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Experiences of Collaborations between Civil Society Organizations and the United Nations

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Abstract

Title Experiences and challenges of Collaboration between Civil Society Organizations and the United Nations

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Key Words Interorganizational collaboration, civil society organization, CSO, United Nations, UN, civil society participation, CSO and the UN collaboration

Interorganizational collaboration is defined by Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2000) as “a cooperative relationship among organizations that relies on neither market nor hierarchical mechanisms of control” (pp. 24). They state that collaboration helps organizations get skills as well as resources that are impossible to acquire from within the organization. Their definition adds that collaboration enhances combining resources by transferring assets and sharing key tools such as knowledge or personnel and coming up with solutions to social problems and also build capacities in order to enhance organization’s ability to express social problems better. Moreover, collaboration can help organizations creating new knowledge through ongoing social interactions in the collaborations and additionally influence the structure of interorganizational relationships and at the same time influence other organizations (Hardy, Phillips and Lawrence 2003). There was an increasing development in collaboration between intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations, and CSOs during the twentieth century (Alger 2002), and according to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2017), CSOs are now considered to be significant and important at the national and international levels by taking part in the political, economic and cultural domain.

The focus of this research is on the experience of collaboration between the United Nations and Civil Society Organizations and its challenges, and the research is carried out by using mixed methods. The research was carried out by distributing a survey to CSOs and UN organizations and collecting experiences of collaboration between both entities. The survey was sent out to 1035 potential respondents, out of which 43 participated. The theoretical framework consists of theories such as Civil Society Participation, Framework of Successful Interorganizational Collaboration and Power.

The research questions answered were; What is the experience of the collaboration between CSOs and the UN? How has the inclusion of CSOs in the UN decision-making process been carried out in practice? Are there challenges in the collaboration?

Through this research it has been demonstrated that collaboration between CSOs and the UN is of highly importance in order to meet the needs of human rights and social justice, but it has its challenges and needs to work on strengthening the dynamics between the two entities as well as balancing the power dynamics and create more inclusion, which is a responsibility of the UN.

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1 Introduction

Interorganizational collaboration is defined by Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2000) as “a cooperative relationship among organizations that relies on neither market nor hierarchical mechanisms of control” (pp. 24). Collaboration helps organizations get skills as well as resources that are impossible to acquire from within the organization. Collaboration enhances combining resources by transferring assets and sharing key tools such as knowledge or personnel and coming up with solutions to social problems and also build capacities in order to enhance organization’s ability to express social problems better. Moreover, collaboration can help organizations creating new knowledge through ongoing social interactions in the collaborations and additionally influence the structure of interorganizational relationships and at the same time influence other organizations (Hardy, Phillips and Lawrence 2003).

In this paper, a mixed method research that examines the experience of the interorganizational collaboration between Civil society organizations (CSOs) and the United Nations (UN) is presented. The purpose is to strengthen the collaboration between the entities to bring their strengths together in promoting social justice and human rights. The research was carried out by distributing a survey to CSOs and UN organizations and collecting experiences of collaboration between both entities. The survey was sent out to 1,035 potential respondents, out of which 43 participated.

The first part of this paper presents background information, meaning concepts within the context of the research, and the objectives as well as research questions that the research was based on. A literature review is conducted to present previous research in the context of interorganizational collaboration, followed by the theoretical framework for the analysis. The data analysis is produced in relation to power, civil society participation and a framework of successful interorganizational collaboration.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Social Work

Social Work began as a profession in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and has several different forms of definitions. The International Federation of Social Workers (2014) has defined social work as

a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.

Furthermore, Cox and Pawars (2006) definition of international social work is

The promotion of social work education and practice globally and locally, with the purpose of building a truly integrated international profession that reflects social work's capacity to respond appropriately and effectively, in education and practice terms, to the various global challenges that are having a significant impact on the well-being of large sections of the world's population. This global and local promotion of social work education and practice is based on an integrated-perspectives approach that synthesizes global, human rights, ecological, and social development perspectives of international situations and responses to them (pp. 20).

Palattiyil et al. (2018) state that the definition of international social work is also the realization of that inequality, injustice and underdevelopment in a local context are consequences of our global processes in our interconnected world. In other words, global circumstances affect local systems. However, the definitions above share the same core values, which are social justice and human rights, as well as the understanding of the connections between national and international matters.

Social work is typically provided within three major organizational groups such as state (government agencies), market (companies and businesses) and community (CSOs, nonprofit organizations, charities, volunteers). Each of these sectors plays a distinct role in the provision of social services. (Freund 2005, Pestoff 2014)

1.1.2 Civil Society Organization

“Civil society refers to all forms of social action carried out by individuals or groups who are neither connected to nor managed by state authorities” (Publications Office of the European Union 2022). A civil society organization is a structured group of individuals who work together in a democratic way to promote the common good and act as a bridge between government authorities and the people. CSOs include social partners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and grassroots organizations (Publications Office of the European Union 2022). CSOs can fill in gaps of service provision in sectors where states have challenges because of bureaucratic structures, because CSOs have more flexibility and target specific needs in communities (Bontenbal & Lillie 2021).

”Civil society has an important role to play in achieving the SDGs and more broadly in development towards safe and secure, peaceful and inclusive societies” (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2017).

Kopecký and Mudde (2003) state that the most common definition of civil society is “a set of organizations that operates between the state, family (individual and household), and the sphere of economic production (market firms)” (Heinrich and Fioramonti 2007, 308). Kopecký and Mudde (2003) also state that CSOs are financially independent from the state and there is no attempt to occupy the state by CSOs, however, they seek to influence it through their activities. There are several different actors that could be named as a CSO; individual citizens, social movement organizations (SMO) or activists (Lipschutz and McKendry 2012), nationalist and religious groups, non-profit organizations (NPO), non-governmental organizations (NGO), advocacy networks, public policy or epistemic network (Kaldor 2003, Gemmill and Bamidele-

Izu 2002), as well as labor unions, professional associations (etc. doctors and lawyers), chambers of commerce, ethnic associations, and more (Jaysawal 2013). At the international level CSOs are viewed as the ones who uphold the moral authority when it comes to operational knowledge and actions in addition to being a partner who can possibly enhance the legitimacy as well as promote support in public and political constituencies (Jaysawal 2013). Additionally, Scholte (2002) states that “through a democratic accountability function, civil society associations can push authorities in global governance to take greater public responsibility for their actions and policies” (pp. 294).

According to Montoute (2016), civil society has participated in decision-making processes for quite some time already, and since the 1990s the initiatives of civil society has had more value in government level decision making due to the interconnectedness of the world, which makes it more challenging for governments to uphold their traditional functions. Furthermore, Montoute states that the involvement of CSOs have led to bringing awareness to the non-transparent decision-making in global institutions within areas of trade and economic policy, which subsequently has resulted in their increasing democratization. Due to the high level of socio-economic disparities, CSOs have also been taking part in policy-making processes that concern people’s lives and giving stakeholders a voice, and they have been able to do so following the technological developments, which enables CSOs around the world to cooperate and gives them strength to demand a voice in policy making together (Montoute 2016). However, Steffek, Kissling and Nanz (2008) argue that CSOs face challenges with being seen as an equal decision-making actor when it comes to international organizations and governments. They suggest that CSOs access to deliberations at decision-making bodies, especially intergovernmental, is highly regulated. Examples of organizations who have denied access to CSOs, either completely or partly, are NATO, the European Union and World Trade Organization (Steffek, Kissling and Nanz 2008). They further state, that the CSOs that are somehow included, are usually strong, well-funded and well-staffed, and once a CSO becomes a privileged partner, collaboration may come to light, which can cause alliances between certain governments and partners and hinder from any new partners involvement.

the very idea of democratizing international governance via civil society participation rests on the presumption that arguments voiced by non- state actors will be heard and debated in international negotiation. The existing participatory arrangements have achieved very little in this respect. (Steffek, Kissling and Nanz 2008)

Having said that, CSOs may depend on funding from either the government or private entities, which can result in power imbalances. These imbalances may affect CSOs' actions, causing them to prioritize the interests of donors or the government over those of the public they represent (Eikenberry, Dodge & Coule 2023).

This research focuses only on CSOs that are independent from government funding.

1.1.3 Criticism of CSOs

According to Kaldor (2003), the number of NGOs, who are funded by Northern donors and are dependent in particular donors, have increased since the 1990s. Kaldor argues that some NGOs have been described as parastatal organizations or government subcontractors, which can decrease the power of citizens instead of increasing it through their capabilities to evade formal

state expectations and functions. In addition, NGOs who are funded by the government can overstep smaller local community or social organizations. Also, NGOs may have a contract with companies to commit them to social and environmental responsibility, however, the companies may not be working ethically, which then have led to the NGO supporting those actions by having a contract with them (Kaldor 2003). Thus, NGOs follow governments instead of influencing them, and they might end up supporting their agendas which may be completely opposite to what their initial intentions are (Youngs 2004).

Furthermore, Jaysawal (2013) states that there are organizations that are taking part in both the political sector and the civil sector, which causes confusion in understanding which sector they represent. Jaysawal argues that some organizations may be promoted as a CSO, but simultaneously pursuing power through politics. According to Scholte (2002), additional challenges of civil society include underperforming in terms of their intentions, as well as carrying out activity that may violate their values, and instead of enhancing democracy actually harming the democratic processes. In addition, Scholte suggests that civil society often fails in offering equal opportunity to stakeholders in participating in global governance, and with further action may subsequently cause structural inequalities and arbitrary privileges. Moreover, Scholte states that some advocates among Northern NGOs have claimed that civil society associations do not need to be representative. Additionally, there are observations that the privileged (middle aged adults, upper class men, northern countries, whites, Christian heritages and urban dwellers) often speak for the subordinate with little or even lack of consultation with the actual should-be representatives of the association. Furthermore, according to Scholte, civil society participation in global governance has a tendency to be carried out - and dominated in the South - by “Western-styled, Western-funded NGOs led by West-ernized elites” (pp. 296), and as such NGOs and other professionalized civil society representatives may oppress the voices from the grassroot level that would really need to be heard for the effects of global governance. Further challenges are seen in CSOs bringing knowledge about global governance to the public, which may be of their lack of competences in certain areas regarding effective public educating and leads to spreading flawed knowledge. Additionally, CSOs can be run with similar top-down hierarchies as political parties, companies or official bureaucracies, as well as having other similar internal deficiencies as any other operator (Scholte 2002).

1.1.4 The United Nations

The UN is an international organization that was founded in 1945 (Nadkarni 2012) during a time when the world was dominated by certain countries and war was a big threat (Pollack 2007). The founding of the UN was initiated by the United States, the United Kingdom, Soviet Union and China in 1942 during the Second World War. However, the final UN Charter was signed in 1945 by 50 founding member states, and today the UN General Assembly has 193 member states (United Nations 2023), and the core task of the UN is maintaining international peace and security as well as protecting human rights (Gareis 2012).

The UN consists of five main organs which are the General Assembly, the Secretariat (Secretary General), the Security Council, the International Court of Justice and the Economic and Social Council (United Nations n.d.). The General assembly consists of all the 193 member states, which meet regularly and each member state can make their case heard and similarly to a national parliament each state has one vote (United Nations n.d.). The Secretariat, led by the Secretary General, responsibility is the administration and bureaucracy of the organization, and

the Secretary General serving as the head chief of the world body (United Nations n.d.). The Security Council main responsibility is maintaining international peace and security and has the power to authorize decisions on economic sanctions or military actions (United Nations n.d.). The International court of justice, which the General Assembly and Secretary General chooses the judges of, deals with international legal issues and disputes between states. Furthermore, the Economic and Social Council stands for the development and coordination of the economics and social work of the UN (United Nations n.d.).

In addition to the main organs, the UN is the parent organization to programs such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Food Program (WFP) which focus on developments in more specific problem areas (Hanhimäki 2015).

1.1.5 Criticism of the UN

In contrast to all the good efforts by the UN, the organization has received criticism. It is stated by Cronin, Mama and Mbugua (2006) that the UNs decision-making process has usually only involved governments to negotiate and make "agreements, resolutions, decisions, treaties, conventions, protocols, declarations and plans of action", and the NGOs participation as consultants does not provide them with direct participation in decision-making, but gives them right to give policy statements for UN meetings. It is also suggested, that governments are the decision-makers and civil society plays a minor role in the process (Healy 2016).

According to Tabbush (2005) the UN have been questioned by civil society activists due to their expensive resources, slow development and even their effectiveness is doubted. The effectiveness of the UN and the unclear transparency of conference outcomes has also been contradictive in the public opinion. It is stated, that the expenses, concern of work duplication, evasion of serious issues, lack of substantial agreements and sticking to previous agreements, compromising instead of committing to more radical solutions and letting a few powerful countries make decisions about the world order (Tabbush 2005).

Furthermore, Gardiner (2007) criticizes how the UNs reputation among the public has turned negative, which one of the reasons is its human rights violations by representatives of the UN Commission on Human Rights (now the UN Human Rights Council). For example, having country leaders as members in the council whose countries are simultaneously violating human rights such as genocide or abusing the rights of their citizens. Additionally, during council elections many countries abusing human rights were elected as members of the human rights council. Moreover, Gardiner (2007) and Gareis (2012) state that the UN peacekeepers have also failed in its mission and instead of promoting human rights, abused those rights. It is also stated that the UN is seen as a corrupted and mismanaged world body (Gardiner 2007).

1.1.6 The UN and Social Work

According to Pollack (2007), international social issues are closely linked to international laws and transglobal organizations, and it plays a role in the background of international law. Therefore, the UN gave international social work organizations a consultative role, one of which is called the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) gaining its consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) at the UN in 1945

(Nadkarni 2012), as well as the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) (Healy 2016). Pollack (2007, 114) states that “social workers have been playing an active role at the UN since its birth in 1945”. Moreover, The IASSW also takes part in several NGO Committees at the UN as an aim to enhance the involvement of civil society (Healy 2016).

Nadkarni (2012, 252) states that Social Work Day at the UN, founded in 1983, works towards the purpose “to educate social workers and social work educators about what the UN is doing and how social work can participate”, as well as “to educate the UN - its agencies, governments and missions - about the relevance of social work in achieving its shared goals”. Thus, it is acknowledged that the social work profession could be helpful at the UN (Cronin, Mama and Mbugua 2006).

1.1.7 The United Nations and Civil Society Organizations

There was an increasing development in collaboration between intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations, and CSOs during the twentieth century (Alger 2002), and according to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (2017), CSOs are now considered to be significant and important at the national and international levels by taking part in the political, economic and cultural domain.

Additionally, the UN and CSOs are reported to collaborate in different matters. For example, the United Nations office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) recognize CSOs as playing a remarkable role in Disaster Risk Reduction efforts by working at the grassroots level (van Wessel, Naz, Sahoo 2020). Additionally, CSOs decide about access for the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and hold knowledge and competences of individuals from a community, as well as connecting these individuals with policymakers serving as a bridge between them (Wong and Tan 2019).

1.2 Objectives and Research questions

The aim of this research is to strengthen the collaboration between the UN and CSOs to achieve their common goal to promote social justice and human rights and create a stronger link between CSOs and the UN so that civil society can have a bigger impact in the decision-making process by sharing their expertise and people's needs from the grassroots level with global governance.

The objectives are set to find out how the representatives of the UN and CSOs experience the collaboration in practice, and what challenges there are hindering the collaboration between the entities.

This study will provide new knowledge from the perspectives of representatives of CSOs and the UN by addressing the following research questions:

1. What is the experience of the collaboration between CSOs and the UN?
2. How has the inclusion of CSOs in the UN decision-making process been carried out in practice?
3. What are the challenges in the collaboration?

1.3 Relevance to the field of social work and human rights

Social workers, with the help of their on-the-ground expertise, can advocate for policies and initiatives that promote social justice and human rights by often working directly with marginalized and vulnerable groups, which gives them valuable insights into the real-world challenges faced by individuals and communities (United Nations 1994). Additionally, social workers can help empower individuals and communities to understand and claim their human rights, which is vital for promoting a culture of human rights awareness and accountability. Social workers are trained to address systemic issues and structural inequalities that underlie human rights violations, and the involvement of social workers in collaboration with the UN can help address the needs of those most vulnerable to human rights abuses and contribute to broader social justice goals (United Nations 1994). Furthermore, social workers are in a position to be able to assist in the development and implementation of policies and programs that constitute a purpose to protect human rights. Collaborating with the UN allows social workers to advocate for the rights of the focus groups of their work, such as asylum seekers, refugees, elderly, children and people with disabilities, on an international level and influencing global policies, and therefore, social workers are an important source of information for the UN (United Nations 1994). In other words, the collaboration between the United Nations and social work is essential because it leverages the expertise, experience, and commitment of social workers to advance the cause of human rights. These entities share the same values, and by working together they can address complex human rights challenges more effectively and make progress toward a more just and equitable world.

2 Literature Review

According to Bryman (2012), reviewing existing literature is a crucial starting point for a researcher, in order to be knowledgeable about the subject and what previous research has already been conducted, as well as being aware of whether there are any unanswered questions in the topic area.

Mowell (2021) studied the challenges to the collaboration between the United Nations and Civil Society Organizations within the UN Economic and Social Council consultative status program. In that study, a survey was carried out for CSOs within the UN-ECOSOC consultative status program, and the study findings revealed several barriers including financial, geographical, communication issues, access issues and unnecessary lengthy bureaucracy. Financial and geographical barriers included for example travel expenses and accessibility (mandatory visas and expenses etc.) for low developed countries or developing areas to be able to participate in meetings and events. The communication issues referred to respondents stating that "obtaining answers to even basic questions remains a challenge beyond the ability of the current system"(pp.15). Furthermore, Mowell states, that respondents in the study expressed difficulties with accessing the UN key organs, for example challenges with being able to present statements verbally or in writing and how they felt they are "merely tolerated, not really listened to" (pp.16) at the UN. Additionally, according to Mowell, there were several comments from the survey respondents that "touched upon the possibility of elitism" (pp.16), as well as indications that CSOs feel underutilized regarding their expertise, and are lacking guidelines and information (Mowell, 2021).

A study of collaboration between CSOs and business firms has been carried out in the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Bhattacharyya and Verma 2020). It states that the attempt with the study was "to develop an integrated framework (consisting of building blocks or elements) on firm-CSO collaboration" and the research was carried out by literature review and discussion. The findings of that research discovered six different building blocks as the CSR action elements for collaboration between firms and CSOs: CSR agenda, resources, capabilities, process, monitoring and stakeholder engagement. Agenda setting was followed by using resources and engaging management capability in order to utilize the resources to develop values that would fulfill the agenda (Bhattacharyya and Verma 2020). Resource and capability implementation lead to carrying out activities, which then were based on a CSR process indicating the order of activities needing to be done. Moreover, it was important during the CSR process that one of the entities engaged with stakeholders via material, relational and interactional ways in order to achieve the requirements of the stakeholder, thus fulfilled CSR stakeholder engagement (Bhattacharyya and Verma 2020). CSR monitoring included CSO or firm observation of the output and function of CSR initiatives, which happened through documenting, reporting, feedback generation and learning input from CSR initiatives (Bhattacharyya and Verma 2020). Furthermore, the study revealed that, in at least one case, the firm took control over the CSR agenda and monitoring from the very beginning and the end of the whole action cycle, whereas the CSO performed the activities and designed and defined the CSR processes as well as carrying out engagement with stakeholders (Bhattacharyya and Verma 2020). Subsequently, it was found as a typology of "outsourcing of CSR". The same typology was seen in another case, where the study found that the agenda setting was also undertaken by a CSO, which led to the firm only contributing to the monitoring stage to assess

the CSR work from their perspective. Similarly, in “CSR-driven” typology, a CSO also participated in the monitoring step, and it was a joint process by both entities. Hence, the CSO was responsible for the whole firm’s CSR program. Furthermore, another typology was where the agenda was set by the firm’s management and they provided the resources that are necessary, however the rest of the process was in the hands of the CSO (Bhattacharyya and Verma 2020). It is stated that “this kind of collaboration was more about the firm providing the hard infrastructure whereas the CSO managing the soft aspects” and ”This was ’Support to CSO for CSR’” (Bhattacharyya and Verma 2020).

Another research, by Hardy, Phillips and Lawrence (2003), studied the organizational effects in interorganizational collaboration, which was based on yet another qualitative method study, where eight different collaborations by an NGO in Palestine that provide nutritional services to women and children over a four-year period examined collaboration. The article presents a model of the findings from the previous study and “the relationship between the characteristics of collaborative relationships and the different effects that they produce” (Hardy, Phillips and Lawrence 2003, 321). The research is based on three dimensions; “the pattern of interactions among collaborating organizations”, “the structure of the coalition formed by collaborating partners” and “the pattern of information-sharing among collaborating partners” (Hardy, Phillips and Lawrence 2003). The findings of the research involves factors as interaction between collaborating organizations, a variety of structures in the new potential coalitions and information exchange. High levels of involvement in collaboration, including sharing of personnel and resources as well as learning from each other by sharing knowledge, showed higher effects of collaboration, which turned out to be a key dimension in effective collaboration (Hardy, Phillips and Lawrence 2003). Findings presented that high level of involvement and embeddedness together appeared to be positively associated with creating new knowledge and the distribution of it through collaboration. Moreover, highly embedded collaborations alone had an impact on increasing the organizations influence in the local network. In other words, collaboration helps organizations attain resources and skills as well as helps to pool resources and develop ways to solve social problems, which is not possible internally in an organization (Hardy, Phillips and Lawrence 2003). Moreover, interorganizational collaboration can result in creating new knowledge instead of sharing knowledge that exists as well as have an effect on bringing some organizations to the front and it can be a means to uphold or increase power in other organizations (Hardy, Phillips and Lawrence 2003).

A literature review, by Majchrzak, Järvenpää and Bagherzadeh (2014), on 22 qualitative case studies in the context of interorganizational collaborations found that six different characteristics change during an interorganizational collaboration; goal, contract frame, interaction style between the collaborating organizations (competition/cooperation) and decision-making control, organizational structure as well as assembly of actors involved in the collaboration. The findings indicate that collaborations with successful outcomes experienced more changes in characteristics during collaboration, which were proactively initiated following differences in interests, organizational cultures and practices between the organizations, and more complex feedback loops which affected other collaboration characteristics during the collaboration process (Majchrzak, Järvenpää and Bagherzadeh 2014).

A study by Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2000) studied the dynamics of institutional fields in the context of interorganizational collaboration from previous literature. The authors state that their meaning of institution is the cultural rules and resources that are often used as patterns of

behavior and interpreting social activity in organizations. The study focused on “the role of institutional fields as a source of rules and resources for collaboration, and on the role of collaboration in the reproduction, innovation and translation of rules and resources within and between institutional fields” and through the findings developed a theoretical framework. The findings of this study show that the terms and concepts of the social processes in the collaborations are taken from the institutional fields of the respective organizations, and the dominant organizations of a collaboration have more formal authority, resources and discursive legitimacy and they determine the most influential rules and resources of the collaboration structures. It is stated that

the greater the asymmetry in power relations within the collaboration, the more pronounced we expect this effect to be: in cases where very high-power organizations collaborate with very low-power organizations, we would expect to see the collaboration instituted along lines clearly drawn from the institutional fields to which the high-power organizations belong. (Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy 2000, pp 33)

Furthermore, the study finds that institutional rules and resources structure the collaboration and which for it is important to examine those patterns in the institutional field, as well as that collaboration enables interorganizational networks, structures of domination and the production and reproduction of rules and resources of institutional fields which form the structure. Additionally, collaboration enhances inclusion for actors to be a part of developing and influencing the direction of development (Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy 2000). Moreover, results found that the relationship of collaboration and the dynamics of institutional fields is shaped by the role of power, and while power is seen as a critical factor to collaborations, this framework presents that power can bridge these two together and have an impact on the collaboration process depending on what kind of specific power relationship they hold (Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy 2000).

3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework consists of theories such as Civil Society Participation, Framework of Successful Interorganizational Collaboration and Power. These concepts will be elaborated in this section.

3.1 Civil Society Participation

According to Nanz, Steffek and Kissling (2008), civil society participation means giving individual non-state actors in communities a voice and including them in decision-making processes and political debates in international governance. They argue that by including civil society, interests, needs and challenges of local stakeholders gets communicated to global levels. Furthermore, civil society participation enables policy choices to be public scrutiny for local people to be able to contribute in international governance. Civil society actors gather and share information, as well as critical assessments, about global governance that makes civil society and the media able to contribute in political debate (Nanz, Steffek and Kissling 2008, Nanz and Steffek 2004). Nanz and Steffek (2004) suggest, that the creation of a public sphere involves a big role from civil society actors since they hold the potential to work between international organizations and global citizenry. In addition to this, they state that civil society actors bring the issues of citizens to the deliberations of policy-making in global institutions and empower marginalized groups in order to include their voices as well in global decision-making.

Nanz and Steffek (2004) argue, that international governance is not transparent and its processes are very distanced from citizens. Additionally, they state that it is “dominated by diplomats, bureaucrats and functional specialists” (pp.317). They also demonstrate that international governance everyday negotiations about norms and standards take place behind closed doors elusive to the public. There is not enough public debate or adequate information reachable for citizens about their policy choices, and the representatives at global organizations are not democratically elected by the people, and therefore, international organizations are not seen as democratic (Nanz and Steffek 2004). This being the case, civil society participation upholds democratic principles by ensuring that a variety of voices, perspectives, and interests are represented in global decision-making processes. This inclusivity promotes legitimacy and accountability in the actions and policies of international organizations like the UN, as well as help build the capacity of civil society in different countries and bridge the gap between international policies and the people they affect. Therefore, civil society participation is considered as an essential concept in this research of fostering collaboration between the UN and CSOs.

3.2 Framework of Successful Interorganizational Collaboration

This framework was formed through a study of grounded theory that analyzed “the macro and micro dynamics of interorganizational collaboration” (Thongkhong-Park 2001, 3). The study derived from the need to discover a theory that combines both micro and macro levels in an analysis, where components such as individuals, group, organizations, groups of organizations and dyads behavior as well as relationships in the organizational context are examined. Additionally, the study was ought to find out how these relationships affect outcomes. (Thongkhong-Park 2001).

According to the framework by Thongkhong-Park (2001), successful collaboration between two organizations emerges from external environmental forces, such as mutual benefit, that motivate both stakeholders to collaborate. Both organizations need to agree to form a link and share their resources in order to achieve the goal. After that, there are two phases that the process of collaboration needs to achieve for the collaboration to be successful. The first phase consists of internal organizational factors within the organizations and among individuals involved; commitment, honesty, inclusion, support, cooperation, positive attitude, respect, relationships, trust and communication. The second phase involves conditions that advance collaboration, and it is the implementation phase of the collaboration process. The factors that need to be present in this phase are inclusion, support, cooperation, trust, communication, accountability, appreciation, coordination, organization, authority, goals and sharing of resources. This phase requires active commitment from and inclusion of middle managers and the front line staff (Thongkhong-Park 2001). Lastly, the attributes that need to be present in successful collaboration are positive attitude, respect, relationships, trust, communication, accountability, people, competence, planned process, common vision, shared goals and values, structure, clear tasks as well as customer satisfaction (Thongkhong-Park 2001).

Additionally to these specific factors that are critical in the different process phases, there are also certain unique factors that need to be present in different linkages of these phases together (Thongkhong-Park 2001), which are shown in figure 1 below, that also represents the whole successful collaboration process:

Framework of Successful Interorganizational Collaboration

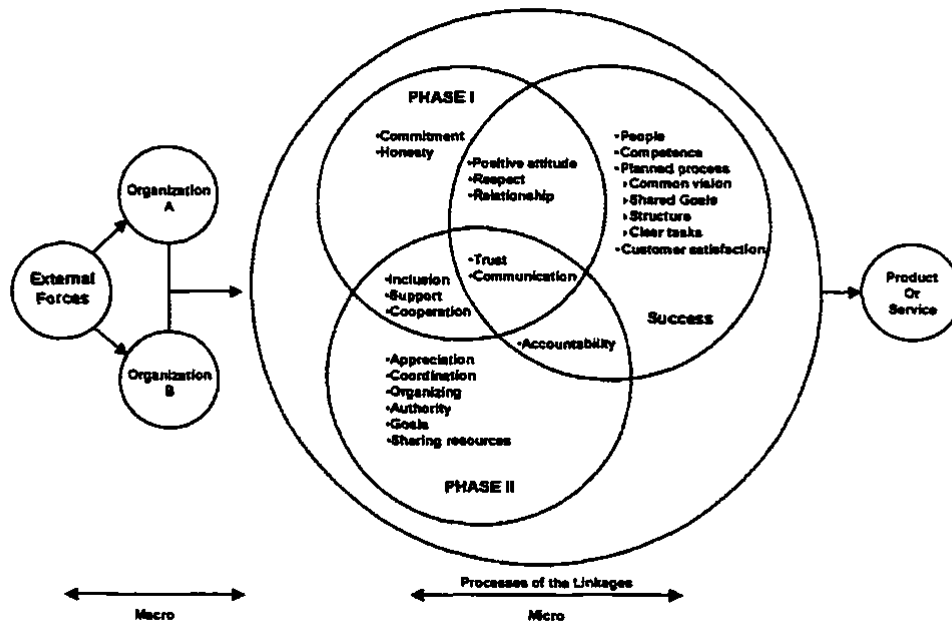


Figure 1
(Thongkhong-Park 2001, pp. 98)

This respective framework is based on a grounded theory study that seeks to understand the dynamics of interorganizational collaboration both at the micro and macro levels. It emphasizes the importance of various factors and phases in achieving successful collaboration between two organizations. In essence, it underscores that successful collaboration is not a one-time event but a process that involves various stages and requires the active involvement and commitment of individuals, organizations, and external factors. It also highlights the importance of trust, communication, and shared goals in building and maintaining collaborative relationships (Thongkhong-Park 2001). In the context of research about collaboration between the UN and CSOs, this framework provides a theoretical foundation for studying the dynamics of such partnerships. It can help understand the factors that contribute to successful collaboration and possibly guide the development of strategies to enhance cooperation between these two sectors. Additionally, it offers insights into the challenges that may arise, which can be valuable to improve UN-CSO collaboration for the benefit of global development and humanitarian efforts.

3.3 Power

According to Tew (2006), power as a concept can be understood as a social relation that brings out social or individual change, and it can have either a negative or a positive impact. The first two approaches to the concept power are ‘power to’ and ‘power over’. ‘Power to’ indicates an individual's power over their own will regardless of other people's opinions, whereas ‘power over’ refers to institutionalized authorities holding power over others, which is naturally vested in them by traditional societal power hierarchies (Tew 2006). Additionally,

Tew also suggests, that power can be seen in a form of protecting and safeguarding the vulnerable groups from power. However, ‘power to’ is most often seen in the dominant Western masculine perspective and does not resonate so much with those less privileged in terms of social and economic resources (Tew 2006). Furthermore, Tew states that the term empowerment is used to describe mutual support and actions taken collectively by disadvantaged and marginalized groups. However, Tew demonstrates another understanding of the term as the phenomenon of an individual rising out of a position of “helplessness and confusion to (re)claim control over their lives and discover their own ‘inner strengths’” (34). Another essential point is, that a challenge with the term is that people in a relatively more powerful position defining empowerment for those who may be in relatively powerless positions. Moreover, there can be seen inequality, discrimination or exclusion in systematic social relations, due to which most common social science has avoided the issue of power (Tew 2006). Tew adds that a critical perspective questions the legitimation of holding power on behalf of a whole society and whether there is any social consensus to that. Moreover, the dominance of authorities holding power over others creates structural “them-us” divisions which legitimates the action for them. This gives power a more of an oppressive notion where dominant groups can benefit from their superiority by economic exploitation, cultural imperialism and even in terms of actual or threatened violence (Tew 2006).

A third, and more reciprocal, approach to the concept of power is ‘power together’ (Tew 2006). This strategy creates solidarity, mutual and emotional support and understanding or resistance towards oppression exercised by dominant groups. It brings people together and appreciates difference and multiple viewpoints in mutual challenge and brings out a co-operative type of power. However, this approach has its challenges regarding people with disabilities, as well as the reaction it can create in dominant groups in order for them to stay in their positions, which can drive these groups together in order to create an “exclusive club” with restricting access (Tew 2006). Subsequently, according to Tew, “lower down hierarchies of *power over* may, in turn, act collectively to exclude those even further down” (pp.39). This phenomenon can be seen from the level of playground children to macro-organizations of society (Tew 2006).

Figure 2 represents the matrix of different power relations described above.

	Power over	Power together
Productive modes of power	Protective power Deploying power in order to safeguard vulnerable people and their possibilities for advancement	Co-operative power Collective action, sharing, mutual support and challenge – through valuing commonality <i>and</i> difference
Limiting modes of power	Oppressive power Exploiting differences to enhance own position and resources at the expense of others	Collusive power Banding together to exclude or suppress ‘otherness’ whether internal or external

Figure 2
(Tew 2006, 41)

The concept of power is a multifaceted and complex aspect of social relations. The theory about different approaches to power and collaboration is important in this research because it helps understand how power works in these partnerships. It acknowledges that power can be used in different ways, such as to control or to empower, and this impacts how collaborations between the UN and CSOs play out. This theory also highlights the importance of working together and supporting each other in these collaborations. It's valuable for this research because it helps see the big picture, including the challenges and opportunities in these collaborations, and how they can make a positive impact on society.

4 Methodology

The research design of this study is presented this chapter. The chosen methodology approaches for the research as well as its data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical considerations will be reflected upon in this part to provide with a holistic understanding of the whole research process.

4.1 Research Design

The focus of this research is on the experience of collaboration between the United Nations and Civil Society Organizations and its challenges, and the research is carried out by using a mixed methods approach of both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Mixed methods research approach combines both qualitative and quantitative research. The combination approach used in this study is completeness, which refers to using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to achieve a more complete answer to research questions by filling the gaps left by one method. This approach is often used if there are challenges in accessing to certain groups of people (Bryman 2012), which UN and CSO workers are. The quantitative method was applied by having multiple-choice questions and a Likert scale, and the qualitative method was applied by adding open-ended comment sections after each quantitative question. The open-ended comment sections were chosen as a qualitative method, because it can add depth to the answers and complement the quantitative responses (Bryman 2012).

The data-collection in this research has been carried out by using a survey with qualitative open-ended comment sections after each question, which for the method is classified as QUAN→qual (Bryman 2012). This classification means that the main data-collection approach is quantitative, however, the qualitative approach is used as a secondary method to bring out more depth out of the quantitative questions (Bryman 2012). It could be argued that this is a QUAN+QUAL classified approach, which means that both data were collected simultaneously (Bryman 2012), as they were in this research. However, since the qualitative data is dependent on the quantitative questions, and not collected with separate questions, the QUAN→qual is the applicable classification in this study. Although there are arguments that mixed method approaches should not be classified into one leading research strategy, the quantitative method is clearly leading in this study, since all the questions in the survey are quantitative, and the (qualitative) open-ended comment sections are only an addition to the quantitative sections.

However, there are arguments against mixed method research, which of one is that research methods are always committed to either an epistemological or ontological approach, and they can not be intertwined. It is argued that both approaches have different procedures in terms of epistemology and ontology, and they are not complementary. Another argument about mixed methods is that both qualitative and quantitative research are separate paradigms, and an epistemological (or ontological) approach can not be combined between two different paradigms, and thus mixed methods is an impossible approach for research. (Bryman 2012)

Having said that, the epistemological orientation of this research is critical realism, which recognizes the reality of the social world and natural order as well as distinguishes reality from human perspectives that can be observed (Bryman 2012). For example, in order to change the social world, we need to understand the underlying structures and circumstances that are the cause of the current status (Bryman 2012). This is an objective approach to the research, which is realized in this study through the survey method. The self-completion survey brings out objectivist worldviews (Bryman 2012) because the survey questions have multiple choice answers, which does not give room to any subjective reflection in the answers. Simultaneously the survey in this research also approaches a natural science model (Bryman 2012), by having open ended comment sections, which brings us to the ontological approach. A constructionist ontology, as Bryman (2012) describes it, challenges pre-existing characteristics and structures in organizations and their cultures, and instead implies that social phenomena are constantly revised and can be flexible. In other words, people shape the social rules naturally through interactions, shared beliefs and consensus together, leading to constantly shaping the culture and dynamics. Therefore, the ontological orientation of this research is constructionism, since both entities in question have the freedom to shape their inner cultures and models and are not necessarily tied to hierarchies by being independent organizations, and this study aims to find out what the dynamic between these entities is and what existing procedures they have based on peoples experiences. Hence, this research is committed to a constructionist ontological approach.

A deductive study is based on testing a hypothesis that has been set at the beginning of the research, whereas an inductive study examines the findings in order to come up with new knowledge or theory (Bryman 2012). This research is not based on a hypothesis, but research questions, therefore, I am not testing whether previous knowledge is true or false, but rather finding out what new knowledge the experiences of the participants can provide through the lens of the theories. Therefore, an inductive approach is applied in this research by using research questions to find out more about the topic. Additionally, the knowledge from the theoretical framework of successful interorganizational collaborations was used as a guide to conduct the survey for the data collection.

4.2 Data Collection

The data collection method used for this research was an online survey produced with Microsoft Forms. I chose a self-completion questionnaire as the data collection method since that enables participants to answer the questionnaire themselves (Bryman 2012), and online is a convenient way to reach participants from different countries. The survey questions were in the form of multiple-choice questions, one Likert scale and open-ended comment sections after each question. Likert scales are used to investigate attitudes of a certain object in the form of a statement that is asked to be rated in a five- or seven-point scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” (Bryman 2012). In this case the seven-point scale was chosen for the scale to receive a more specific outcome. A survey was chosen as the data collection method since the data was to be gathered from several different people worldwide who were asked the same questions. Therefore, for example interviews, would have given more depth in the answers, but the likelihood to get responses from several different people would have been lower. The questions in the survey are divided in different indicators, however each indicator has only one question in order to keep the survey broad but short.

The questions for the survey arose from the framework of successful interorganizational collaboration (Thongkhong-Park 2001). However, acknowledging that there may be important information left out from the multiple-choice questions, the open comment fields held an opportunity to fill those gaps. The respondents of the data collection were civil society organization workers as well as United Nations workers. As for the sampling, a mixture of snowball and purposive sampling technique was utilized. Bryman (2012) describes snowball sampling as in which the researcher chooses a small sampling group where the participants can propose others who are relevant to take part in the research. He also states, that this sampling technique is used in survey research when probability sampling is nearly impossible and trying to sample hard-to-reach populations (Bryman 2012). However, the sampling also has attributes of purposive sampling, since I chose CSOs who either do collaborate with the UN or who I think should collaborate with the UN to make sure that the ones sampled are relevant to answer the research questions (Bryman 2012), and therefore the sampling is not fully random. Snowball sampling was chosen because it was to be assumed that reaching these organizations and receiving respondents to the survey would not be an easy task and the risk of failing to receive enough respondents was at issue. The survey was sent out to organizations in several different countries in all continents in the world, and choosing the organizations was based on whether they cooperate with CSOs or UN. The criteria to be able to answer the survey was to be a worker in either a CSO or a UN entity that is independent from the state. The participants were invited to take part in a one-time anonymous and voluntary survey.

The survey was sent to 1035 respondents via email. The respondents email addresses were found on a national or an international website for each organization. All email addresses, to which the survey was sent out, did not work, however those emails are not included in the 1035 emails. Each respondent received a cover letter in the email, including a description of the research, informing about confidentiality and data usage as well as contact details of the researcher and thesis supervisor, together with a link to the online survey. It is to be noted that the content of the cover letter had a mistake, where some of the information was repeated twice, which I only noticed when it had already been sent out. The content was not fixed after it was noticed to maintain honesty of the research throughout. Reminders were sent to each respondent and the data for this research was collected between April 2022 and December 2022.

4.3 Data Analysis

The data set in this research includes both quantitative and qualitative data. However, the whole data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which is one of the most common approaches regarding qualitative data based on Bryman (2012), where data is categorized into different themes. Although, according to Bryman (2012), thematic analysis has its challenges in respect to the identification of the themes, which can be difficult, and that the analysis can be found unreliable since it is subjective and open to interpretation. However, in the survey of this research, the survey questions were already categorized based on the indicators and therefore the coding of themes in the analysis derives from the indicators in the survey. However, the participants brought up some new themes in the comment sections, which have also been added to the categorization. Additionally, some themes have been divided into subthemes. Thematic coding was chosen as the data analysis method for this data because the survey questions were already divided into themes of characteristics, and each question is based on the characteristics in the chosen theoretical framework, which for the questions could be individually analyzed in

order to find out whether those characteristics are realized in the collaboration between UN and CSOs.

After the coding was clear and the findings were presented, each theme was discussed and reflected upon theories individually in the end of each section, and both the quantitative and qualitative data was analyzed in tandem in order to complement each other. Moreover, the findings include anonymous tables and quotations from the respondents to show the number of responses to each question and their capacity as well as what the respondents have commented regarding each question. In the end of the findings there is a summary of the findings and analysis.

4.4 Trustworthiness

According to Bryman (2012) and Heikkilä (2014), the trustworthiness of a quantitative research and its quality is assessed by validity and reliability. Firstly, reliability evaluates whether the results of a research are repeatable, and a requirement for that is that the sample is large enough to be representative. Reliability also measures accuracy and faultlessness (Bryman 2012, Heikkilä 2014). Validity, on the other hand, assesses if the research has measured what it was supposed to measure (Bryman 2012), excludes systemic errors, has a high response rate and produces averagely correct results, and validity must also be ensured with questions that are unambiguous and cover the whole research problem (Heikkilä 2014).

The measures used in this research arose from the framework of successful interorganizational collaboration, and, as mentioned, the questions in the survey were formed based on the theoretical framework, which upholds the consistency of the research throughout. Previous research by Hardy, Phillips and Lawrence (2000; 2003) as well as Majchrzak, Järvenpää and Bagherzadeh (2014), that was presented in the literature review, have found similar attributes in interorganizational collaborations as the framework used in this respective research and its survey questions. This gives validation to the research since a framework, that measures what the research question seeks for, was used to create the survey questions. Additionally, the sample was collected as diversely as possible in order to represent the respective entities as widely as possible and ensures measurement reliability. However, although responses came diversely from several different countries and continents, it is recognized that a major limitation of this research is that the response rate is not large in order to be representative enough, which hinders the data to represent a holistic experience of the collaboration between the CSO and the UN representatives. Moreover, an online self-completion survey increases the risk of misinterpretations of the survey questions (Heikkilä 2014). Furthermore, in order to motivate responders to take the survey, the attempt was to keep the survey as short as possible while collecting as much information as possible, which led to some responses being unclear. For example, answers indicating that sharing knowledge is realized between CSOs and the UN does not tell us what kind of knowledge is shared and whether it is a deep understanding about something or superficial knowledge such as statistics and facts.

Having said that, since reliability and validity are concepts relevant especially to quantitative research (Bryman 2012), and this being a mixed method study, the quality of this research can not be measured by only utilizing these concepts, and the qualitative data is an invaluable addition to this research.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

When conducting research several ethical considerations should be taken into account to ensure the well-being and rights of the participants as well as the integrity and safety of the research. The participants and researchers must be protected from harm and wrongs during the whole research (Swedish Research Council 2017). The main areas to consider when conducting ethical social research are harming participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception. The harmful consequences that research can cause participants if conducting research unethically are for example anxiety, stress, delusions, affected intellectual development, fear of sexual preference revelation or revealing participants identity (Bryman 2012). However, not all the forementioned risks were at issue in this research.

To make sure that the participants rights in this research are taken into consideration, the survey that was sent out included a cover letter. The cover letter stated the research topic and purpose, as well as information about the survey itself. In addition, the cover letter also let them know that participants remain anonymous, and the confidentiality of the data is guaranteed, as well as that participation is strictly voluntary. It was also stated in the letter that participants can refuse or cancel their participation at any time, and that the research findings will be published in the thesis and may be used for other research purposes. To ensure the confidentiality, participants were also reminded to not include their name anywhere in the survey. Moreover, the cover letter stated clearly, that by filling and sending the questionnaire they will give their consent to participate in the research. This ensures that informed consent has been received by participants and they are respected in terms of their privacy and the given information, which reduces the risk to harm participants. Contact details of the research student and supervisor was also shared in the cover letter. For ethical reasons, the names of the organizations were not revealed anywhere in this paper in order to ensure full anonymity of the participants. Additionally, the same survey was sent out to all participants and the data was analyzed objectively, which guarantees fair and equitable treatment towards participants. A lack of ensured anonymity can, for example, cause uncertainty about revealing critical or negative information about the entity they are representing and being able to truthfully express their opinions, which can subsequently cause stress and anxiety to the participator.

Deception is what occurs when the researcher presents the research as something that it is not, to for example limit the participants understanding of it, in order to receive certain type of responses (Bryman 2012). This was avoided by clearly explaining the research purpose, estimated length of taking the survey, and how the data is going to be used, in the cover letter.

Research can also cause harm to the researcher, which for it is crucial to considerate the possibility of physical or emotional harm while conducting research and collecting data. The data collection was carried out online, with no other contact with the participants other than sending out the informed email with the survey link, which for the researcher was not being harmed either physically or emotionally. However, by contacting people via email and giving them also contact details of the supervisor, with consent, in the cover letter, there was the risk to receive harm via email to the researcher and supervisor, or via phone to the supervisor. On the other hand, offering contact details ensures that participants are able to question the participation and receive more information about it if they feel it is necessary in order to take part, which balances out the risks and benefits of the research in order to achieve the goal (Swedish Research Council 2017).

5 Findings and Discussion

Figure 3 below demonstrates the number of respondents of the survey.

RESPONDENTS	UN	CSO
Female	17	6
Male	9	10
Prefer not to answer	1	
Total	27	16

Figure 3

The respondents of the survey are from all continents and different countries in the world. The findings below are divided in different themes and subthemes based on the response categories, and they are discussed and reflected upon the theories in each section. Additionally, each section starts with presenting a figure from the survey results to demonstrate the findings. The first theme, objectives, shows only one figure (4) and the subthemes are different than themes that are in the figure, because the subthemes include themes that came up from participant comments. However, in other sections the subthemes have their own figures.

5.1 Objectives

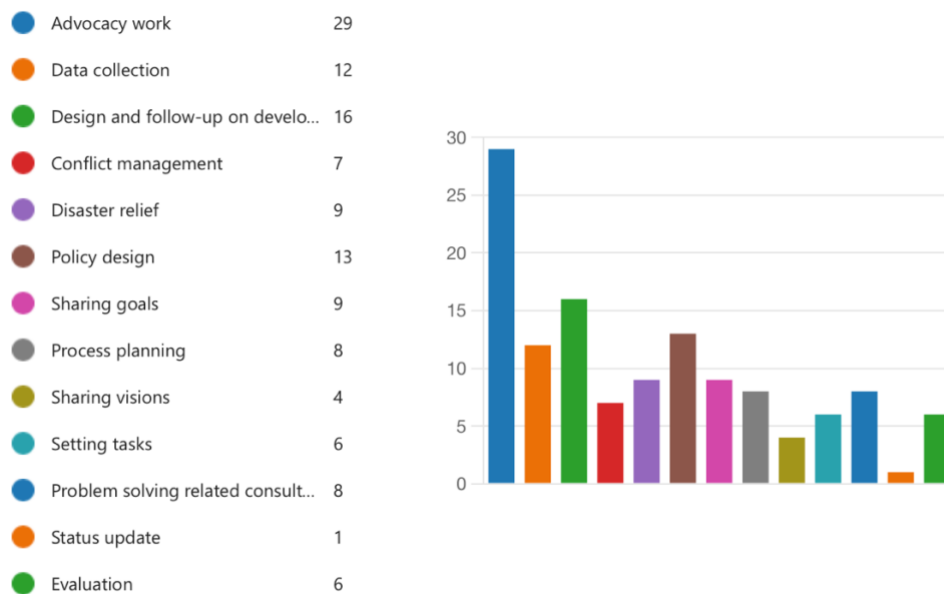


Figure 4

5.1.1 Advocacy

When asked about the objectives of the collaboration between CSOs and the UN “advocacy work” was the most common objective in the quantitative data collection receiving 29

responses from participants, as shown in figure 4. Additionally, “advocacy work” is also mentioned in the comment field to be the main objective of the interaction between CSO and the UN. One respondent stated that “CSOs are filling important gaps in areas where government services are insufficient, e.g. services to migrant workers. Secondly, the grassroots level information that CSOs have on challenges faced by migrant workers are important for well-informed and evidence-based policy making, so their inputs in policy advocacy and consultations on labour migration policy are really important”.

5.1.2 Project implementation

According to participants from the comments, most of the interaction has regarded project implementation. One participant responded that the objectives include “Implementation of the regional level activities to support beneficiaries where the CSOs were Implementing partners“, as other participants state that “In my experience, the main form of interaction with partners is as implementers of programme activities” and “the majority has been about actual project implementation”. One participant stated that CSOs assist the organization in project delivery.

5.1.3 Service provision

Providing services is another objective that stands out from the data, some participants statements being that “The thrust of collaboration between CSOs and UN is to reach out to the unserved population and to bring issues related to inclusiveness and equality” as well as “Partnership for CSOs to provide services”. Another participant responded that the collaboration is “Mainly focused on sensitizing host communities and working with the UN to better respond to real issues faced by refugees on the ground, in other words people focused rather than policy based”.

Discussion:

Thongkhong-Park (2001) states that successful collaboration between two organizations is dependent on mutual benefit. The most common objective that participants brought up for the collaboration of CSOs and the UN is “advocacy work”, which in other words means giving support. An approximately even amount, in relation to the total amount of the representatives, of CSO and UN representatives have chosen this objective in the survey, which indicate that it is a mutual understanding. Through advocacy work, CSOs can contribute to policies by serving information to the UN from the grassroot level. Project implementation and service provision are also key objectives in the collaborative efforts. However, there is a lack of setting tasks and sharing goals and visions together, as can be seen in figure 3, which are important attributes to achieve successful collaboration, as well as planned process (Thongkhong-Park 2001). Setting goals and tasks as well as sharing visions together with both collaborating organizations, enables inclusion of both entities to come together in important matters of communities or societies. Planning the process, according to Thongkhong-Park (2001) is necessary in a successful collaboration, which however does not look to be very common in this respective collaboration. Additionally, the objectives raise the question of how project implementation and service provision can practically be made without setting the tasks together. Moreover, it raises a concern of whether the UN is setting the tasks for CSOs to implement. This phenomenon can be seen as an act of “Power over”, according to Tew (2006), where institutionalized authorities hold the power, whereas “Power together” would be collective action and sharing, such as sharing goals and visions.

5.2 Meeting Structure

5.2.1 Forms of meetings

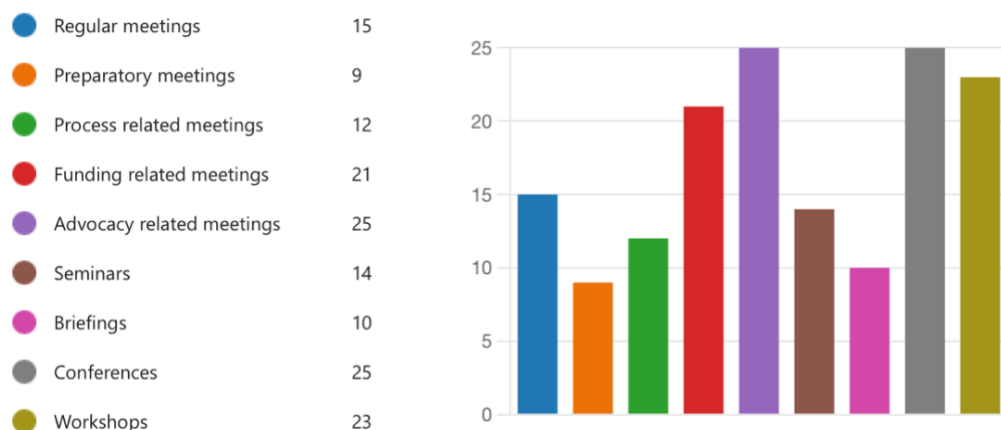


Figure 5

The quantitative data in figure 5 shows that the meeting formats of the collaboration varies a lot. The top four forms of meeting are advocacy related meetings, conferences, workshops and funding related meetings. A comment from a participant regarding meetings was that “During the [...] meetings, other CSOs may participate as OBSERVERS only, where they are allowed one period at the opening for giving a statement, but do not speak for the rest of the discussion [...]. This is to ensure that they do not replace trade unions, which are the true representatives of workers.”

5.2.2 Frequency

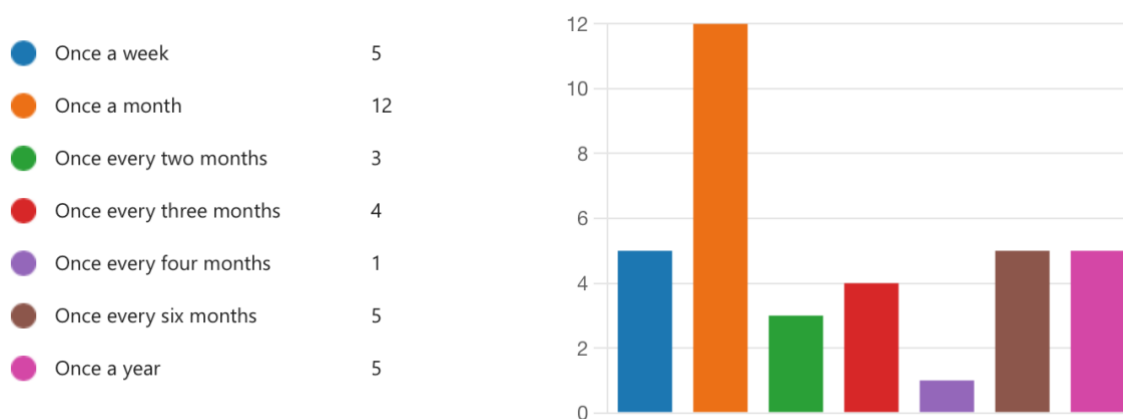


Figure 6

Collaboration meetings are most often carried out once a month. Although, figure 6 indicates also experiences of having meetings once a year, once every six months, once every three or two months, as well as once a week. However, participants state that the meeting frequency depends on the “situation”, the “objectives”, the “nature of implementation agreement” and the “type of engagement”. In addition, a participant stated that “Not many regular meetings, which should take place”.

5.2.3 Length of meetings



Figure 7

As is seen in figure 7, the length of the meetings appear to most often be 1-2 hours. However, participants have responded that some meetings can go on for a few days or even 1 or 2 weeks. One participant stated that “The less they meet the longer are the meetings. Irregularities are more evident when conversations are had”.

Based on one participant, there is experience of CSOs participating in collaboration meetings in the role of observers only, which does not support the attributes of communication, sharing of goals and visions, cooperation, inclusion (Thongkhong-Park 2001), nor giving a voice to civil society in international governance by hearing their interests, needs and challenges that appear in the grassroot level (Steffek, Kissling and Nanz 2008, Nanz and Steffek 2004). The participants statement “During the [...] meetings, ...they are allowed one period at the opening for giving a statement...” gives the impression that the participation of CSOs is controlled by the UN organization, which indicates oppressive power (Tew 2006). However, though assumptions can not be drawn from only one response, there is a likelihood that the UN involves CSOs in the meetings, but the question is how much room are CSOs given to participate in those meetings. However, this may be dependent on the context of the organization because there was only one participant expressing this experience. On the other hand, the findings show that the entities meet most often once a month, which indicates consistency, and since some collaborations last for several days, I think it is likely that CSOs most often do participate as more than observers.

5.3 Agenda

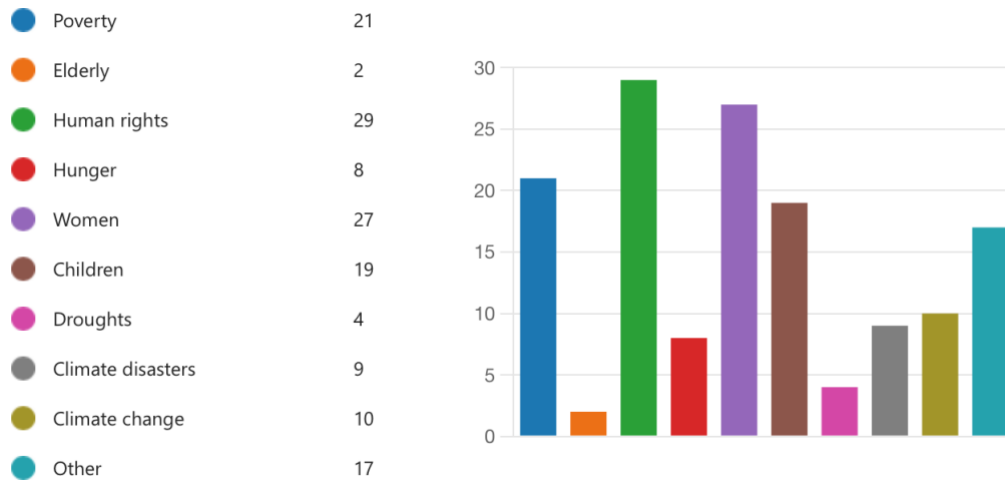


Figure 8

The findings in figure 8 indicate that the most common agenda for the collaboration meetings is human rights, following women, poverty and children. Additionally, in the comments several participants have added migration as an agenda for their collaboration.

The fact that the most common agenda for the collaboration meetings is human rights shows that both CSOs and the UN share the same goals and have a common vision of the outcome in the collaboration, which is one of the crucial attributes in order to achieve successful collaboration (Thongkhong-Park 2001). Also, the figure indicates that both entities share somewhat same visions for the agenda, since the contrast between the chosen options and less chosen options is high. This can mean that they share the same agendas and goals.

5.4 Communication and Outcome Documents

Communication:

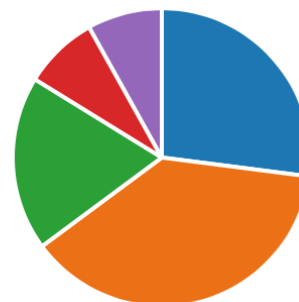
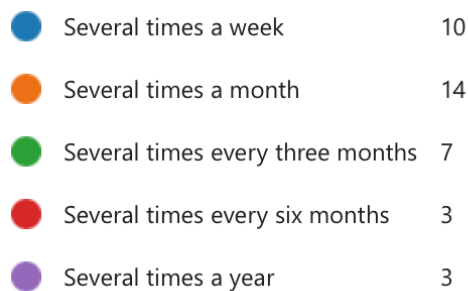


Figure 9

Outcome documents:

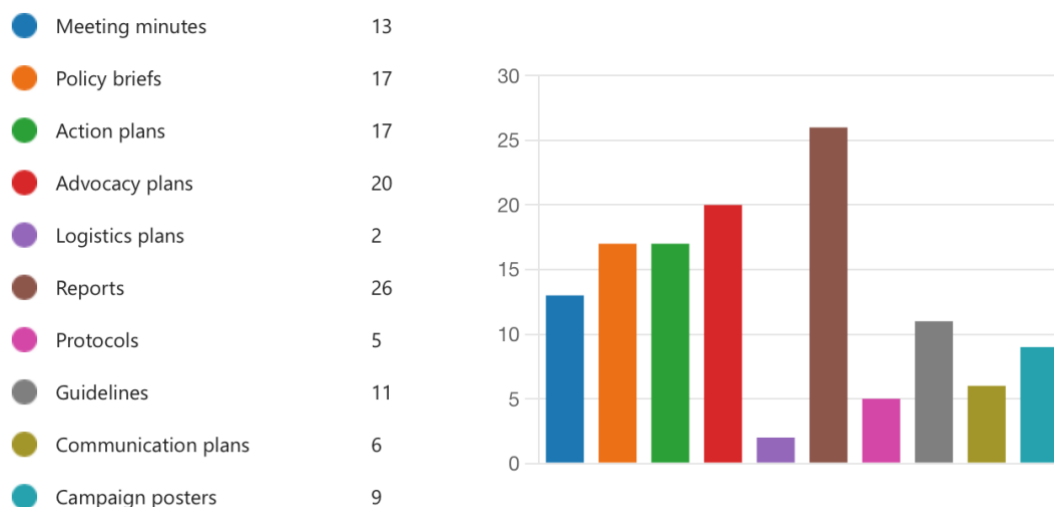


Figure 10

Based on the results in figure 9, CSOs and the UN communicate most often several times a month or several times a week. Fewer respondents have answered that they communicate several times every three months or less. The comments from participants include statements as “Actually, quite rarely” and “several times DAILY”. Others state that they communicate depending on “... the issue and immediate concerns” and “... when necessary”. It is clear, that the communication between the UN and CSOs is more often than rarely, although two participant comments express quite opposite experiences while others express that the communication takes place when needed. Good communication can ensure commitment and trust between entities by showing the collaborating partner that the interest and effort is reciprocated, while bad communication can lead to unreliability and lack of motivation. Having said that, it is difficult to be sure whether there is enough communication based on this data, since the responses make a somewhat neutral average.

Furthermore, figure 10 shows that outcome documents from the meetings between CSO and the UN are mostly reports, advocacy plans, action plans and policy briefs. However, it can be seen in the same figure that also meeting minutes, guidelines, campaign posters and communication plans are produced in the outcome of meetings, but not as often. The least common outcome documents are protocols and logistic plans. Participants have additionally stated in the comment sections, that reports about activities and contracts are also among outcome documents of meetings. One respondent commented that “the outcomes of such meetings may also include a revised draft-law, draft strategy, MoU or a visionary document, etc.”. I would say that outcome documents could potentially strengthen the collaboration by having material about the discussions and plans from meetings, however, to bring the thoughts and plans into action it is essential to coordinate tasks between the UN and CSOs. By seeing that there are actions plans and advocacy plans, it is likely that coordination is achieved in the collaboration.

5.5 Shared Resources

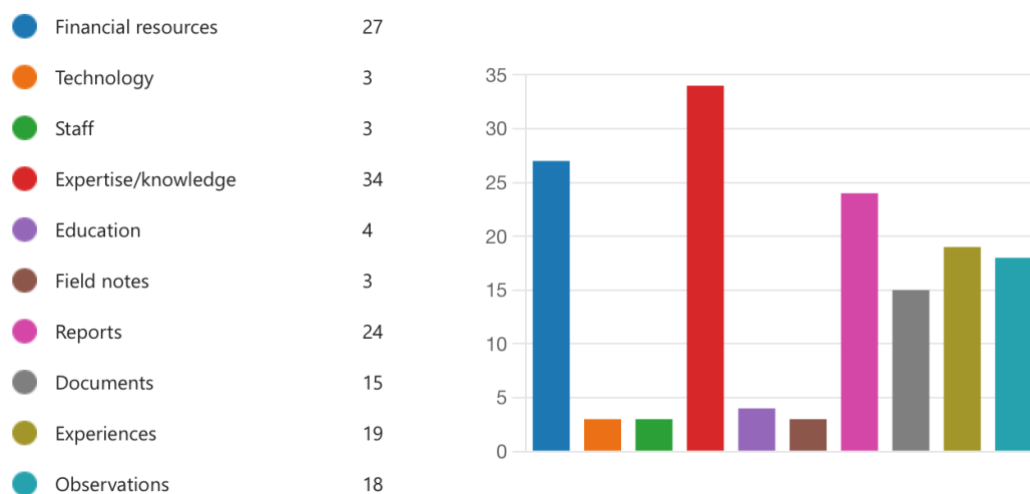


Figure 11

As for shared resources between the respective entities, figure 11 shows that the most common is expertise/knowledge, following financial resources, reports, experiences, observations and documents. A UN representative responded that “We provide financial support and expert advice/backstopping to CSOs. They deliver services to migrant workers on our behalf”. Another participant added “Time” as a shared resource.

Based on Thongkhong-Park (2001), sharing resources is a needed attribute in the preliminary phase of the successful collaboration, meaning that sharing resources between organizations enables the possibilities for a successful collaboration. These findings indicate that CSOs and the UN share most commonly expertise and knowledge, however it is unclear if this resource is shared evenly from both sides, or whether it is only shared from one entity to the other. Additionally, it is not clear what type of expertise/knowledge is shared. In the event, that the common practice is sharing expertise and knowledge from both organizations, this would indicate appreciation between the entities and the openness to learn from each other, which according to Thongkhong-Parks (2001) theory needs to be present for the collaboration to be successful. Moreover, as they point out in the theory, sharing resources in general is essential to advance collaboration. Additionally, with the knowledge gained from the literature in this study, it has been strongly pointed out that what CSOs have to offer is their expertise and knowledge about people’s needs from the grass-root level, which is also what would democratize the UNs decision-making process as stated in the civil society participation theory by Nanz, Steffek and Kissling (2008).

This practice would show a power together position between the entities, which is an equal and positive type of power position where neither parts are oppressed in any way by power imbalances (Tew 2006). In other words, there would be balanced power shared equally to both entities.

5.6 Role of CSOs in meetings and CSOs ability to influence the UN

Role of CSOs in meetings:

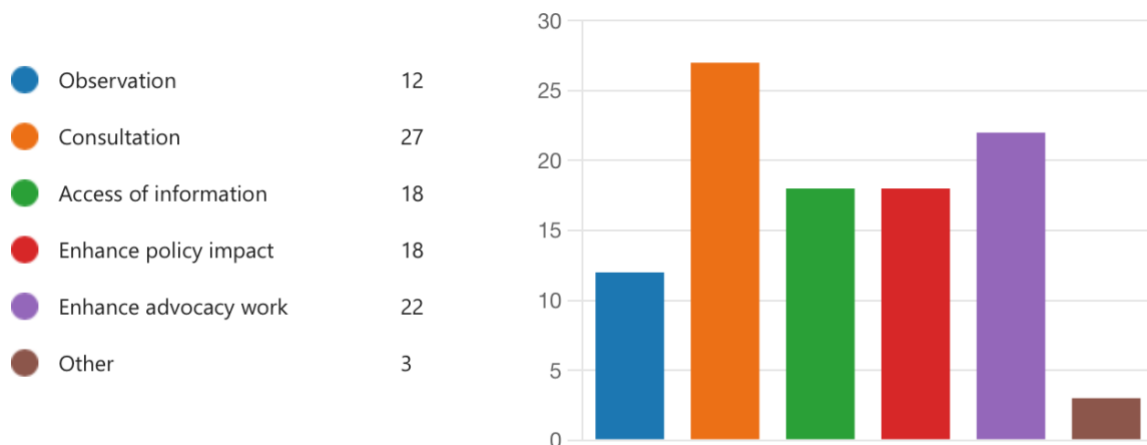


Figure 12

The findings in figure 12 indicate that the role of CSOs in meetings vary between consultation, enhancing advocacy work, enhancing policy impact, access of information and observation. However, consultation was the most common response. It shows that there is inclusion of CSOs in the processes of the UN, however, it is not clear from these findings what abilities CSOs have in these roles in terms of development, and what kind of authority or power dynamic there is in the cooperation.

CSOs ability to influence the UN:

4.21
Average Rating

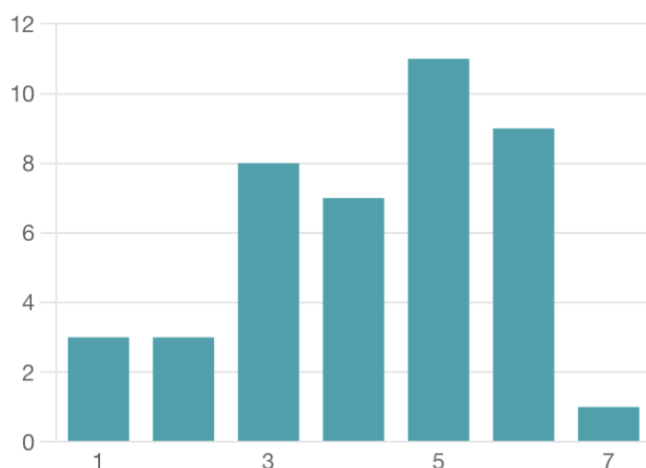


Figure 13
Likert scale

Furthermore, respondents were asked to rate how much they agree with CSOs being able to influence the UN in a Likert scale from 1 (highly disagree) to 7 (highly agree). The average rating of this scale was 4.21, which means that in average more than half of the respondents agreed with CSOs being able to influence the UN.

6 Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore the experience of the collaboration between CSOs and the UN. The objectives were to find out what the collaboration is in practice and if there are challenges to the partnership.

The findings presented in this paper are not sufficient for drawing conclusions about the collaboration between the UN and CSOs, since the representativeness is too low. This constrains the research from fully answering the research questions.

Having said that, as a researcher, I analyzed that based on current findings the existing attributes of successful collaboration that popped up, presented in the theoretical framework of successful interorganizational collaboration by Thongkhong-Park (2001), are coordination, appreciation, sharing of expertise and knowledge, goals, common vision and planned process. However, I think that the responsiveness is so low, and the results show a neutral outcome, and therefore it is not possible to draw conclusions about whether the collaboration between CSOs and the UN is successful or not.

However, the low responsive rate makes me question why so many respondents of the emails did not take part. Could it be dependent on who the researcher is, and that a student's research is not taken as seriously as if it was official research carried out by someone in a more valuable position? This could indicate a power imbalance in terms of method, which has an effect on the response rate. Or is there some insecurity in expressing opinions about the respective topic? One thought that comes to mind is that the answers in the Likert scale, while showing a somewhat neutral answer, included responses that disagreed with CSOs being able to influence the UN and challenges the idea of CSOs and UN having equal inclusion in the collaboration. And if there would be insecurity in answering to the questions, most participants chose a neutral option to avoid negative outcomes. Therefore, since there are some participants indicating that CSOs do not have much room to take part in decision-making, I would not say that they do have power to influence decisions.

As can be seen in a research presented in the literature, about an interorganizational collaboration between a CSO and a firm by Bhattacharyya and Verma (2020), it is suggested that CSOs are put in the position of being responsible of the practical work, while the firm is providing with the infrastructure. Furthermore, according to the research by Mowell (2021), there are barriers to the collaboration between the UN and CSOs, but those challenges did not manifest in this research. However, there were some individual responses, about the role of a CSO in the collaboration, that indicated that the collaboration takes more of a form of CSOs implementing the practical work and activities with people on the grassroots level, but not policy-based collaboration. With that being said, reflecting on these findings, it is likely that CSOs ability to influence the direction of the collaboration may be limited, as they are seen as more of implementing activities and projects in practice, as is also seen in the findings of this study. In that case, it could be suggested that CSOs may not be valued as politically competent, but rather only implementers in the grass-root level, which could also have an impact in their role in political decision-making. This would hinder CSOs' ability to contribute to the political sphere as well as shape policies and programs. Subsequently, this suggests that there is a power imbalance between the entities. As Tew (2006) states it,

asymmetrical power dynamics may influence how decisions are made and implemented, as well as have an overall effect on the direction of the collaboration between the entities. As a result, the collaboration may not fully harness the potential benefits of civil society participation. As stated earlier, power can be seen as either a positive or negative aspect in a collaboration and have a big impact on the social entities by either controlling or empowering. Having said that, a power over position, as observed to be likely in this collaboration, is a negative and dominating way to rule, which does not produce a democratic decision-making process where civil society can be involved.

CSOs can offer valuable knowledge and insights from the grassroots level, which could lead to more targeted and effective decisions that address the needs of the people. The observed power dynamics in the UN-CSO collaboration suggest that there may be room for improvement in terms of democratizing decision-making processes, ensuring more meaningful involvement of CSOs, and leveraging their knowledge for better outcomes. Addressing these issues could lead to more equitable and effective collaborations that truly empower and benefit communities at the grassroots level.

Having said that, it is important to consider that since this study is oriented by a constructionist ontological approach, the experiences between organizations and collaborations can vary depending on cultures, dynamics and models in different places, and how those affect the experiences. It is also noted that the reason behind lacking responses, particularly about challenges, may also be caused by the survey questions. After doing the analysis, I noticed that the questions may have been too neutral to receive any other outcome. There could have maybe been more open-ended questions than just comment fields, or ideally interviews. Therefore, I think, in addition to the population being hard to reach, the method of the research has also affected the outcome. Additionally, although the findings indicate of shared expertise and knowledge between CSOs and the UN, the research fails to give more insight into what kind of knowledge is shared and from which party, or both? I think by sharing education, the UN could learn more about the work of CSOs and have deeper understanding about communities and marginalized groups, while CSOs could learn more about the decision-making processes, which could subsequently bring both entities to the same level of understanding and inclusion.

The theories of power and civil society participation, that have been chosen to research the experience of CSO-UN collaboration, have been on point for this study and truly reflects on the challenges that there may be, because the concepts of power and civil society participation were both seen in the literature and in the study findings. However, the results are too limited to fully demonstrate the components to be achieved in a successful collaboration based on the theoretical framework by ThongKhong-Park (2001), and I notice as a researcher that those components in a collaboration should maybe be studied in a different way.

Through this research and its literature, it has been demonstrated that collaboration between CSOs and the UN is of highly importance in order to meet the needs of human rights and social justice. In conclusion, this research can hopefully bring awareness to the existing dynamics between CSOs and the UN and its challenges to realize equal collaboration to enhance decision-making. It has been learned through the process, that it is a major challenge to reach these organizations and be able to specify what their collaboration is together. The results of this research gives a very narrow insight into the collaboration between the UN and CSOs, however, it is hoped that this topic will be studied furthermore to be able to work on closing the gap between civil society and the United Nations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Cover Letter

Survey: Information Letter

14 April 2022

Dear Respondent,

I am a graduate student in the Master's Programme Social Work and Human Rights at the University of Gothenburg. For my final thesis I am examining the collaboration between Civil Society Organizations and the United Nations. The supervisor working along this project is Dr. Deniz Kellecioglu.

Because you are either a representative of a Civil Society Organization or of the United Nations, I am inviting you to participate in this research study by completing the attached survey. It will require approximately 10 minutes. There is no compensation for responding, nor is there any known risk.

The purpose of the survey is to find out how actual collaborations have looked like in practice. The survey is sent out to a diverse group of representatives from Civil Society Organizations and the United Nations.

The participants of this survey remain anonymous, and no personal data will be saved anywhere. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you may refuse or cancel participation at any time. Additionally, the study findings will be presented in a written paper, which will be published and may be used for scientific purposes. However, no personal information of the participants will be published, and the anonymity and confidentiality of the data is guaranteed during the whole study. Please do not include your name anywhere in the survey in order to ensure that all information remains confidential.

Participation is anonymous and will remain anonymous, as no personal data will be saved anywhere. The anonymity and confidentiality of the data is guaranteed during the whole study. Please do not include names, or other identifiers in the survey, in order to ensure that all information remains confidential. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may refuse or cancel participation at any time. This work follows the ethical guidance of the Swedish Research Council (<https://www.vr.se/english/mandates/ethics.html>)

The study findings will be presented in my thesis, which will be published at the domain of the University and may be used for other research purposes. The objective is to provide useful knowledge that can be utilized to enhance the collaboration between Civil Society Organizations and the United Nations.

By filling and sending the questionnaire, you will be agreeing to participate in the above described research. **The survey:**

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=DQSIkWdsW0yxEjajBLZtrQAAAAAAYAAJOjokFUN1E0SVJQRTNBMINDOEhMVkNPVjdXRlpZSy4u>

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Mina Mirzakhani-Moghaddam
Graduate student

Contact details to the supervisor

deniz.kellecioglu@gu.se

+46317865416

Appendix 2. The survey questionnaire

The collaboration between the United Nations and Civil Society Organizations

Thank you for taking the time to take the survey!

Please choose options based on **your own experience**.

Additional reflections can be written in comment fields after each question, however it is voluntary.

This survey project abides by the principles and ethical guidance of the Swedish research council. Link: <https://www.vr.se/english/mandates/ethics.html>

Participants remain anonymous during the whole study.

For further information, please see the enclosed information letter, or contact me Mina Mirzakhani-Moghaddam at gusmirzami@student.gu.se and thesis supervisor Deniz Kellecioglu at deniz.kellecioglu@socwork.gu.se.

Date: 08.04.2022

Identification

1. Gender

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to answer

2. Which capacity are you responding from?

- As a United Nations representative
- As a Civil Society Organisation representative

3. How many years of experience do you have from that capacity?

4. Which city/cities is your experience based on in your answers?

Survey

5. In my experience, the main objectives of the collaboration between United Nations and Civil Society Organizations have been
please choose maximum 3 options

- Advocacy work
- Data collection
- Design and follow-up on development goals
- Conflict management
- Disaster relief
- Policy design
- Sharing goals
- Process planning
- Sharing visions
- Setting tasks
- Problem solving related consultation
- Status update
- Evaluation

6. Comments:

7. In my experience, the most common formats of the United Nations and Civil Society Organizations meetings are

please choose maximum 5 options

- Regular meetings
- Preparatory meetings
- Process related meetings
- Funding related meetings
- Advocacy related meetings
- Seminars
- Briefings
- Conferences
- Workshops

8. Comments:

9. In my experience, Civil Society Organizations and the United Nations meet

- Once a week
- Once a month
- Once every two months
- Once every three months
- Once every four months
- Once every six months
- Once a year

10. Comments:

11. In my experience, the average length of the meetings are

- Less than 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 3-4 hours
- 4-8 hours
- More than one working day

12. Comments:

13. The most common agendas for those meetings are

Please choose maximum 5 options

- Poverty
- Elderly
- Human rights
- Hunger
- Women
- Children
- Droughts
- Climate disasters
- Climate change
- Other

14. Comments:

15. In my experience, Civil Society Organizations and the United Nations communicate (email, phone call etc.) with each other

- Several times a week
- Several times a month
- Several times every three months
- Several times every six months
- Several times a year

16. Comments:

17. In my experience, documents produced most often as a result of the collaboration are

- Meeting minutes
- Policy briefs
- Action plans
- Advocacy plans
- Logistics plans
- Reports
- Protocols
- Guidelines
- Communication plans
- Campaign posters

18. Comments:

19. In my experience, the most common resources shared between the United Nations and Civil Society Organizations are

Please choose maximum 5 options

- Financial resources
- Technology
- Staff
- Expertise/knowledge
- Education
- Field notes
- Reports
- Documents
- Experiences
- Observations

20. Comments:

21. In my experience, the most common roles of Civil Society Organization representatives in the collaboration meetings are

Please choose top 3

- Observation
- Consultation
- Access of information
- Enhance policy impact
- Enhance advocacy work
- Other

22. Comments:

23. In your experience, to what degree do you agree with Civil Society Organizations being able to influence the United Nations?

Strongly disagree 1 - 7 Strongly agree

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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24. Comments:

25. Please provide additional reflections about the collaboration between the United Nations and Civil Society Organisation: