

UNESCO's Contribution

Report of the High Commissioner of the United Nations Human Rights Council on the issue of civil society space, further to Human Rights Council Resolution 32/31

1) Introduction

This contribution relates to existing mechanisms of UNESCO's cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

It should be noted that in November 2016, UNESCO's Executive Board has adopted a decision requesting the Director-General, in close consultation with Member States and the NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee, to "*develop proposals on how to further create opportunities for qualitative dialogue between Member States and NGOs, including within the governing bodies, drawing on best practices in other United Nations agencies and similar institutions, and to present them to it at its 202nd session with a view to transmitting them to the General Conference for consideration at its 39th session*" ([200 EX/Decisions](#), item 23, pp. 30-31).

2) Background

Article XI, paragraph 4 of the [UNESCO's Constitution](#) defines the basis for cooperation between UNESCO and NGOs:

"The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization may make suitable arrangements for consultation and cooperation with non-governmental international organizations concerned with matters within its competence, and may invite them to undertake specific tasks. Such cooperation may also include appropriate participation by representatives of such organizations on advisory committees set up by the General Conference".

Since its founding, UNESCO has therefore sought to collaborate with NGOs and over the years, it has built up a valuable network of cooperation with NGOs having an expertise in its fields of competence: education, science, social and human sciences, culture, communication and information. It also played a leading role in the creation of many NGOs in order to strengthen the role of civil society in the pursuit of its goals.

Combining expertise and resources with NGOs allows UNESCO to:

- create strategic alliances for advancing UNESCO's programme priorities and values;
- enhance efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of its programmes and activities;
- strengthen visibility and impact of its action and presence, globally, regionally and at country level;
- reinforce the understanding, ratification, implementation and monitoring of UNESCO's normative frameworks;
- enhance its capacity to reach all segments of societies which should be beneficiaries of its action;
- multiply the effects of UNESCO's actions.

Partnership with NGOs concerns **all fields of competence** of the Organization and comprises **all forms of cooperation**, including advancement and dissemination of knowledge, technical and intellectual advisory functions to UNESCO, programme implementation, funding and visibility. It is relevant for all UNESCO's functions (laboratory of ideas; standard-setter; clearing house; capacity-builder in Member States; catalyst for international cooperation).

It should be noted that in addition to the overall official framework detailed below, UNESCO is carrying out a range of activities in its different fields of competence, on an **ad hoc basis**, in cooperation with numerous NGOs that enjoy or do not enjoy official partnership.

3) Statutory framework

The current official framework for civil society engagement is outlined in two main instruments: the ***Directives concerning UNESCO's partnership with non-governmental organizations*** (copy enclosed, hereafter referred to as "the Directives" or "the 2011 Directives") adopted by the General Conference at its 36th session in 2011, and to a lesser extent the *Directives concerning UNESCO's relations with foundations and similar institutions*, adopted by the General Conference at its 29th session in 1997. In addition, the *Comprehensive Partnership Strategy* ([192 EX/5.INF](#)), adopted by the Executive Board at its 192nd session in 2013, defines the overall framework for partnership and separated strategies for engagement with individual categories of partner, including cooperation with NGOs.

The involvement of NGOs in programme implementation does not necessarily hinge on an official partnership with the Organization. However, **official partnership** under the framework of the Directives **is the privileged way of cooperation with the Organization**.

The Directives offer a simplified policy framework for engaging, managing and maintaining this partnership, which will allow to:

- further integrate partnerships with NGOs in programme planning and implementation, at both global and local levels;
- promote a genuine culture of partnership with NGOs within the Organization;
- revitalize, renew and widen the network of NGOs in official partnership with UNESCO;
- promote partnership with new organizations that are representative of civil society in regions of the world where such organizations, for historical, cultural or geographical reasons, are isolated or weak.

a) How can an NGO become an official partner?

Any international, regional, national or local NGO may become an official partner, whenever its purposes, functions, structure and operation are non-governmental, democratic and non-profit-making in character. The NGO should fulfil the following conditions:

- it should be engaged in activities in one or more specific fields of UNESCO's competence;
- it should have a recognized legal status, an established headquarters and be governed by democratically adopted statutes;
- it should have been in existence and have been carrying out activities for at least two years.

The potential for synergy and the extent of the activities already implemented jointly by the NGO and UNESCO are also important elements for the admission of an NGO to official partnership.

Requests for partnership may be submitted at any time, and are processed through an internal evaluation guided by a rigorous admission process managed by UNESCO's Secretariat and steered by the Intergovernmental and Non-Governmental Desk within the Sector for External Relations and Public Information (ERI/MSP/INO).

b) Types of official partnership

The 2011 Directives outline two possible types of partnership, which depend on the structure and aims of the NGO, the nature of its cooperation with UNESCO and the scale of its contribution to the partnership:

- **consultative status**, designed to enable UNESCO to establish and maintain flexible and dynamic partnerships with any organization of civil society that is active in UNESCO's fields of competence at any level, and
- **associate status**, open to international or regional organizations having maintained a continuous and effective partnership with UNESCO for at least two years.

The consultative status partnership is granted on the discretion of the Director-General and reported thereon to the Executive Board, while the associate status partnership is granted by the Executive Board on the recommendation of the Director-General and consists of close and sustained cooperation in defining and implementing the Organization's programme, requiring a continuous and effective partnership in consultative status for at least two years.

The Directives do not foresee a fixed duration for the consultative partnership, while the associate partnership is established for a renewable period of eight years.

Absence of collaboration for a period of four years between UNESCO and a partner organization will result in the automatic termination of the official partnership, for both consultative and associate partnership. The decision to terminate a consultative partnership depends on the Director-General, who informs the Executive Board. When the Director-General deems it necessary to end an associate partnership with an NGO, he/she shall refer the matter to the Executive Board for decision.

Currently, UNESCO is enjoying official partnerships with 387 NGOs. The table below shows the breakdown of NGOs in official partnership based on the region where their headquarters are located:

Region	NGO Associate status	NGO Consultative status	TOTAL
Europe and North America	54	253	307 (264 international)
Africa	5	15	20 (7 international)
Latin America and the Caribbean	4	12	16 (6 international)
Asia and the Pacific	3	28	31 (21 international)
Arab States	2	11	13 (2 international)
TOTAL	68	319	387 (300 international)

c) Modalities of cooperation

Official partnership with UNESCO is more than just an accreditation. It consists in a mutual engagement to cooperate and work together in the Organization's fields of competence.

Official partnership arrangements include bilateral modalities of cooperation as well as collective modalities of collaboration.

Bilateral cooperation is essentially thematic and can intervene at different functional areas of activity (e.g. capacity-building, advocacy, technical support, standard-setting, etc.). It is managed through various modalities: implementation of certain elements of UNESCO's regular programmes, execution of projects and joint initiatives, consultation mechanisms and/or memoranda of understanding, etc.

Collective cooperation allows exchanges among NGOs and coordinated actions and is centered around three main mechanisms:

- the International Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations;
- the NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee;
- collective consultations on specific subjects.

i) The International Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations

The International Conference of NGOs (hereafter referred as "the Conference") brings together all NGOs in official partnership every two years to review the state of cooperation with UNESCO, conduct collective consultations on the main lines of UNESCO's programme and facilitate cooperation between organizations having common interests.

The Conference in particular enables the Director-General to gather advice and suggestions from NGOs, especially regarding her/his preliminary proposals on UNESCO's Draft Programme and Budget, including the guidance provided by the Executive Board.

ii) The NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee

The [NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee](#), elected by the International Conference of NGOs, is made up of ten NGOs, out of whom four have associate status and six have consultative status, and is chaired by a Chairperson elected by the Conference. All regions, as defined by UNESCO, should be represented by at least one NGO having its headquarters in that region, thus ensuring an appropriate geographical diversity in its composition.

The Liaisons Committee's role between meetings of the NGO Conferences is to:

- represent the interests of all NGO partners;
- take necessary steps to ensure the proper functioning and efficiency of the partnership between NGOs and UNESCO;
- implement resolutions adopted by the International Conference and prepare for the next session;
- ensure that NGO opinions taken collectively are reflected by UNESCO in the preparation of its draft programme;
- contribute to preparations for the debates in the Committee for Non-Governmental Partners (NGP) of the Executive Board;
- organize, in consultation with the UNESCO Secretariat, a twice-yearly "International Forum for NGOs in official partnership with UNESCO".

The Forums present opportunities for raising awareness and mobilizing support around the Organization's priority issues. Organized in different regions of the world, they enable the mobilization of a larger number of local NGOs and the local branches of international NGOs, as well as new audiences.

iii) Collective consultations on specific subjects

Collective consultations on specific subjects may be organized by the Secretariat with specialized NGOs, to ensure their contribution to the development and implementation of certain of UNESCO's priority programmes.

The only collective consultation mechanism currently implemented is the Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education for All (CCNGO/EFA). It was established in 1984 as a consultancy forum on literacy and has developed to be the main platform for NGOs to contribute collectively to the Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The CCNGO/EFA includes about 300 NGOs, and works as a network of international, regional and national NGOs that gather every two years to discuss specific issues within the education field. In its upcoming global meeting in May 2017, the body will formally change its name to "Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education 2030".

d) NGO participation in the governing bodies of UNESCO

In an aim to open up the governing bodies to inputs and contributions from civil society, Member States of UNESCO have allowed the participation of NGOs to the General Conference and the Executive Board.

In accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and the Rules of Procedure of the General Conference, official NGO partners with associate status may send observers to sessions of the **General Conference**. In addition, NGO partners with consultative status may be invited to send observers on the decision of the Director-General acting on behalf of the General Conference.

These observers can make statements on matters within their competence in the commissions, committees and subsidiary bodies of the General Conference, with consent of the presiding officer; they may address plenary meetings of the General Conference on particular matters of major importance that fall within their competence.

As far as the **Executive Board** is concerned, two main mechanisms for NGO participation exist:

- the **Committee on Non-Governmental Partners (NGP)** of the Executive Board, which was established in 1966 as one of its permanent committees to assist it in the execution of its tasks. The Committee studies matters concerning UNESCO's cooperation with NGOs and foundations, in particular overseeing the implementation of the Directives. In addition, the Committee can carry out thematic debates on the involvement of non-governmental partners in UNESCO's action. Today it is composed of 24 Member States. NGO representatives can participate as observers and take the floor after Member States, upon the approval of the Chairperson, according to the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board.
- the NGO partners may also take part as observers on authorization of the Chairperson of the Executive Board, granted upon written request, in the **other bodies of the Executive Board**. Partners may also submit written statements at any time to the Director-General on UNESCO programme matters within their competence. These statements may then be communicated to the Executive Board or the General Conference.

e) Contribution of NGOs to the UNESCO programming cycle

In order to associate NGOs fully with the development of UNESCO's objectives, priorities and programmes and to foster sustained upstream cooperation, official NGO partners may contribute, both individually and collectively, to the Organization's programming cycle via specific consultation procedures on the Draft Medium-Term Strategy (C/4) and Draft Programme and Budget (C/5) of UNESCO:

- NGOs contribute **individually** via a questionnaire sent to all official NGO partners. They are thereby invited on the Director-General's request, to submit recommendations in writing about UNESCO's priorities and programme, which are then communicated to the Executive Board together with the preliminary proposals of the Director-General.
- NGOs also contribute **collectively** via the International Conference of NGOs, which is invited to communicate collectively to the Director-General the NGOs' views and suggestions about the Draft Programme and Budget, including the guidance provided by the Executive Board.

f) Other mechanisms of cooperation

In addition to the official framework detailed above, there are specific mechanisms adopted by Member States, related to **cultural conventions**, which also provide cooperation with NGOs through their own guidelines and accreditation systems.

These mechanisms include several conventions such as the *2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, which refers to the fundamental role of civil society in its Article 11 and gives a vital role to NGOs for its implementation, or the *1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two (1954 and 1999) Protocols*, the *1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, the *1972 World Heritage Convention*, the *2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage* and the *2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. This has resulted in relations with some 240 NGOs between 2012 and 2015.

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NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee

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