is inconsistent participation by civil society in the Assembly and its Committees.

The Security Council's (SC) engagement with civil society expanded during the 1990s as it assumed wider roles in sanctions, peacekeeping, and post-conflict governance (Desai 30, 2025). Under Rule 39 of its Provisional Rules of Procedure, the Council may invite "other persons whom it considers competent" to provide information. Since then, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security has accounted for over 650 times across 385 separate resolutions where the SC reinforced, acknowledged, and highlighted the role of civil society. The SC has called for Member States and the UN to work with CSOs in conflict prevention efforts, peacebuilding, and the delivering of humanitarian assistance (30). Yet access remains uneven. On topics where Council Members are involved in conflict or have substantially diverging interests, civil society access becomes more restricted (Desai 31, 2025).

Furthermore, reprisals against briefers for speaking out against Council Members remains a grave concern, exacerbating the security risks of visibility when engagement is precedent based, not legally enshrined (Desai 31, 2025).

NGOs can apply for special accreditation to participate in GA high-level meetings and thematic conferences (e.g., climate summits, financing for development, migration compacts). The accreditation is granted per event and expires when the event ends.

Member States of the UN are responsible for approving or rejecting accreditation. Currently, singular states can block NGO special accreditation, often for political reasons. Since 2021, there have been efforts to expand gold standard language to block single states from rejecting applications. This expansion of language would send blocked NGOs to the GA where a vote to overturn the block is held. To overturn a block would need a simple majority. However, passing these reform efforts have a struggle of political will.

While temporary, these mechanisms often broaden participation beyond the ECOSOC roster.

Key Challenges

Some of the key challenges faced by NGOs working to gain include stalled reform, backlog and bureaucratic delays, uneven access across UN Organs, and shrinking civic space and safety risks.

1. Despite periodic discussions to streamline accreditation or extend consultative rights system-wide (as envisaged in ECOSOC Decision 1996/297), reform remains stalled, as consensus among Member States remains challenging. For example, reforms led by Chile, Uruguay, and Mexico in 2017 were brought through ECOSOC. Another example is in 2024 when the UK and Costa Rica led a NGO Committee Reform Decision to remove arbitrary pre-lists and create an informal working group. However, both efforts failed to pass.
2. With thousands of organizations awaiting review, and limited Committee meeting time to clear pending applications, backlog and bureaucratic delays are a key roadblock to CSO accreditation.
3. Uneven access across UN Organs has exposed short-term access, particularly the GA and SC, to rely on precedent rather than codified procedures. This leaves participation vulnerable to political discretion.
4. Shrinking civic space and safety risks has resulted in human-rights defenders and briefers facing intimidation, surveillance, or travel restrictions following UN engagement.

Emerging Opportunities & Reform Efforts
Despite these obstacles, several developments point toward renewal:
1. Special Accreditation Mechanisms for high-level meetings and thematic conferences permit wider, issue-based participation.
2. Expanding the mandate of Decision 1996/297, to include all UN bodies, remains under discussion and could create a more coherent participation framework.

3. Lobbying NGO Committee elections to elect Member States that demonstrate a willingness to pass NGO Committee reform. In particular, this would require the United Kingdom to call votes on its own regional bloc. This upcoming session will see the UK, the US, Turkiye, and Israel sit on the West Europe and other States bloc on the NGO Committee. Reform is unlikely unless the UK calls a vote and lobbies to elect states that have records that both support CSOs and Committee reform.
4. Efforts to improve gold standard language that would enable the General Assembly to vote to overturn special accreditation blocks. Improving gold standard language would put in place a set checks and balances on the Committee where deferred NGOs can appeal to the GA. The GA would be given the power to overturn deferrals. In turn, the accreditation process would become more transparent and democratic.
5. Adopting reform efforts brought forth by Costa Rica and the UK that seek to end obstructionist tactics of the committee. One important aspect of this reform would allow NGOs to participate virtually in Committee application reviews (Pai & Pérez, 2024). This would ensure NGOs from developing countries gain consultative status by preventing the Committee from requiring in-person participation of applicants. This inadvertently blocks NGOs that do not have the resources to attend sessions in New York.

Civil society participation is essential to the United Nations' multilateral legitimacy and its capacity to respond to complex global challenges. While Article 71 and subsequent ECOSOC resolutions established a framework intended to institutionalize this engagement, the current NGO Committee accreditation has become increasingly politicized, opaque, and restrictive. Prolonged deferrals, uneven access across UN organs, and heightened risks to civil society actors undermine both the intent and effectiveness of the consultative relationship. Strengthening long-term ECOSOC accreditation through targeted reform, such as improving transparency, enabling virtual participation, and expanding appeal mechanisms, would reaffirm the UN's commitment to inclusive governance. Preserving a safe, credible, and accessible pathway for civil society engagement is not only necessary for accountability, but critical to the UN's ability to remain adaptive, legitimate, and responsive in a rapidly changing global environment.

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Advancing Civil Society–Peacebuilding Commission Engagement through Regional CSO-UN Dialogues

By Ian Howard Eriksson

The United Nations' Peacebuilding Commission stands at a critical juncture. Despite twenty years of institutional evolution and explicit mandates to engage civil society, the Commission remains structurally constrained in its ability to meaningfully incorporate the voices, experiences, and expertise of the very stakeholders operating on the frontlines of conflict prevention and post-conflict recovery. While successive UN resolutions have reaffirmed the importance of civil society partnership in advancing peace, the gap between rhetorical commitment and institutional practice has only widened, revealing fundamental barriers that limit both the depth of civil society engagement and the effectiveness of the Commission itself. This brief argues that advancing civil society engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission requires moving beyond incremental reforms to the existing architecture and instead demands innovative solutions that address the structural, political, and resource constraints that currently undermine authentic civil society participation. Without such reforms, the Peacebuilding Commission will continue to miss critical opportunities to leverage the localized knowledge, contextual expertise, and legitimacy that civil society actors bring to global peacebuilding efforts.

Established in 2005 by twin Security Council and General Assembly resolutions (S/RES/1645– A/RES/60/180), the Peacebuilding Commission has grown over the past twenty years into the UN's preeminent forum for the advancement of conflict prevention and post-conflict recovery. Since its inception, however, the Commission has been plagued by insufficient, surface-level engagement with civil society—the non-governmental, non-UN actors working to reestablish peace and stability and prevent conflicts at both the local and international levels—ultimately limiting its effectiveness and overall impact. 2005's twin-resolutions "[recognize] the important contribution of civil society and non-governmental organizations, including women's organizations, to peacebuilding efforts" (p. 2) and "[encourage] the Commission to consult with civil society [and] non-governmental organizations…as appropriate" (para. 21).

Two decades later, the recently adopted 2025 twin Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR) resolutions (S/RES/2805– A/RES/80/11) include just two direct references to civil society. The first

reiterates "the importance of partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including…civil society organizations [and] local peacebuilding stakeholders…in supporting national peacebuilding priorities" (p. 1); the second reference merely "encourages the Peacebuilding Commission to further consult with relevant civil society organizations, especially local peacebuilders, grass-roots organizations, and women-led and youth-led organizations from countries considered by the Commission" (para. 11). While reinforcing the need for further engagement with civil society does not necessarily mark a step backwards for the Commission, it does not provide clarity on how this should be done. Furthermore, by limiting the formal role of civil society to 'consultants', the Peacebuilding Architecture mirrors the "consent over inclusion" approach to integrating civil society into decision making frameworks that Hellmüller outlines in her analysis of civil society inclusion in conflict mediation in Syria (2020, p. 417). Much like the peacemakers in the Syrian case, civil society peacebuilders are heavily restricted in their ability to influence on the work of the Commission, The oft repeated justification for this being that the Commission's mandate is to the national governments of member states, not 'the people'.

For civil society actors, there currently exist just two established pathways to engage the Commission: first as briefers to Commission meetings and by participating in the recently established annual CSO-UN Dialogue on Peacebuilding. Despite their expanded participation in formal Commission meetings, civil society briefers continue to face structural and political limitations that severely constrain the depth, candor, and impact of their engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission and its members. These barriers stem from both the design of the Commission itself and the precarious position of civil society actors operating within a state-centric multilateral system. The format of both country-specific and thematic meetings leaves each briefer with just 5-10 minutes to address the Commission, and they are generally not given an opportunity to provide concluding remarks (allotted time varies depending on the number of briefers for a meeting), let alone a chance to respond to questions or statements from member states (PBC/1/OC/3/Rev. 2, 2024, p. 2). In the case of country-specific meetings, the legitimacy of these briefings is undermined as civil society actors are beholden to their own national government's interests and positions (Security Council Report, p. 9).

Even if they had the opportunity, for many civil society briefers, openly criticising or contradicting their national government presents too great a risk of retaliation . Furthermore, the time constraints and the hyper-formal setting create an environment that privileges concise, diplomatic language over the detailed, context-rich narratives. Civil society actors, many of whom operate in

informal community settings and have little exposure to the UN's Peacebuilding Architecture, must radically compress and transform their presentations to fit institutional expectations, thus limiting the potential for substantive engagement during these meetings. While these limitations do result in less impactful exchanges with the Commission, the expanded inclusion of civil society briefers has been a hard-earned victory, and radical changes to the rules of procedure remain unlikely.

Recognizing the glaring constraints faced by civil society, in 2023, the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO)—along with a core group of 10 international non-governmental organizations—organized the first CSO-UN dialogue, a multi-day conference which seeks to provide civil society representatives a more interactive and impactful platform to engage and potentially influence the Commission and its constituent members. In practice, however, access and inclusion for civil society actors has remained highly contentious. In 2023 and 2024, the dialogues were held at UNHQ in New York City, and the 2025 Dialogue will be in Geneva, and these locations alone have left the Dialogues cost-prohibitive for many of the organizations and individual peacebuilders operating in the most critical peacebuilding contexts. Even with financial support from the UN, these funds usually cover little more than air travel for participants. Given the stated intent of CSO-UN Dialogues has been to provide a platform for predominantly Global South civil society representatives, inequitable access does continue to remain a priority concern for the event organizers and participants alike.

While the 2025 twin PBAR resolutions explicitly reference the value of briefings by relevant stake holders, including civil society (para. 2c), formal mention of the CSO-UN dialogue, which was included in earlier drafts of the resolution, is entirely absent in the final versions adopted by the GA and Security Council. Though this omission does certainly indicate internal disagreement between member states over the level of access and inclusion that should be afforded to civil society, by no means does it mark the end of the annual Dialogue. Rather, it leaves room for further innovation on the concept that has been developed over the past three years. And, presently there is an urgent need for innovative approaches to building and sustaining peace. In the midst of the present financial crisis gripping the United Nations, the PBSO has endured major budgetary and personnel cuts that have limited its capacity to carry out its mandate, let alone take a leading role in the coordination of a global dialogue on peacebuilding (Chen, 2025). Despite increasing the workload for an already under-resourced Peacebuilding Support Office, the 2025 PBAR does not go as far as to substantively address the funding gaps handicapping the PBSO. This

resource constraint, however, creates both a challenge and an opportunity: rather than expecting the PBSO alone to coordinate and finance global dialogues, the Commission should embrace a decentralized partnership model that expands beyond the current "core group" of ten international non-governmental organizations.

By developing regionalized CSO-UN dialogues in key peacebuilding contexts, the Commission can significantly reduce the financial and logistical barriers that currently exclude local and grassroots peacebuilders from meaningful participation. These regional dialogues would serve as inclusive platforms for civil society actors operating within and across conflict-affected regions, allowing them to substantively engage UN officials and member state representatives without the financial and physical burden of intercontinental travel to Geneva or NYC. Critically, these regional platforms should feed into a consolidated global dialogue held annually at UN Headquarters, creating a two-tiered engagement architecture that combines the accessibility and contextual depth of regional engagement with the institutional legitimacy and influence of global-level participation.

 This approach would not only address the resource constraints plaguing the PBSO but also leverage the existing networks, expertise, and convening capacity of local civil society, regional organizations, international NGOs, and UN regional offices, thus transforming financial limitations into the catalyst for more inclusive and impactful CSO-UN engagement. Regional CSO-UN dialogues should provide a space for actors from different peacebuilding networks and country contexts to develop a shared understanding of peacebuilding as a mutli-dimensional process, which often looks different across a region. While there is not a guarantee that all disagreements over priorities will be resolved, the mere act of exchanging thoughts and ideas should serve to prevent the outright framing conflicts seen in the case of Myanmar, which hindered local groups' ability to galvanize sustained international support (McCarthy, et al., p. 97). Furthermore, by developing a shared set of regional peacebuilding needs and priorities, these forums would provide the Peacebuilding Commission with a clearer sense of how to carry out its work across various contexts and what to prioritize.

Regional dialogues on peacebuilding are by no means a radical concept. In recent years, upstart conferences have formed with the expressed goal of feeding into the main 'global' CSO-UN Dialogue, such as the African Regional Consultation (ARC) in Nairobi. First held in November 2025 and organized by ACCORD and the West African Network for Peacebuilding with additional support from the PBSO, the ARC brought together a diverse array of civil society organizations, policymakers, youth and women's groups, and other stakeholders in an inclusive space to examine Africa's distinct experiences,

surface common challenges, and jointly shape recommendations to be presented at the 2025 Dialogue in Geneva (Lawal, 2025). While the ARC provides an ideal model to replicate across regions and peacebuilding contexts, other smaller forums could also be better supported and integrated into a global network of regional CSO-UN dialogues on peacebuilding.

The Ferghana Valley Peace Forum is one such example of these smaller, regional dialogues that bring together civil society and key policy makers and representatives from regional and international organizations for the discussion and formulation of common goals and agendas. The first installment of the Forum, titled "Ferghana Valley: Joining Forces for Peace and Progress" saw stakeholders from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan come together to discuss the shared goal of prosperity and stability in the violence-afflicted tri-border region, and marked the first such conference in Central Asia to have been planned and organized by local actors as opposed to external intermediaries like the EU (Abdiev, 2025). As these regional peacebuilding platforms have proven their cost-effectiveness, they offer clear value amidst the financially uncertain future of the UN's Peacebuilding Architecture.

Regionalizing the CSO-UN Dialogues offers a pragmatic way to overcome existing access, legitimacy, and resource constraints. By institutionalizing regional dialogues that feed into an annual global forum at UN Headquarters, member states can equip the Commission with a more representative evidence base, clearer regional priorities, and sustained channels of communication with frontline peacebuilders. Such reforms would not only align the Commission's practice with its long-standing commitments, but also enhance its capacity to support context-sensitive, nationally-owned, and genuinely inclusive peacebuilding processes.

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Redefining Power: Civil Society and an Updated United Nations

By Aminah Gassama

Since its inception in 1945, the United Nations has been a multilateral forum aimed at preserving global peace, security, and human rights. Decades later, however, its structure and norms continue to privilege state actors, often at the expense of civil society—the very communities and organizations that constitute the global population. The need for change is urgent, especially in the face of genocide and the global rise of fascist and fundamentalist (FF) movements. It is the UN Charter that functions as the basis for the UN system, so it is the immediate review and revision of the Charter that will start a new age for the UN. Member states, agencies, organizations with consultative status, and the general public are all urged to demand the invocation of Article 109, allowing for a general conference to review the Charter.

The Article 109 Coalition, launched during the 2025 UN General Assembly after earlier organizing during the 2024 UN Civil Society Conference in Nairobi, now brings together more than 40 civil society organizations along with former UN officials, diplomats, and global NGO leaders to advocate for a general conference on Charter reform. Its supporters include prominent figures such as former New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark and former Irish President Mary Robinson, signaling growing high-level backing for structural transformation (Article109.org). Importantly, Article 109 provides a legal pathway for embedding civil society into the Charter itself. Institutionalizing civil society participation through Article 109 would strengthen accountability, reduce extractive humanitarian practices, and reorient UN governance toward the lived realities of people rather than the interests of states or corporations.

Traditional notions of sovereignty and the risks inherent to state-centric approaches to international governance have ushered in this moment of crisis. Redistributing power toward civil society, the people, is not only feasible but essential. Such an effort would redefine sovereignty as responsibility rather than control, institutionalize accountability, and enhance the UN's capacity to respond to humanitarian crises and global inequities in collaboration with, and notably in service to, impacted populations. Article 109 offers the avenue to rethink the UN's foundational norms, particularly regarding sovereignty, accountability, and civil society participation. Historically, the Charter has codified sovereignty as the control of territory, privileging state interests over human rights and community agency. Yet, as United States' 33rd President, Harry S. Truman, noted during the UN's formation, "This Charter . . . will be expanded and improved as time goes on. . . . Changing world conditions will require readjustments" (Kjorven and Parlamis, 2025). Despite the intention for a dynamic Charter, Article 109 has never been used, with the Charter itself only receiving three amendments within its 80 year history (United Nations).

A critical element of this redistribution involves redefining sovereignty through the lens of necropolitics. Achille Mbembe (2003) describes necropolitics as the exercise of power through the management of life and death, illustrating how states often determine whose lives are valued and whose are expendable. Extending this framework, scholars have argued for a normative shift in sovereignty from territorial control to responsibility and relational governance (Anghie, 2005). In practical terms, this would entail expanding the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine to include not only mass atrocities but also gendered, racialized, and economic forms of state violence. Annual reporting on reproductive justice, care economies, disability protections, and anti-racist governance could be institutionalized, with non-compliant states facing penalties such as restricted voting rights or limits on peacekeeping participation (Fassbender, 2008). Such amendments ensure that sovereignty is tied to meeting human needs rather than maintaining hierarchical control over populations.

Within the UN system, several bodies are well-positioned to implement reforms that redistribute power toward civil society. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) already engages with non-governmental organizations through consultative status mechanisms, though these are often limited and formalistic. Expanding ECOSOC's role to include a formalized coalition of transnational communities would provide a mechanism for civil society to participate meaningfully in UN decision-making. Similarly, the Human Rights Council and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) could institutionalize requirements for civil society consultation and transparency, ensuring that policy interventions reflect the needs of affected communities. These changes align with the UN80 Initiative, a comprehensive review of UN structures and programs, and its recommendations for greater accountability, transparency, and relational governance (United Nations, 2025). Although the UN80 Initiative has highlighted systemic gaps in addressing gender justice, racial equity, and the rights of marginalized communities, the additional invocation of Article 109 can help actualize its goals holistically.

Feminist and intersectional critiques of the UN further illuminate the urgency of reconstruction. Noor, a feminist think-and-do tank, identifies fascist and fundamentalist movements as actors that exploit structural inequalities to consolidate economic, social, and political power (Sardá-Chandiramani & Bonilla, 2024). These movements operate through complex mechanisms of disinformation, violence, and social control, often targeting marginalized communities. Engaging with these critiques underscores the importance of redistributing power toward civil society as a strategy to counter authoritarianism and promote transformative justice. The redistribution of power is not an overly optimistic or unrealistic proposition. Civil society actors—including grassroots movements, non-governmental organizations, and transnational coalitions—possess both knowledge and legitimacy that state-centered institutions often lack. Examples abound globally: in India, the Shaheen Bagh protest mobilized Hindu, Muslim, and non-

religious women in a sustained, intersectional movement against restrictive citizenship legislation, demonstrating the capacity of civil society to enact social and political change (RahimDad, 2024). Similarly, the Sisterhood, a refugee women's collective in Indonesia, organizes across ethnic, linguistic, and religious lines, advocating for community rights and fostering political education. These examples highlight the potential for civil society to act as a counterweight to authoritarian tendencies and to inform multilateral policymaking with lived experience, expertise, and relational knowledge (Sardá-Chandiramani & Bonilla, 2024).

Policy recommendations must seriously consider the risks posed by rising authoritarianism, both within member states and in global governance structures. Contemporary FF movements exploit disinformation, economic inequalities, and social divisions to consolidate power, often framing resistance as illegitimate (Sardá-Chandiramani & Bonilla, 2024). In response, the UN should adopt relational impact assessments for all major agreements—including climate, migration, digital governance, and humanitarian reform—evaluating gender justice, racial equity, disability inclusion, environmental impacts, and intergenerational equity. By incorporating such assessments, the UN ensures that policies do not entrench inequality or curtail civil society participation. Transparency measures should allow communities to track and evaluate UN interventions, acknowledging the legitimacy of grassroots knowledge and the centrality of people as the primary constituents of global governance (Sardá-Chandiramani & Bonilla, 2024).

Real-world examples demonstrate the feasibility of these recommendations. For instance, CHANGE's Caring Cities program shows how civil society partnerships can reshape urban governance by centering care work in municipal planning. Through community-based research in cities like Bogotá, Buenos Aires, and Los Angeles, CHANGE engaged caregivers directly—treating them as experts rather than beneficiaries—and used their input to inform city policies on childcare, early-education services, care infrastructure, and gender-responsive budgeting (CHANGE, 2022). Similarly, globally coordinated AIDS organizing movements such as ACT UP demonstrate how decentralized activism can reshape global policy; such movements pressured states and international organizations, including the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, to adopt human rights–grounded frameworks and confront pharmaceutical monopolies (Epstein, 1996; UNAIDS, 2002). Additionally, the contemporary Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement likewise demonstrates the power of grassroots transnational mobilization to challenge entrenched state violence and reshape global discourse on human rights and sovereignty, as the decentralized, intersectional movement rooted in Palestinian civil society has influenced universities, unions, city councils, and cultural institutions to adopt rights-based ethical commitments despite the opposition of powerful states (Barghouti, 2011). Together, these examples reflect John Gerard Ruggie's (1992) vision of multilateralism as an evolving institutional architecture

grounded in flexibility, shared responsibility, and governance aligned with human needs rather than state-centric interests.

In addition to structural change, profound normative shifts are necessary to redefine cooperation and accountability within the United Nations so that it reflects a genuinely plural and justice-centered multilateralism. Rather than evaluating success solely in terms of state stability, geopolitical harmony, or aggregate economic growth, multilateral cooperation should be measured by its ability to sustain reciprocal relationships, promote substantive justice, and uphold human dignity in all its forms. This requires eliminating the use of veto powers in instances of mass atrocity, sexual violence, racial persecution, and other egregious human rights violations, ensuring that the capacity to protect vulnerable populations is not subordinated to the political interests of a few powerful states. Consistent with proposals advanced by the Action for Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency (ACT) group and various human rights coalitions, an independent panel of experts—including civil society representatives—should help determine when these thresholds are met, thereby embedding shared ethical responsibility into decision-making procedures. Anne-Marie Slaughter's argument for a "caucus of democracies" further illuminates the importance of value-based coordination within global governance: she contends that democratically aligned actors should form a consultative grouping to develop unified positions that enhance principled action and reduce gridlock in multilateral institutions (Slaughter, 2005). Reimagined through an intersectional and decolonial lens, however, such a caucus must extend beyond sovereign states to include Indigenous nations, tribes, and religious bodies that also practice democratic governance and hold longstanding traditions of collective stewardship. Incorporating these communities would disrupt the assumption that only nation-states are legitimate global actors and would expand the moral and cultural foundations of multilateral cooperation. This broadened coalition—committed to accountability, deliberation, and the protection of life—could serve not as a replacement for the UN but as an anchor, strengthening global decision-making by ensuring that democratic values are not narrowly defined by Western liberal institutions but are rooted in diverse, place-based forms of governance that have historically resisted domination and championed relational justice.

By invoking Article 109, incorporating feminist and intersectional critiques, and institutionalizing civil society participation, the UN can redistribute power, redefine sovereignty, and enhance accountability. These recomendations are not utopian; they are grounded in empirical evidence, historical precedent, and the demonstrated capacities of civil society actors worldwide. As the Combahee River Collective and contemporary Black feminist thinkers assert, liberation for the most marginalized leads to broader human freedom. Realizing this vision requires bold, coordinated action, a willingness to rethink entrenched norms, and a commitment to justice, equity, and human dignity across all UN structures. The

UN has the legal, normative, and moral tools to enact such change; the challenge is to harness them in service of the people it was created to serve.

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How Peer Support Can Empower Inclusion for Marginalized Civil Society Organizations

By Ruby Gower

Civil society organizations (CSOs) – "non-state, not-for-profit, voluntary entities formed by people in the social sphere" ("Civil Society Organizations") – are essential to the effective functioning of the multilateral system. Their inclusion helps to increase the legitimacy of peace processes (Hellmüller, 2020) and makes it more likely that the concerns of underrepresented communities are heard at high-level discussions. Though their inclusion is vital, there are many barriers, both formal and informal, that impede CSOs' participation in multilateral processes, including at the UN. However, these challenges are not shared by all CSOs equally. Some CSOs are especially marginalized; these organizations tend to be smaller in both size and scope, less well-resourced, and without connections to governments or other institutions (and are at times explicitly anti-government, increasing their marginalization). These CSOs – what I will call marginalized CSOs – face even greater barriers, both formal and informal, to meaningful participation in multilateral processes than larger and more well-resourced CSOs. In this brief, addressed to the ECOSOC Secretariat, I argue that peer-to-peer support from more powerful CSOs helps remove both formal and informal barriers to participation for marginalized CSOs and is a crucial method of empowering their meaningful participation in multilateral spaces. Based on existing practices, I outline a few ways larger CSOs can support more marginalized ones, and recommend that CSOs in consultative status with ECOSOC be mandated to outline how they are supporting other civil society organizations in their quadrennial reports, as well as any support they may have received.

The need to include CSOs in general in multilateral processes is well-documented; for instance, the United Nations Association of the UK asserts that "civil society plays a critical role in advancing UN objectives and programmes". One major benefit of including CSOs in multilateral processes is that they help ensure that the concerns of underrepresented or marginalized communities are heard in high-level discussions. For example, NGOs that have consultative status with ECOSOC are able to attend some conferences at the UN, submitting questions to be addressed by speakers from governments and other institutions. Smaller CSOs provide particular value here; because they are often focused on particular communities, regions, or issues, they may have more in-depth on-the-ground experience with specific communities and can therefore contribute expertise that larger organizations may not have. According to Maaike Matelski in her 2023 book "Contested Civil Society in Myanmar", "local organizations that to Westerners appear unorganized and incoherent may actually know more about dynamics on the ground than 'donor darlings' claiming to speak for the population as a whole" (Matelski, 2023, p. 164) But as useful as they are, marginalized CSOs face specific barriers to their participation in these forums,

conferences, and processes, directly related to the fact that they are often smaller, have fewer financial resources, and many work on sensitive issues such as sexual and reproductive rights.

The barriers marginalized CSOs face are both formal and informal in nature. One major type of formal exclusion is the explicit barring of CSOs from attending events, forums, and conferences. Sometimes, all CSOs are barred from attendance – as in the case of many meetings at the UN General Assembly and Security Council – but there are also a large percentage of meetings that only certain CSOs are invited to. Closed informal consultations can present "accessibility challenges for non-English speakers and individuals outside of New York" ("Civil Society Calls for Meaningful Inclusion," 2024), and invited CSOs tend to be Western donor-friendly, well-resourced, already connected to governments and donors, and accredited with a range of Western institutions. As Matelski writes, "many donors prefer to work with 'moderate' sections of civil society whose views on political change are expressed in terms that are compatible with Western priorities" (Matelski, 2023, p. 163). One example of this exclusion in the context of the UN is the granting of consultative status with the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). If a CSO is granted consultative status with this body of the UN, they are able to attend UN events, submit questions, and potentially make an impact on multilateral processes. If they are not, they are barred from almost every event; for example, a high-profile Civil Society Conference in Nairobi in May 2024 was "only open to representatives of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the UN's Economic and Social Council, affiliated with the UN's Department of Global Communications or such that can provide a written reference from a UN entity" ("Civil Society Calls for Meaningful Inclusion," 2024). Being given "ECOSOC consultative status is seen as one of the most prominent ways for NGOs to gain access to the UN" (Vronen, 2017, p. 1), but the decision-making process around which organizations are granted the status is politicized – NGOs that work on sensitive issues, such as LGBT rights, "that are not approved of by all the Committee members find themselves having a hard time in being granted consultative status" (Vronen, 2017, p. 97). Formal barriers such as the politicized denial of ECOSOC status and the barring of certain CSOs from multilateral processes disproportionately affect marginalized CSOs and mean that their ability to meaningfully participate is hindered. As I will show, peer-to-peer support from larger CSOs can help in removing or reducing the impact of these formal barriers.

In addition to formal barriers, marginalized CSOs face informal challenges to meaningful participation. Even if marginalized CSOs are granted a seat at the table, the language used in many multilateral spaces, including the UN, is opaque, the systems and SOPs complicated, and connections with representatives of governments and powerful institutions are hard to form. In order to reduce this barrier, larger, better-resourced CSOs can empower their smaller counterparts by supporting them in navigating exclusionary multilateral systems through educational and capacity-building initiatives. The

International Planned Parenthood Federation, where I have been interning this semester, is an international NGO that works in over 170 countries "to provide help, advice, services and supplies relating to any aspect of sexual and reproductive health" ("Member Associations"). IPPF is a very large CSO with an annual budget of over $125 million ("Financial," 2024). They are well-connected to (and financially supported by) governments around the world ("Annual Performance Report", 2025), are in consultative status with ECOSOC ("International Planned Parenthood Federation", 2025), and regularly give statements at the United Nations in New York and Geneva ("UN & Human Rights," 2025) in addition to attending other high-level multilateral events. IPPF has under its umbrella more than 149 Member Associations (MAs), which are autonomous local CSOs connected to and supported by the IPPF Secretariat. Not all of IPPF's MAs are equally marginalized, and some, such as the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, are relatively powerful, but this structure allows IPPF to support their more underrepresented and marginalized CSOs.

IPPF empowers the inclusion of marginalized MAs in a variety of ways. They recently established the UN Advocacy Lab, which brings together IPPF MAs from around the world to discuss how best to approach advocacy at the UN from the ground up. Participants discuss what initiatives have been effective for UN engagement, what they are planning for the future and what issues there needs to be more focus on, and strategize how best to collaborate. Importantly, this is – among other things – an expertise-sharing project. Larger, more experienced CSOs share information on how to effectively navigate UN systems, breaking down informal barriers for marginalized CSOs posed by lack of experience in these settings; for example, in a recent Lab discussion, participants from major CSOs in the sexual and reproductive health space shared advice around when to push for progress on reproductive rights and when to prioritize maintaining prior gains, based on their previous experiences. Discussions in the Lab give representatives from marginalized CSOs important tools and connections that might have otherwise been inaccessible. IPPF also runs consultations where they hear directly from activists how they can best support their engagement in multilateral processes – at the UN and elsewhere. This support includes helping activists and their organizations write reports, draft statements, and set up meetings with representatives from the UN. IPPF's work with their MAs helps to eliminate the informal barriers caused by lack of experience and familiarity with vocabulary, systems, and processes that these marginalized organizations face to their meaningful participation.

This type of advocacy is not limited to IPPF. Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, a major Canadian CSO focused on sexual and reproductive health and rights, also supports marginalized grassroots organizations in their work. For example, they are currently constructing a feminist advocacy school that trains activists and representatives from local organizations on how to engage with the UN and ensure their concerns are heard; as it is upcoming, this is not yet publicized. Additionally, Matelski writes

that "civil society's ability to express and act on its political views is partly conditional on the room granted by the government (and sometimes donors) to operate" (Matelski, 2023, p. 163) – larger, better-resourced organizations with prior connections to powerful institutions can take advantage of their position to empower smaller organizations. When Action Canada makes statements to the Human Rights Council, it names the grassroots organizations the statement is on behalf of, increasing their name recognition and legitimacy in high-level spaces; it did so, for instance, at the HRC's 54th session, making their statement on the rights of Indigenous peoples "with the full support of the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights and in solidarity with First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples across Canada, also known as Turtle Island" ("HRC 54 Action Canada," 2023). IPPF, Action Canada, and other large organizations are already doing important work to empower marginalized CSOs; mandating the reporting of that work is the next step in institutionalizing and legitimizing it.

Reducing informal barriers to inclusion helps to challenge the more formal and explicit ways marginalized CSOs are barred from meaningful participation in multilateral processes. If, for example, an organization is able to effectively showcase their work in reports, they may be more likely to be invited to multilateral forums and conferences, or even granted ECOSOC status. And effectively tailoring language and emphases to UN systems – something that requires expertise – increased the likelihood that an organization's work will have a tangible impact. When Action Canada assists local CSOs with writing UPR reports, for example, they are helping to ensure that the human rights concerns of these organizations are heard by Member States and the UN as a whole. Removing barriers related to opaque language, systems, and procedures increases the possibility that marginalized CSOs gain entry into mainstream multilateral bodies and have meaningful impact on their work, reducing the impact of their formal exclusions.

The work that IPPF, Action Canada, and other relatively powerful organizations do to support the representation and inclusion of marginalized CSOs must be more widespread. In order to facilitate this, I recommend that ECOSOC requires that CSOs with consultative status include their efforts to support the inclusion of local CSOs in their quadrennial reports. These reports must be submitted by consultative CSOs to ECOSOC every four years, and detail – among other aspects – the actions the organization has taken to "advance the achievement of the development agenda of ECOSOC and the United Nations at large" ("Submitting Your Quadrennial Report"). These reports are an ideal space to require reporting because their submission is already part of organizations' workflows, they are read by civil society institutions, and the fact that the reports are regularly submitted means an organization's efforts towards providing support can be tracked over time. Given resource constraints, it is challenging to directly ask major CSOs to devote time (and often funds) to supporting marginalized organizations, but mandating

reporting would legitimize and institutionalize peer-to-peer support and create new norms around its importance. This could eventually lead to increased funding being made available for this work.

Efforts to encourage support within civil society are complicated by the fact that, in an environment of increasingly scarce funding, there is competition between CSOs and larger CSOs may be incentivized to exclude smaller ones – Roggeband & Krizsán write in "The Selective Closure of Civic Space" that "the disempowerment, exclusion and persecution of specific civil society organizations are accompanied by the empowerment and inclusion of 'government-friendly' organizations" (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2021). This competition is increasingly present, but the gains from peer-to-peer support are not one-sided; as shown by IPPF's consultations and other efforts, collaborating directly with local, on-the-ground organizations provides larger organizations with broader mandates and weaker ties to commuinties essential expertise, connections, and information. There are also essential instititutional-level reforms that must be made in order to facilitate participation, including democratizing the ECOSOC selection process and improving inclusion monitoring tools. Institutionalizing peer-to-peer support through increased reporting is not a panacea for the challenges faced by marginalized CSOs or civil society as a whole, but it is an accessible way to legitimize and create new norms around partnership, collaboration, and expertise-sharing.

Marginalized CSOs bring energy, focus, and specific expertise to multilateral systems, and their inclusion must be actively facilitated. Multilateral systems have material consequences in the field; when decisions are made around where to send services, the breakdown of budgets, and which groups should be prioritized, the organizations present in the room, and who they represent, is vital. Local organizations tend to be some of the most marginalized, but they have vital expertise on what types of support are appropriate in their communities; a lack of this expertise can mean services are delivered that go unused, wasting valuable time and money. Reforming institutions and supporting powerful CSOs in uplifting their more marginalized counterparts is urgent and will have real results on the ground.

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Toward Equitable Multilateralism: Institutionalizing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights' (SRHR) Advocacy in UN Peacebuilding

By Erica Greenberg

International non-governmental human rights organizations play a crucial role in democratizing and legitimizing UN multilateralism. They are an important component of civil society, which "ensures the successful development of a democratic and law-based state" (Andrii 2024). However, non-governmental human rights organizations - in particular ones that focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) - are not institutionalized and formalized enough in UN multilateral spaces, in particular peacebuilding and reconstruction processes, especially as SRHR is increasingly violated, marginalized, and disregarded. Without formal, meaningful, and equitable participation of non-governmental human rights organizations in these processes, human rights standards cannot be upheld, and states will not be held accountable as conflict and mass atrocities persist. Furthermore, without these forms of engagement, UN multilateralism ceases to fulfil its foundational mandate and intended function, undermining human rights standards in the international system. In order to bridge this gap, the UN Secretariat should advance efforts to ensure that non-governmental SRHR organizations are formally represented and involved in ceasefire negotiations, peace dialogues, and reconstruction planning, mandate designated seats for such organizations within UN humanitarian coordination processes, and include SRHR commitments in ceasefire and post-conflict agreements.

Non-governmental human rights organizations have been enshrined in various frameworks and initiatives to play a crucial role in various UN multilateral processes, especially as the UN has expanded and evolved since its founding. More recently, frameworks such as the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) all emphasize the importance of NGOs in upholding and advancing human rights. However, words in writing have failed to translate into tangible action as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) face many barriers to entering UN spaces, including funding and financial constraints that hinder in-person participation, being denied ECOSOC consultative status and thus not having access to the UN, inaccessibility to learning UN-specific terms and processes, and more. In particular, as trends of nationalist, right-wing, and anti-globalism sentiment increase, organizations that champion for women's rights and gender equality, marginalized communities, LGBTQ+ and SOGIESC communities, and SRHR

have faced the most opposition and pushback. This is particularly concerning as several gross violations of human rights, mass atrocities, and humanitarian crises are ongoing today, with the genocide in Gaza/Palestine, the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the ongoing civil war in Sudan, and more.

There has been a variety of literature that engages in the discussion of why the UN's multilateral efforts and human rights mechanisms are not only lacking but failing to address ongoing conflicts and mass atrocities. Many scholars point to the structural limitations of the Security Council, in particular to the abuse of the veto system by its permanent members. A. Setiawan contends that while the tools to address conflicts and mass atrocities are formally established and employable on paper, such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, the application of such frameworks have been "selective, politicized, and impeded by the structural limitations of the UN system, particularly the [UN Security Council]'s veto power" (Setiawan 2025). For example, between late 2023 and mid-2024, five Security Council resolutions that addressed the atrocity in Gaza were blocked by permanent members, "illustrating the paralysis that veto dynamics introduce in urgent humanitarian contexts" (Setiawan 2025).

While there are certainly a handful of structural flaws in the UN system, its vulnerabilities are further exacerbated and revealed by the trend of rising right-wing, nationalist, and anti-globalist sentiment. N. Bonifai et al. point to the judicialization after the Cold War, as the international legal system enforces constraints and thus evokes resistance, particularly in majoritarian powers against such a system (Bonifai et al. 2022). In recent years, this trend has been reflected most notably by the re-election of Donald Trump, as well as increasing right-wing influence in Italy, Finland, the Philippines, Israel, Argentina, and Japan. As a result of this trend, there has been a significant rollback and erosion of human rights, particularly SRHR, women's rights, and gender equality. The recent review of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) reflected on the 30 years of progress in women's rights since its adoption, but underscores persisting challenges and gaps, such as the slowing progress in sexual and reproductive health as many women from low-income households and rural communities face many barriers to access essential sexual and reproductive health services (UN Women 2025). Another example is the resolution on policies and programmes involving youth, which is reviewed and adopted every two years. Between 2021 and 2023, key languages that pertained to SRHR, gender, diversity of youth, especially on adolescents, girls, and young women, as well as the reference to the gender digital divide, were removed (A/RES/76/137, 2021; A/RES/78/179, 2023). Additionally, the references to SRHR that were included in

the 2023 resolution were diluted, with a significant decrease in the references to the disproportionate barriers and challenges young women and girls experience. Disappointingly, the youth resolution that was adopted this year failed to bring back much of the language that was removed between 2021 and 2023, despite the committee's intention to do so, and negotiations on the resolution demonstrated an overall trend of opposition to language on SRHR, diversity, and youth from marginalized communities.

In this context of increasing marginalization of SRHR and other human rights issues, it comes as no surprise that one of the most underreported and sidelined issues in Gaza/Palestine is the violation of sexual and reproductive rights in the genocide. The issue of sexual and reproductive rights in Gaza/Palestine is not a new development since 2023, but has been part of an ongoing human rights violation that escalated significantly in the 2000s, with Israel intensifying its occupation, immobilizing many Palestinians, and denying them access to essential services, including sexual and reproductive healthcare (Freeman and Shoman, 2025). Furthermore, sexual and reproductive health has been weaponized and used to facilitate further violence towards Palestinians, with Israel targeting reproductive healthcare facilities, including maternity wards and in-vitro fertility clinics (UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel 2025). The sexual and reproductive violence facilitated by Israel is further exacerbated by the denial of food access and state-facilitated starvation, as pregnant and post-partum women experience malnutrition and significant health complications. Despite the perpetration of reproductive violence and certainly other human rights violations facilitated by Israel, peace dialogue and ceasefire negotiations have not included non-governmental human rights organizations or any form of civil society as formal participants. The ceasefire negotiations in January were mediated by the United States, Qatar, and Egypt, and the recent Security Council resolution 2803 that endorsed Trump's plan to establish a transitional administration and coordinate reconstruction efforts in Gaza completely lacked formal engagement of non-governmental human rights organizations, while also failing to address systemic reproductive violence perpetrated by Israel against Palestinians (UN News 2025).

Despite this disregard for SRHR in the genocide in Gaza/Palestine and other mass atrocities occurring today, SRHR is a critical human right that is enshrined in various UN resolutions and documents. For example, the Women, Peace and Security agenda adopted by the UN Security Council in 2000, acknowledges how conflict and extreme violence affect women, and "enshrines the international community's commitment to women's equal participation as agents of peace" (UN Women 2024). Not

only do studies show that "women's participation in peace negotiations contributes to the quality and durability of peace", inclusion of civil society, including NGOs, in peacebuilding processes also contributes to its longevity (Krause 2018; Conciliation Resources 2014). Thus, non-governmental human rights organizations, and in particular local and women-led ones, cannot be sidelined or excluded from peace processes, and certainly SRHR cannot go unacknowledged in such processes. This is especially true for peace dialogue and ceasefire negotiations concerning Gaza/Palestine; without the inclusion of SRHR organizations and other human-rights organizations in such processes, the needs and concerns of Palestinians cannot be adequately and justly met.

In order to address these gaps in the UN's peacebuilding efforts and the lack of emphasis on SRHR in these processes, the UN Secretariat should implement the following policies. One, mandate and ensure SRHR NGOs and other human rights-based organizations are formally represented and active in ceasefire negotiations, peacebuilding dialogues, and reconstruction planning. For example, having SRHR NGOs and other human rights-based organizations in ceasefire negotiations concerning Gaza/Palestine is crucial to addressing the grave violations of sexual and reproductive rights. Two, UN humanitarian coordination processes should mandate designated seats for non-governmental SRHR organizations. Formalizing a space specifically for SRHR NGOs ensures that humanitarian response designs, such as needs assessments, funding allocations, and service deliveries, are shaped with the accurate and reliable expertise of these organizations, and thus would better address the violations of sexual and reproductive rights. Finally, ceasefire and post-conflict agreements should include SRHR commitments, including but not limited to ensuring the protection of healthcare facilities and clinics, access to contraception, comprehensive sexual education, maternal healthcare, and gender-based violence services. This will not only help in directly addressing the often unacknowledged harms of sexual and reproductive violence but will also aid in holding states accountable, as SRHR commitments would be enshrined in such documents.

Certainly, the underlying flaws of the UN ultimately have to come from institutional change, such as reforming the UN Security Council and its veto system. However, these changes will require substantial time, resources, and sustained effort, something that cannot be afforded to address the urgent atrocities occurring on the ground today. Every moment that passes without decisive collective action by the international community to address these atrocities, not only are individuals' and communities' livelihoods destroyed, but the very fabric of the UN - human rights standards, rule of law, and

humanitarian principles - is delegitimized and eroded. Thus, smaller changes need to be made as soon and efficiently as possible. While these policies are not a panacea to address the fundamental flaws and gaps in the UN system itself, these policies will significantly contribute to the quality, durability, and legitimacy of peace and reconstruction processes, and restore human rights protections and standards for all. Non-governmental human rights organizations and civil society in general are crucial to enacting and maintaining peace, security, and justice, and play a crucial role in UN multilateral processes. Their participation and engagement cannot be sidelined or excluded, but rather promoted and formalized in these spaces.

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Community-Based Religious Organizations Assisting in Combating World Hunger

By Taylor Miller

Introduction

Despite secularism as a tenet of international diplomatic engagement, people around the world rely deeply on faith in their daily lives. Community-based religious organizations (CBROs) -local religious groups - that use shared community resources to provide social services for the immediate community, operate in every region of the world, and are often turned to as pillars of refuge and support, particularly when dealing with hunger and food insecurity. This policy brief provides examples of the role of CBROs in some crisis contexts, showcasing both their alignment with humanitarian principles as well as the ways localization can empower bottom-up food assistance when larger institutions fail. This brief then provides policy recommendations for the World Food Programme (WFP) - as the leading multilateral organization addressing hunger and food insecurity- to strengthen local emergency food assistance and improve equitable access for vulnerable communities.

Overview

Multilateral institutions are shaped by colonial-era power structures, which contribute to growing distrust in the Global South. The Bretton Woods institutions (the IMF and the World Bank) were created. At the same time, much of the world remained under colonial rule, legitimizing structural inequities that influence global governance (Anghie, 2023:64). The United Nations emerged under similar conditions, with many countries still under colonial rule at its inception. This history continues to shape perceptions of legitimacy in international responses to crises such as hunger and food insecurity.

CBROs can fill the trust and legitimacy gaps that multilateral institutions lack. They possess moral authority, deep local relationships, and cultural fluency that multilateral institutions cannot replicate. Faith-based organizations (FBOs) can be shaped by donor priorities and bureaucratic requirements. Still, CBROs maintain a level of community legitimacy and trust that cannot replicate. This brief, therefore, focuses on how CBROs as partners are uniquely capable of delivering immediate and culturally resonant assistance. Building on this idea, I rely on scholars in this field to explain the specific capacities that enable CBROs to fill these gaps.

Religious organizations differ widely, yet many share common strengths, including durable community trust, volunteer networks, rapid mobilization capacity, and independent funding streams. As Karam (2025) observes, "religious entities are the largest, and among the most creatively self-resourced, bodies in the world" (p. 296). Similarly, Kraft (2015) finds that "local faith communities are often first responders in humanitarian crises" (p. 401). These qualities position CBROs as highly effective actors in preventing and responding to hunger, especially when new infrastructure would be slow or costly to build. This is evident when examining real-world applications.

Moreover, CBROs have a long history of adhering to the four core humanitarian principles (impartiality, neutrality, humanity, and independence). Traditions across major religions emphasize service, caring for the vulnerable, and charity. Kathryn Kraft's (2015) study of evangelical churches assisting Syrian refugees in Lebanon demonstrates that, when partnered with multilateral actors, CBROs can deliver impartial and non-coercive aid (p. 421). Kraft notes that many Syrian refugees receiving aid felt that the volunteers were more receptive to their needs and to humanitarian principles because of the religious convictions that guided them (p. 420). The Syrian refugees were predominantly Muslim, and the volunteers were evangelical, primarily Christians, illustrating how, in serving one another, religious differences can strengthen communities.

At the same time, there are valid questions about proselytization, political sensitivities, and the preservation of impartiality in prioritizing CBROs' delivery of aid. Kraft's study shows that when CBROs receive training from multilateral organizations on humanitarian standards, impartiality improves significantly and beneficiaries report greater comfort receiving aid (p. 421).

The WFP already partners with CBROs in more than 40 countries and recognizes the impact these organizations have on food assistance through their strong community ties. For example, the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-day Saints (2024) has a partnership with the WFP spanning a decade. Still, the implementation of CBROs within broader localization policy remains to be seen, leaving collaborations on an ad hoc basis (para. 5). As the 2016 WFP Inter-Religious Engagement framework shows, earlier efforts toward systematization were not fully operationalized.

Case Examples

1) **2025 US Government Shutdown:** A recent example of CBROs providing for communities in times of emergency was the suspension of food subsidies, which affected 12.3% of the American population. Local CBROs immediately worked to serve their respective communities (NPR Network, 2025). New Birth Missionary Baptist Church worked to feed 2,000 people in Metro Atlanta every weekend until subsidies were reinstated (Leoffler, 2025).

2) **Langar Kitchens:** In Sikhism, Langar Kitchens serve vegetarian meals to the general population, free of charge, and regardless of circumstance, and are considered an act of selfless service (*3343*). The langar is rooted in building community, as recipients often gather together to share the meal, reinforcing a sense of equality that strengthens community bonds and furthers the trust CBROs foster with their respective communities.

3) **Masjid During Covid-19**: During the Covid-19 lockdown in India, mosques and gurudwaras partnered to feed laborers as the country shut down and jobs became harder to find (IAMC, 2020). The local community contributed to this effort by providing extra food to the masjid to make meals for anyone who needed it. Each day, the team delivered around 600 to 700 food packets to hungry workers. When speaking with local community members, they expressed frustration with the perceived lack of planning and support from the government.

4) **The 2015 earthquake in Nepal**: Lutheran churches and mosques worked together to coordinate emergency response and relief efforts, as these religious organizations were the first people on the ground in the crisis.

Policy Recommendations

These cases demonstrate CBROs' capacity to deliver rapid, trusted food assistance. To operationalize these strengths within the WFP's mandate, I provide four actionable recommendations to achieve the larger goal. These recommendations are as follows:

1) **Formalize CBRO and WFP partnerships in the localization policy:** The WFP already has a localization policy, created in June of 2025, that targets local NGOs in the communities it serves, and a program on inter-religious engagement in food aid from 2016. Building on this. WFP is fully aware of CBROs in delivering food aid, but its implementation in emergency relief remains uneven. Formalizing the relationship

would legitimize CBRO engagement within WFP policy and strengthen WFP's moral authority by aligning it more directly with trusted community institutions. For example, creating a registry of trusted CBROs in these areas can assist the WFP or any other multilateral agency in contacting officials on the ground in an emergency, much as general NGO networks across the United Nations do.

2) **Creating and simplifying funding modalities for multi-religious CBOs:** CBROs often rely on community members to donate and volunteer in feeding the larger population. This process is frequently informal, with many religious organizations exempt from formal taxation processes. To maximize funding flows, providing CBROs with simplified access and reporting mechanisms can help them secure the funding they need quickly during emergencies.

3) **Strengthening CBRO compliance with international Humanitarian Standards and Documentation:** A concern for fully integrating CBROs is the risk of proselytization and the violation of the humanitarian principle of impartiality. The WFP can partner with CBROs to train volunteers on the four humanitarian principles, ensuring that aid workers comply with WFP rules and conduct. Offering training services semi-regularly will also ensure that lessons learned are not quickly forgotten and that best practices continue to be used.

4) *Establish/Support Interfaith Food Distribution Networks in Emergencies:* Similar to the coordination logistics of the cluster system created by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), this recommendation advocates for interfaith networks in local communities to gather together in times of crisis in an effort to identify the core issues and work collectively towards a solution instead of duplicating projects. This also ensures that the emergency response is still community-led and culturally grounded.

Conclusion

In reading and analyzing the proposed budget changes for the United Nations' 80th anniversary, it is evident that tightening budgets and growing global need requires new and innovative ways to continue serving world populations. CBROs are a local means of serving communities in times of crisis, as they combine moral authority, local knowledge, and rapid mobilization capacity, directly complementing the WFP's mandate. Strengthening partnerships

between CBROs and WFP would enhance emergency food responses, deepen community trust, and support a more sustainable, localized humanitarian system.

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U.S Violations of International Law and Threats to Venezuelan Sovereignty and international Peace and Security

By Chloe Peyton

I present this Policy Brief to the Secretary-General under Article 99 regarding United States violations of international law as evidenced by the extrajudicial killings of 83 civilians via 21 airstrikes against alleged drug boats in the Caribbean and in the Pacific since September the 2nd, in addition to preparations for covert or direct military action against the sovereign State of Venezuela (Airwars, 2025). The escalation of attacks and attempts to impose regime change within Venezuela perpetrated by the U.S disregards international peace and security, and violates the right to self-determination, enshrined in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) all ratified by the U.S (United Nations, 1945; United Nations, 1966; Barnes et al., 2025). These U.S. violations of international law once again herald an era of 'Gun Boat' diplomacy and U.S hegemony over Latin America.

Since September 2, the U.S. has launched airstrikes on small boats carrying alleged "narco-terrorists" in the Caribbean and Pacific (Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2025). The U.S Defense Department has accused these boats of carrying narcotics to the U.S — reporting 21 operations, and killing 83 civilians. As of November 14, 2025 the U.S further intensified military force against Venezuela by deploying 15,000 troops to the area in what the U.S Navy is calling the operation "Southern Spear (U.S Navy, 2025; NBC News, 2025)." Additionally, in October 2025 the Trump administration publicly acknowledged that they had authorized a CIA operation in Venezuela, underlining statements made by the Secretary of State and national security adviser Marko Rubio who has argued that the Venezuelan president is an illegitimate leader, supporting the drug trade. This sentiment seeks to legitimize increased military pressure as a "counter narcotic tactic" ultimately aimed at pressuring Maduro to step down (Barnes et al., 2025).

Despite launching 21 airstrikes against alleged "drug boats" Washington has not provided any concrete evidence that its targets were smuggling narcotics, nor that the boats posed a threat to the U.S. To date the U.S is not officially at war with any countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, as the U.S is obligated under the constitution *ArtI.S8.C11.2.1 Overview of Declare War Clause*, to receive congressional approval to declare a war (U.S. Const. art. I, § 8, cl. 11). Therefore, U.S. actions violate domestic and international law as drug smuggling does not constitute an immediate threat to life that would justify the use of lethal force as self defence under the UN charter (United Nations, 2025). Allegations of illegal drug trafficking fall under criminal law enforcement; the individuals involved are entitled to "a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by

law," as guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)—a treaty the U.S ratified in 1977 (United Nations, 1966). Additional protections under IHL is the use of lethal force within international waters, under customary law of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), without a legal basis, the use of lethal force in international waters amounts to extrajudicial killings (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2025; Zou & Ye, 2023).

The U.S air strikes against boats in the Pacific and the Caribbean have destroyed the vessels, killing everyone on board and therefore effectively ensuring little to no evidence or any survivors can be brought before a court to testify (Shamim, 2025). On November 17th 2025, the Wall Street Journal reported that a Department of Justice brief claims that drug smugglers are enemy combatants by smuggling fentanyl to the U.S, proposing the drug is a chemical weapons threat. These claims are unsubstantiated, as "fentanyl is typically made in Mexico and smuggled over land" and additionally drug smuggling does not constitute an immediate threat as no armed attack by any of the boats occurred, nor did any come from any other entity arising from Latin America or the Caribbean (Seligman & Gordon, 2025). Under these circumstances the Right to self defense against an armed attack — as enshrined in the UN Charter Article 51— in this case is not substantiated (U.N. Charter ch. VII, 1945). However, if even the U.S were at war with Venezuela protections still remain for civilians under the international law set by Article 51 - Protection of the civilian population in the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention of 1949, in which indiscriminate attacks are prohibited, defined by acts that can be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life (Protocol I, 1949/1977, art. 51).

Beyond extrajudicial killings, the U.S has authorized a CIA operation in Venezuela, as well as large deployment of troops to areas near the Caribbean for training exercises in Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago, further violating international law by broaching state sovereignty, a right enshrined in the UN Charter Article 2(4) which prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, and the Right to self-determination as recognized in Article 1 of the ICCPR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2025; Osgood, 2025).

U.S. attempts to remove Maduro have had deadly regional spillover effects, with victims from Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Colombia, with mutilated bodies washing up on Trinidad and Tobago's beaches.(Romero & Rios, 2025; Schmitt, 2025). Trinabagonian fishermen have disclosed their fears of going out into the waters where the strikes have taken place, as families have called for justice for family members they believe have been killed in the strikes (Peralta & Dixon, 2025). Tensions have risen across the region: Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, supported the U.S. military action, which has heightened friction in the region. This tension has exacerbated relations between Trinidad and Venezuela, as well as sparking domestic tensions in Ecuador due to a pro

US administration and opposing public opinion ultimately leading to a rejection of a referendum in Ecuador on expanding U.S. military bases in the country. Conversely, Colombian President Gustavo Petro condemned the U.S' actions as extrajudicial killings, asserting that whether a Colombian victim allegedly killed in the strikes was carrying fish or cocaine, the U.S nonetheless committed murder by denying those on board a trial (The Washington Post, 2025; Al Jazeera Staff and News Agencies, 2025; (Wells, 2025).

U.S. actions in Latin America have intensified regional tensions at a time when the region had been moving toward greater regional cooperation.Venezuela has responded to the attacks with a great escalation of military action in the region, violating the "Zone for peace" agreement, that was drafted in the CELAC-EU (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, and the European Union) joint summit and affirmed in the joint declaration from November 9th in Santa Marta, Colombia. The Declaration highlighted the need for regional stability in the Caribbean, as well as the importance of international cooperation, mutual respect, and full compliance with international law, particularly in "a time when multilateralism is being questioned all over the world and there is a continued need for a more just, equitable and democratic international order (Council of the European Union, 2025)." The "bi regional relationship" centering peace, is one of many regional agreements that the U.S has undermined in the Western Hemisphere, scholar John Gerard Ruggie in his article *Multilateralism: the anatomy of an institution,* notes that Latin American nations have moved towards greater co-operation in some respects as a response to the U.S continued attempts to undermine multilateralism in the region (Ruggie, 1992). In addition to this I argue that the U.S. is moving back to what Antony Anghie in *Rethinking International Law: A TWAIL Retrospective* refers to as a return to "gun boat diplomacy", a mark of the U.S 20th century tactics that was often used in Latin America by the U.S. as a means to protect its investments (Anghie, 2023, p. 88). The U.S continues to demonstrate that it sees itself as exempt from adhering to the ideals of a peaceful multi-polar world, that it rather prioritizes the dominance over Latin America, recalling its actions taken in the Cold War, notable examples of which include U.S.-backed coups in Guatemala (1954), Brazil (1964), and Chile (1973), and support for the "contra" rebels against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua (Coatsworth, 2005). The recent assault by the U.S in the Caribbean and the Pacific is a thinly veiled attempt at prompting a regime change in Venezuela, thus reinforcing what Antony Anghie would describe as a continuance of the hierarchy of western hegemony over Latin America, replicating the Cold War era ideal of 'universality,' where the U.S foreign policy sought to violently advance a Western vision of the world order (Anghie, 2023, p. 16).

The Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the UN has sent a formal letter to the UN Secretary General, condemning the actions taken by the U.S as extrajudicial killing and violations of international law, requesting the Security Council investigate the

illegal nature of the killings, and confirming that the U.S violates the 'Zone of Peace', and presentation of peace in the regions through the issuance of military escalation and licensing of CIA operations, and propaganda messaging of drug trafficking and terrorist activities (Acosta, 2025). Additionally in the 10015th Meeting of the security council, representatives from Guyana, Greece, Somalia, Algeria and Slovenia, Republic of Korea, China, Sierra Leon, Russia, Colombia, Mexico condemned the actions taken by the U.S. Both representatives of Russia and China condemned the U.S for infringing on human rights and international laws, in agreement with the statement made by the representatives of Greece, Somalia, Algeria and Slovenia, who called for a prompt de-escalation and due consideration for the socioeconomic and humanitarian crisis across the region, including additional remarks made by the representative of Slovenia that urged the U.S to consider the regional stability in the Caribbean (Security Council press, 2025).

Recommendations

In accordance with member states' statements condemning the U.S, and considering the urgency of the situation, peace talks between the U.S and Venezuela must begin now. I support recommendations set by the PR of Venezuela in the letter sent on October 15th, calling on the authority of the Secretary-General under Article 99 of the UN Charter to "bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security" calling for investigation into the potential international laws broken by the U.S under Chapter VI Article 34 stating the Security Council may investigate any dispute, in congruence with this draft resolution includes recommendation to take action under Chapter VII and Articles Article 41, to ensuing interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations with the U.S, and subsequently 42 to take action by air, sea, or land forces if necessary in order to restore international peace and security. This policy brief additionally calls on the calling for the Secretary-General to immediately establish a special envoy to The U.S to mediate peace talk between the U.S and Venezuela, as well as appoint Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution building on existing capacities, including establishing a Special Adviser to head an investigative team into the legality of the strikes against fishing boat as potential war crimes such as violations of the Geneva convention under Common Article 3 for immediate mediation and ensuing an accountability mechanism to restore international peace (House of Lords Library, 2022; Geneva Convention, 1949; UN charter Article 99, 1945; United Nations Peacemaker, n.d.).

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Expanding Regional Representation and Veto Oversight in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

By Noelle Puvak

Equitable representation in high-level deliberative processes is central to the United Nations mandate and the multilateral system. As its most powerful organ, the Security Council possesses critical authority, with the power to deploy armed forces, impose blockades, suspend diplomatic agreements, and mandate legally binding resolutions. This body shapes peace and security governance, affecting all corners of the world. As one of the most longstanding internal challenges to UN system reform, Security Council expansion is more necessary now than ever before, amidst public mistrust and growing polarization and insecurities, within the UN system and the world at large. Indeed, this is an excellent window of opportunity to pursue Council reform. As it exists today, the Council does not represent the geopolitical realities of the 21st century (Nadine, 2016), nor does it reflect the current membership of this institution. Instead, the Council has upheld an obsolete and exclusionary membership framework from a post-World War II era, concentrating veto power in the hands of five states. This Policy Brief builds on the conviction that if the UN Security Council does not pursue a concrete reformation process, the entire multilateral system will become increasingly deficient at dealing with pressing common challenges. Moreover, the Brief argues that Security Council reform through expansion means integrating the very regional bodies, Africa and Latin America in particular, which have been excluded from its permanent deliberative processes.

Background

This year marks 80 years since the creation of the Security Council, the body expressly tasked with the promotion of international peace and security. Established in 1945, this organ originally encompassed 11 members, comprising 5 permanent and 6 non-permanent seats (Hosli, Campioni, Meijerink, and Atsuko, 165). Emerging as victors of the Second World War, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, the United States, and China secured indefinite seats, which have proven immovable amidst eight decades of rapid globalization. Today, this coalition, known as the P5, continues to monopolize the Council's agenda and access to veto power,

reinforcing self-interest-based power dynamics that effectively disable the Council from implementing its mandate to uphold peace and security around the world.

However, that is not to say that Council reform has been out of the question. A key moment of progress came in 1963, when the Security Council expanded its non-permanent membership to ten rotating seats. Unfortunately, in the nearly 62 years since, the Council's membership has remained in a state of paralysis. In stark contrast, the General Assembly, as the United Nations' most representative organ, has grown by 65%, from 117 countries to 193 countries today (Hosli, Moody, O'Donovan, Kaniovski, and Little, 2011). While the Security Council continues to resist overdue reform, its previous enlargement indicates that it is possible, with the right reinforcement.

Structural and Geopolitical Challenges

Clearly, there are prevailing challenges to successful Council reform, one of the first being that new membership is predicated on amending the UN Charter itself. Procedurally, this would require the approval of a two-thirds majority of the 193 countries in the General Assembly and ratification by the P5 (United Nations, 2025). In practice, this would demand significant political will from these Member States.

However, the UN80 Initiative, launched this year, has already been met with mounting voices in favor of concrete Council transformation even among its permanent members. During the 44th and 45th meetings of the GA's 80th Session, held in November of this year, China, the UK, Russia, and France expressed their own support for reform. Africa's underrepresentation in the Council was a common thread in these statements, indicating support for potential expansion (United Nations, 2025). The U.S. was the only P-5 member to explicitly denounce any potential Council reform, affirming its stance that access to veto power should not be extended beyond its present membership. However, the fact that two permanent members, the U.S. and Russia, continue to refuse to pay their dues to the United Nations this year (Mishra, 2025) means that it is time to reimagine their dominant role within the system.

While the G4, a reformist coalition comprised of Brazil, India, Japan, and Germany, has advocated for its own permanent seats on the Council, this strategy has failed to deliver concrete reforms. For one, the Uniting for Consensus (UFC) group, comprised of 12 countries including Argentina, Costa Rica, Mexico, Pakistan, South Korea, and Turkey, continues to block G4

expansion (Jaishankar and Prasanna, 2025). Considering geopolitical stalemates, this approach must be retired in favor of a broader and more politically feasible reform strategy.

Securing Permanent African Membership on the Security Council

Recognizing the significant influence of permanent Council membership and its disproportionate distribution, securing a permanent African seat is as critical now as it has ever been. As the Secretary-General himself has stated, it is unacceptable that a continent representing 1.5 billion people across 54 countries (Worldometer, 2025) is still denied permanent status in the UN's most powerful organ. Sierra Leone's President Julius Maada Bio further defined the absurdity of Africa's exclusion from permanent Council membership as emblematic of the extent to which colonial and imperial legacies remain embedded in global power structures (United Nations, 2024). While long overdue, securing a permanent African seat would be one step toward addressing its historical and contemporary omission from high-level international decision-making processes.

Furthermore, regional expansion would rectify Africa's denied leadership in the very deliberative processes that have affected it the most. To date, over 80% of Security Council resolutions have been applied to conflict and humanitarian crises across the African continent (Africa Analyst, 2025). Yet, African Union leaders have still been denied the authority of the P-5, even amid highly escalated humanitarian crises. The Russian Federation's veto of draft resolution S/2024/826, calling for an immediate ceasefire and protection of civilians in Sudan, is only one case to represents this issue. Despite 14 affirmative votes, including three from Mozambique, Algeria, and Sierra Leone, one permanent member was still able to block a resolution urging immediate entry of humanitarian aid into the country (United Nations Security Council, 2024). While this is certainly not the only instance in which a P5 Member State has halted an African-led resolution, it represents a fundamental flaw within the Council's architecture.

At a practical level, the African Union must have the express right to elect its own permanent Council membership. The 2005 Ezulwini Consensus, or the Common African Position, substantiates this very objective, affirming the need for a fair and democratic selection process. While the Consensus has yet to be put into practice, it remains the strongest regional common ground for Security Council reform (Mbara, Gopal, and Ehiane, 57). Ultimately, two

permanent African seats are necessary in the pursuit of a more balanced, operational, and politically legitimate Security Council.

Integrating Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

The prolonged exclusion of Latin America and the Caribbean's permanent status on the Council must be duly rectified. Today, this region represents nearly 700 million people across 33 countries, representing a significant and growing population (Worldometer, 2025). In much the same way that the African continent has been denied permanency on the Council, the LAC countries have been restricted to temporary 2-year terms. Amidst mounting geopolitical challenges, including the United States' escalating military presence in the Caribbean, LAC countries need access to a permanent voice in the Council's international peace and security deliberations. Furthermore, it should not be understated that LAC countries, particularly Mexico and Brazil, have long taken the lead in contributing to UN peacekeeping (Koop and Maldonado, 8). Ultimately, it is due time that this region secured a permanent seat on the very deliberative body deploying these troops.

Addressing Council Efficiency and Deliberation Processes

Certainly, some theorize that an enlarged Security Council would be more prone to geopolitical stalemates and prolonged deliberation. The UFC group is a particularly vocal opponent of wider permanent membership, believing that broader access to the veto will heighten Council paralysis (Government of Canada, 2024). However, the reality is that Security Council gridlock is already a pervasive phenomenon, particularly with ever-heightening geopolitical rivalries among the P5 themselves. For far too long, these countries have monopolized veto power and the threat of its use, which lingers across each deliberation and decision-making process (Nadin, 27).

On the contrary, broader regional representation will be key to improving the flow of information into the Council, enhancing prioritization, and ensuring that its decisions reflect current realities. In their elected Council roles, African, Latin American, and Caribbean states have already proven this reality. For instance, in 2023, the A3 coalition, comprised of Ghana, Gabon, and Mozambique, led resolution 2719 to strengthen financing for African Union-led peace support operations (United Nations, 2023). Ultimately, a more geopolitically

representative Council will be better equipped to strategically respond to international security threats across the board.

Enhancing Accountability through the Veto Initiative

With Council expansion, there is still a critical need to strengthen accountability and oversight on the use of veto power, particularly in the case of mass atrocity crimes. First and foremost, all necessary measures must be taken to ensure compliance with Resolution 76/262, which has spearheaded the Veto Initiative. In recent years, the Security Council has faced increased deadlock in the face of mass atrocities, largely due to the exercise of the veto (United Nations, 2025). The Veto Initiative recognizes that the Council's failure to respond to or prevent these crises has grave consequences for human life. Adopted in 2022, this tool requires the General Assembly to convene a debate within 10 days after a permanent Security Council member exercises the veto. (United Nations, 2022). This initiative, originally led by Mexico and France, further urges voluntary restraint on the veto in the case of crimes against humanity and genocide. Ultimately, while it will be tremendously difficult to abolish the Council's veto power, at least in the foreseeable future, targeted constraints on it will continue to be essential toward limiting its use.

Today, the multilateralism system finds itself at a critical juncture, with a window of opportunity to finally pursue legitimate Security Council reform. With current P5 members failing to meet their financial contributions, the United Nations must look toward new leadership, particularly within its most powerful organs. As such, the Secretary-General must translate verbal commitments into concrete pressure toward wider regional Council representation. Securing permanent seats for Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean is not simply a moral objective but a functional imperative reflecting current global realities. In the years to come, expanded representation will be critical to improving the Security Council's ability to effectively respond to international crises affecting all regions of the globe.

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Health AI Governance for Digital Health Transformation in LMICs: Strengthening Public Digital Health Infrastructure Through Governance, Policy, and South-South Cooperation

By Tejas Varma

Context: The Digital Health Transformation Imperative

Health digitalization presents LMICs with unprecedented opportunities to strengthen public health systems and address longstanding challenges in access, equity, and service delivery. The economic case is compelling: health digitalization in Africa alone could generate cost savings of approximately US$11 billion (15% of current health expenditures) by 2030.[1] Yet evidence from LMICs reveals a troubling pattern: successful AI implementations remain fragmented, donor-dependent, and unsustainable. This leaves a significant proportion of AI projects in LMICs discontinued following external funding cessation.[2]

Furthermore, governance gaps in equity, data, and transparency hinder successful implementation. Most AI tools (70%) deployed in LMICs use opaque algorithms lacking interpretability, eroding clinician trust. AI models trained on high-income country data introduce algorithmic bias when deployed in LMIC contexts.[3] More fundamentally, LMICs are deploying isolated AI applications without the governance frameworks and public digital infrastructure needed for equitable, responsible, and sustainable implementation.[4]

This brief examines how UNDP can support LMICs in building integrated digital health governance that positions AI as a tool serving public health priorities within a coherent public digital infrastructure, drawing on UNDP's implementation experience with digital health solutions in India (eVIN, U-WIN, CoWIN), Indonesia (SMILE), and across 62 countries, the brief identifies three core governance challenges - equity gaps, data governance gaps, and transparency gaps - and proposes actionable recommendations for UNDP Country Offices and the Digital Health for Development Hub.

Challenge 1: Equity Gaps in Digital Health Access - Governance Determines Who Benefits

Governance failures determine not just whether digital health is adopted, but who benefits and who is systematically excluded. When countries lack frameworks requiring equity assessments before deployment, resources naturally concentrate in well-resourced urban facilities, leaving rural, marginalized, and under-equipped populations excluded. This is fundamentally a governance problem rooted in how countries design, finance, and scale digital health systems. Access to quality healthcare and health outcomes depend on whether digital health tools are designed and deployed equitably. Equity gaps mean some populations, rural communities, women, youth, elderly, socially vulnerable groups such as people living with HIV (PLHIV) etc., lose access to potentially life-saving digital tools. Without deliberate governance frameworks prioritizing equity, digital health technologies follow existing resource flows to well-equipped urban facilities, leaving underserved populations further behind.

Evidence shows that well-resourced teaching hospitals adopt AI at significantly higher rates than district hospitals serving rural populations.[5] Urban areas consistently receive greater investment in

diagnostic tools compared to rural regions.[6] This concentration reflects a fundamental reality that healthcare facilities deploy what governance frameworks and funding systems enable them to deploy. Research indicates that AI systems trained predominantly on urban, better-resourced datasets systematically underperform in rural contexts, creating what scholars call the "AI Deployment Paradox" - technologies intended to reduce health inequities risk exacerbating them.[7] Without deliberate governance choices mandating equitable deployment, digital health becomes another mechanism reinforcing existing health disparities.

The governance challenges are threefold. First, most LMICs lack frameworks requiring equity impact assessments before AI deployment, allowing resources to flow to well-equipped urban facilities while rural populations remain systemically excluded.[8] Second, donor-dependent funding models prioritize pilot projects in accessible urban areas over equitable national systems, resulting in temporary implementations that vanish when external support ends.[9] Third, governance structures lack accountability mechanisms to ensure equitable deployment, permitting systematic exclusion of marginalized populations without consequences.[10] When marginalized populations are systematically excluded from digital health tools, health outcomes worsen. Rural and resource-constrained populations remain trapped in outdated diagnostic and service delivery models while urban populations benefit from innovation, widening health disparities rather than closing them.[11]

India's eVIN and U-WIN Platform Demonstrates Equity-Centered Design

India's experience demonstrates how governance frameworks can prevent the AI Deployment Paradox. When India's vaccination coverage languished at 65%, UNDP supported the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to develop eVIN and U-WIN as public digital infrastructure—not pilot projects.[12]

U-WIN was explicitly designed with equity governance principles: multi-language support (11 Indian languages), offline functionality for connectivity-poor areas, and "anywhere access, anytime vaccination" enabling migrant families to maintain continuity across relocations.[13] The government mandated training for over one million healthcare workers, most of them women in rural facilities, ensuring marginalized communities gained equitable access.[14]

This resulted in increased vaccine coverage with 69 million children and 24 million pregnant women registered. The equity governance principles were embedded through: mandatory integration into national health policies and budgets (ensuring sustainability beyond donor cycles), workforce empowerment prioritizing rural health workers, and domestic data sovereignty with government-controlled systems.[15]

Challenge 2: Data Governance Fragmentation - No Interoperable Public Infrastructure

Another fundamental governance challenge is the absence of a coherent public digital health infrastructure. Countries have fragmented health data scattered across incompatible systems (different classification systems, different health programs, different sectors) with no governance framework enabling integration. Without foundational data governance addressing standardization, ownership, and interoperability, countries cannot leverage health data as a strategic public asset for AI development, health system strengthening, pandemic preparedness, or epidemic response.[16] Fragmented data systems prevent countries from understanding population health patterns, identifying gaps in service delivery for marginalized groups, or responding rapidly to disease outbreaks. When health data cannot be integrated

and analyzed, decisions remain based on incomplete information, perpetuating inequities and missed opportunities for intervention.

Across LMICs, Health data is collected in fragments - by disease program (HIV, malaria, TB), by geographic location (national vs. district vs. facility level), and across sectors (public vs. private) - with no common standards or mechanisms for integration.[17] Data remains in non-machine-readable formats, unsuitable for analysis or AI development. Some countries report using only a small fraction of collected health data because systems cannot communicate or share information.[18] Fear of liability and lack of clear sharing rules further prevent data integration. Regulatory frameworks - developed for a pre-digital era - lag far behind technology development, creating misalignment between what governments want to enable and what policies actually permit.

The challenges are twofold. First, countries lack national policies establishing interoperability standards and semantic consistency across classification systems. Second, clear data ownership and sharing rules remain undefined—without clarity on liability, data access rights, and accountability, health workers will avoid sharing.[19] These gaps also reflect a deeper challenge: technology development happens in the private sector while government regulatory frameworks lag far behind, creating systematic misalignment. Countries have not made data governance a cross-sectoral priority, nor established coordination mechanisms between Health, ICT, and Innovation authorities.

SMILE Demonstrates Interoperable Public Infrastructure

Indonesia's SMILE (Electronic Immunization and Logistics Monitoring System) addresses data governance fragmentation through foundational design choices. Developed by UNDP Indonesia and the Ministry of Health in 2018, SMILE is an open-source, cloud-based platform providing real-time vaccine inventory tracking—critically, designed for interoperability from inception.[20]

The governance framework enabled SMILE to expand beyond immunization: SMILE Malaria app (preventing drug stockouts in Southwest Sumba), ME-SMILE for medical waste management (50 hospitals), and rabies response tracking (74,000 vaccines in Bali).[21] During COVID-19, SMILE monitored 454 million vaccine doses across 12,000+ facilities.[22] This adaptability stems from governance decisions: semantic interoperability standards allowing integration across disease programs, open-source architecture preventing vendor lock-in, and clear data ownership rules enabling South-South technology transfer to Kenya, Burundi, and Malawi.[23]

This resulted in serving 2 million+ patients across 500+ facilities with a threefold return on investment.[24] The data governance success factors were: integration with national health budgets and Global Fund support (sustainable financing), cross-sectoral coordination between Health and ICT ministries, and deliberate design as public infrastructure enabling pandemic preparedness through real-time visibility.[25]

Challenge 3: Algorithmic Accountability and Transparency Gaps - Trust Collapse

When AI systems operate without transparent processes or local validation, health workers lose trust in the technology and the systems deploying it. Governance failures around transparency create a fundamental credibility deficit: if clinicians cannot understand how algorithms work, they cannot validate whether those tools are appropriate for their patients. Without mandatory transparency requirements and local validation processes, algorithms perform poorly in local contexts, disproportionately affecting

marginalized populations in under-resourced settings who cannot access alternative diagnostic or treatment options.[26]

Most AI tools in low- and middle-income countries rely on algorithms whose decision-making processes clinicians cannot interpret or validate.[27] Studies show that even when practitioners view AI favorably in principle, they express distrust when they cannot understand the basis for diagnostic or therapeutic recommendations.[28] This trust deficit reflects a fundamental governance failure: without mandatory transparency requirements and local validation processes, health workers cannot understand or validate the algorithms they are expected to deploy. Performance disparities emerge when algorithms trained on Western populations encounter diverse contexts - a stark example is IBM Watson's concordance varying from 13% to 96% across cancers in China due to U.S. training data.[29] Thus, if AI trained on Western populations is deployed in diverse contexts, performance disparities will inevitably follow. Without clear accountability frameworks, there is no recourse when systems fail or produce biased results.

Three interconnected governance gaps explain this trust deficit: First, countries lack requirements for local validation on diverse populations before deployment - algorithms validated only in high-income settings are introduced into contexts where they systematically underperform, yet governments have not mandated testing to prevent this. Second, mandatory transparency requirements are absent - countries do not require documentation of training data sources, algorithmic processes, or system limitations as a condition of deployment.[30] Third, when systems fail or produce biased results, accountability frameworks are unclear, leaving clinicians and patients without recourse or remedy. These gaps reflect inadequate regulatory frameworks: governments have not established the legal obligations, licensing requirements, or oversight mechanisms that would ensure algorithmic accountability.[31]

A fourth gap compounds the problem, being the lack of robust data protection frameworks ensuring public control of health data, allowing private entities to access, use, and monetize sensitive health information without public oversight or benefit-sharing.[32] When communities observe their health data extracted without transparency or reciprocal benefit, particularly by private AI companies, trust in digital health systems collapses entirely, regardless of algorithmic sophistication. This represents both a governance failure (absent regulatory frameworks) and a violation of data sovereignty and human rights principles.

Recommendations: UNDP's Role in Supporting Digital Health Governance

<u>Support Foundational Data Governance Policies That Embed Equity and Human Rights</u>
UNDP Country Offices should lead policy dialogues with governments to develop comprehensive data governance frameworks: semantic interoperability standards, clear data ownership and sharing rules, liability frameworks, and data sovereignty requirements. Rather than treating these as technical standards, UNDP should frame data governance as a development and human rights imperative. These dialogues should facilitate governance compacts between Health, ICT, and Innovation authorities, specifying data access rights and mutual accountability. Critically, frameworks must embed equity requirements from the outset: mandatory equity impact assessments before procurement and national scale-up strategies explicitly prioritizing underserved populations.[33]

<u>Champion Public Digital Infrastructure Over Fragmented, Donor-Dependent Solutions</u>

UNDP should position itself as a critical voice advocating for public digital infrastructure approaches. When countries face choices between proprietary platforms and open-source alternatives, UNDP should advocate for solutions enabling local customization and South-South transfer, drawing on SMILE as evidence. UNDP should support governments in integrating digital health into national health policies and domestic budgets, ensuring that digital health serves development and public health priorities, not commercial interests.[34]

<u>Advance South-South Cooperation and Algorithmic Accountability for Responsible AI in Health</u>
UNDP should broker peer learning between governments with similar contexts, supporting adaptation of proven models like eVIN/U-WIN and SMILE, and documenting implementation experiences through the Digital Health for Development Hub.[35] UNDP should work with governments to establish governance requirements for AI deployments in health: mandatory local validation, transparent documentation of training data sources, routine performance monitoring for bias, and clear redress mechanisms when systems underperform. Supporting independent algorithmic audit mechanisms will ensure that AI in health advances public health goals and human rights.

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Proposing A Protocol Regulating Short-Lived Climate Pollutants
By Clio Vos

A central purpose of multilateralism as a global governance structure is to organize relationships between states and establish expectations for their behavior (Kruck & Rittberger, 2010). A core mechanism for this kind of coordination is multilateral treaties (MLTs), which are a way for states to directly set rules, regulations, and expectations. If they carry enough political weight, MLTs have the significant power of generating "instant custom", establishing clear norms even for states who are not signatories (Blum, 2008). While non-parties may not be explicitly bound to follow the rules set by the treaty, widespread normative recognition can create reputational consequences for states if they breach well-established norms. Of course, there are countless examples of MLTs failing to bring enough parties on board to actually be effective (see Blum, 2008). However, despite its very real limitations, the UN's MLT system addressing climate change has been relatively successful, with nearly universal participation. The UN's binding climate architecture is called the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It requires signatories to commit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and to submit plans for mitigation. However, there are still some very significant categories of emissions that are not included in UNFCCC treaties. A new Protocol to the UNFCCC should be implemented regulating emissions of short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs) such as black carbon and methane.

The Montreal Protocol is widely recognized as one of the great success stories of multilateral environmental regulation. Since its implementation in 1987, nearly 99% of ozone-depleting substances banned under the Protocol have been phased out, and UN-backed experts say that the ozone layer is currently on track to fully recover within four decades (UN, 2023). It is also one of the few MLTs to reach universal ratification. The Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol takes a further step in the mitigation of climate change and its impacts, specifically focusing on hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), with the potential to avoid 0.4°C in global warming if fully implemented (Amendment…, 2016; UNEP, 2019). HFCs are one of multiple types of Short-Lived Climate Pollutants (SLCPs), and currently are the only SLCP to be regulated under a binding international convention. Other key SLCPs include methane and black carbon (commonly known as soot), which have serious consequences on both global climate and

public health. Black carbon emissions are produced by the combustion of fossil fuels and biomass across sectors ranging from transportation to industry to residential heating and cooking. Methane is primarily emitted by fossil fuel usage and from the agricultural and waste sectors.

These pollutants are still not regulated under a binding international framework. The Global Methane Pledge is a methane regulation framework launched at COP26 in 2016, but is not legally binding; and black carbon is not directly regulated under any UN multilateral framework, binding or non-binding (International Energy Agency). SLCPs are overall a strong warming force on the global climate, making up about 45% of warming emissions globally - nearly half, yet they go unregulated by the UN's binding climate architecture (Climate and Clean Air Coalition [CCAC], "SLCPs").

While mitigation of climate change is a key reason to regulate SLCP emissions, their impact on human health is also a vital consideration. SLCPs such as black carbon are a major cause of both ambient (outdoor) air pollution and indoor air pollution, which harm public health worldwide. 99% of the global population breathes air that exceeds World Health Organization (WHO) air quality limits, putting nearly the entire world at risk of serious health conditions (WHO, 2024). Air pollution is the 4th leading cause of death globally, being associated with 7 million premature deaths every year, and reduces life expectancy by an average of 1 year and 8 months worldwide - almost as much as tobacco use (State of Global Air [SOGA]). The impact is even greater in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), who tend to bear the heaviest burdens of air pollution while having fewer resources to deal with the resulting health consequences. Around 89% of all premature deaths associated with air pollution occur in LMICs (WHO, 2024). Air pollution is a major risk factor for diseases such as stroke, ischaemic heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, pneumonia, and cataract, meaning that air pollution increases strain on healthcare systems that are often already under-resourced, particularly in LMICs (WHO, "Air quality…").

Morbidity and mortality caused by air pollution also have significant economic impact, costing the world $8 billion per day in healthcare costs and lost productivity (Huikuri, 2022). Apart from the economic toll of premature deaths, noncommunicable diseases associated with air pollution prevent people from going to work (absenteeism), and decrease their productivity when they are there (presenteeism). Air pollution is a significant barrier to sustainable development, weakening the workforce in LMICs. Sustainable development requires a healthy population,

both as a means for economic growth and as an important end in itself. Mitigating air pollution has economic benefits, and these potential benefits are highest in LMICs.

Nationally Determined Contributions are plans submitted by states to the UNFCCC to set goals for climate change mitigation. Analysis of 123 NDCs 3.0 submitted from January through November 2025 found that 70% mentioned air pollution, but only 15% mention black carbon - and only 4% set an explicit black carbon reduction target (NDC Registry). Without measurable targets, governments can't be held accountable for their commitments to reduce emissions.

Some countries are already integrating SLCP considerations into their NDCs, emphasizing the relevance of this issue in their national contexts. Chile's 2025 NDC has a dedicated section on SLCPs, stating that "Chile recognizes that actions to mitigate short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs) like black carbon, methane and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) are a contributing factor in urgently limiting the increase in average global temperatures, and that for this reason it is necessary to work in tandem with efforts to reduce emissions of other GHGs" (Chile, 2025). The NDC sets a target to progressively reduce black carbon emissions relative to a 2016 baseline, aiming for a reduction of 25% by 2030 and a reduction of 30% by 2035, with ambient $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations less than or equal to 18 µg/m^3 by the same year (Chile, 2025). Chile also commits to a 10% reduction in methane emissions by 2035 relative to historic maximum emissions (Chile, 2025). The NDC explains the importance of reducing SLCP emissions, explaining the air quality and public health co-benefits of reducing black carbon emissions; the negative impacts of black carbon on glaciers and snow; and the significance of methane's contribution to global warming, being 86% more potent than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period (Chile, 2025). This section not only emphasizes the importance of addressing SLCPs in climate change mitigation strategies, but also provides a model for how countries can integrate SLCPs into their nationally determined contributions and set measurable targets for emissions reduction.

A Protocol under the UNFCCC regulating black carbon would help countries integrate SLCP mitigation goals into their NDCs. The political utility of such a Protocol is demonstrated by South Africa's statement on black carbon in their NDC 3.0, which says that "South Africa does not include black carbon, since it is not a substance controlled by the UNFCCC or Paris Agreement." South Africa is clearly aware that black carbon is an issue related to climate change, but has decided not to include it in the NDC, using the lack of a regulatory framework as

reasoning. Another issue that could be addressed by a regulatory Protocol is lack of resources for air pollution monitoring and response. Nigeria writes in their NDC 3.0 that, "The coverage of categories as per Nigeria's NID1 [National Inventory Document] has been improved. However, challenges remain regarding data availability, and the following categories are yet to be covered:... Petrochemical and Black Carbon production… Nigeria intends to address these data gaps and incorporate these categories subject to availability of resources." There is clear political will to address SLCPs and consider them in national climate planning, but lack of resources is a barrier to effective response. Recognition of SLCPs as a relevant issue under the UNFCCC would encourage donors to direct resources towards the urgent need for monitoring, adaptation, and mitigation of SLCP emissions, supporting countries like Nigeria in tackling this issue.

Climate successes, such as the Montreal Protocol, emphasize the importance of multilateral cooperation on climate change and air pollution. These are issues that have no national borders - clean air is a common good, a responsibility that is shared by every state. Measures such as multilateral conventions regulating harmful emissions, while not a panacea, can be critical for protecting the environment and human health. While the UNFCCC system has its flaws, its near-universal recognition by states makes it a powerful tool to influence state behavior and climate planning. An additional Protocol providing guidance on monitoring and mitigation of SLCPs would help states address a significant issue not just for the global climate, but also for public health.

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Building a UN Country Knowledge Infrastructure: A Proposal for the UN 80 Initiative

By Maya Watanabe

Context

A widely acknowledged criticism of multilateralism is the challenge of disseminating critical information among its many actors. The UN produces vast knowledge but lacks system wide mechanisms to connect, retrieve, and use it for decisions. Often, knowledge is lost to levels of bureaucracy and fragmentation between different UN processes and entities. This is especially problematic when many of these decisions are urgent and timely-ness and relevance of decisions impact the lives the UN was created to service. Thus, the issue is not a lack of information, but fragmented systems and inaccessible tacit knowledge. I recommend a Country Knowledge Infrastructure (CKI) with AI-enabled search, joint ownership, and integrated accountability. I also advocate for a pilot system to be implemented in Africa, where more nexus crises lie. This may create an environment for faster, more consistent decision-making, reduced duplication, stronger nexus outcomes, and more equitable participation for small delegations and local partners.

Building on Mr. Kimani's recommendations in my capacity as a student and intern of UNHCR, I'd like to share a concrete proposal for strengthening information sharing equitably across the multilateral system. Namely, this is investing in the development of Country Knowledge Infrastructure (CKI) with joint ownership across UN entities and partners. CKI is a field-level digital and organizational system that consolidates conflict and political economy analysis; human rights reports; program evaluations; financing data; lessons and operational guidance; and tacit knowledge. It would have to be secure, requiring resources to protect against increasingly elaborate cybersecurity threats. Access may also be tiered for sensitive material.

Governance Structure:

As Hann W. Maull points out in his article "The Pitfalls of Multilateralism", good leadership is vital for multilateral systems to work effectively. As such, figuring out an effective governance structure of the CKI is critical. One suggestion is to include creating an ASG level executive lead to oversee knowledge integration, ensuring that this becomes core organizational work and to make its processes visible to the senior leadership level. One concern that may arise about centralizing knowledge is access to sensitive information. Building on the existing resident coordinator system which mandates collective decision-making and coordination as they lead the UN Country Team, this infrastructure should prevent any single entity from controlling access to content standards (UNSDG | the Resident Coordinator, n.d.). An inter-agency knowledge standards board could be made to create access rules and help with dispute resolution. There could be default access to UN entities and delegations. Additionally, networks should be

established to connect peace operations, political missions, resident coordinators, and humanitarian actors. One recommendation Mr. Kimani suggested is designating nexus coordinators with dual reporting lines to resident coordinators and mission leaders, guided by shared indicators such as violence reduction or progress in transitions to national systems(Informal Ad Hoc Working Group on UN80 Initiative - General Assembly, 80th Session, 2025). Just as it is important that all entities are included, maintaining a geographic and gender balance throughout this system is key to operational success. According to Antony Anghie, 'Third World Approaches' have always fostered and encouraged plurality. Feminists and 'Third World' scholars bring an alternative understanding to the UN system with a deeper understanding of its impact on people in developing countries and their efforts to resist and reform it (Anghie, 2023). Additionally, during the Academic Conference on Africa, African scholars spoke about the oppressive systems of power and knowledge that have led African states themselves not to legitimize African scholarship coming out of the continent (Academic Conference on Africa 2025 | Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, 2025). Having a center for aggregating the variety of knowledge systems including tacit knowledge in a country specific infrastructure would help integrate these valuable perspectives into institutional frameworks.

Benefits:

This proposal aims to bring several benefits to the UN by creating a system where different UN entities can share and extract knowledge from the system with ease. There are many anticipated benefits for the field teams, Member States, and the wider UN system. Field teams would need to spend less time searching for knowledge and more time contextualizing their decisions, leading to greater impact that is appropriate to the needs of people. With rapid staff turnover, these successions would be supported by a living record of decisions and rationals, helping solve the problem of lost tacit knowledge. There would be more shared contextual and situational awareness across humanitarian, development, and peace pillars. Member States are the pilot seat of every UN decision, yet they often have the least information. These systems would allow them to make better informed decisions leading to better impact by having easy access to important background knowledge. Smaller delegations could engage in decision making on equal information footing. Additionally, the many simultaneous demands of the UN stretches the resources and capacities of these smaller delegations and often they must choose between different important processes to focus their energy on. Spending less time searching for information, would allow more capacity to participate across different fora. Across the wider UN system there would be reduced duplication and reporting fatigue. In general, efforts could be more focused on creating impact instead of producing parallel reports. It could also reduce competition among UN entities and create better coordination and collaboration. Overall incorporating these changes to the UN reforms would be a concrete contribution to creating a more effective and collaborative multilateralism.

Conclusion

To harness the UN's strength, it is not enough that it holds knowledge, it must be able to mobilize that knowledge for impactful decisions. This proposal offers a concrete, politically feasible step for UN reform that benefits every layer of the UN's multilateral system. It will help diminish fragmentation, the

need to relearn and duplicate information, to create an operational knowledge system that enables the UN to act in a way that is timely, coherent, context sensitive, and evidence-informed.

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