Accountability of Public and Private International Organizations

Steve Charnovitz

Definitions of Accountability

This chapter addresses the concept of accountability of international organizations (IOs), both public and private. A public IO is an organization of member states founded by treaty or via transgovernmental agreement. For example, the Permanent Court of Arbitration, established in 1899, has 110 states parties. A private IO is typically a non-governmental organization (NGO) containing members (such as associations or individuals) from more than one country. For example, Transparency International, established in 1993, is composed of national chapters in more than 90 countries. This article will also treat international-minded NGOs with members solely of one country, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, as a private IO. Private profit-seeking organizations, such as a transnational corporation, are not explicitly covered even though much of the analysis would be relevant to them.

The term 'international' is regularly used in world politics literature, and so that term will be used here even though a better term might be 'transnational' which signals a horizontal relationship. Although 'international' does not necessarily connote a vertical relationship, scholars and jurists frequently imagine an international plane that is above states and individuals. The hierarchic imagery is applicable to some public IOs, such as the International Court of Justice, but is less applicable to the private IOs. The global NGOs, such as the International Chamber of Commerce, are not on a higher level than states and are 'international' in a different way than say, the International Monetary Fund. The Chamber has a trademark on its moniker of 'world business organization'.

Over the past decade, there has been outpouring of scholarship on the accountability of IOs. August Reinisch (2001) was among the first to examine the accountability of public IOs. Lisa Jordan and Peter Van Tuijl (2006) were among

the first to commission a volume of scholarship on NGO accountability. There have also been a few studies that looked at the accountability of both kinds of IOs.

The alleged pathology of the unaccountable IO differs between the types. In an unaccountable intergovernmental organization (IGO) the problem is typologized to be policies favouring some states over others, improper incursions into national sovereignty or abuse of delegated authorities by international secretariats or civil servants. In an unaccountable NGO the problem is typologized to be falsely maintaining who the NGO represents or putting the special interest of the NGO over the general interest of the community. One of the earliest critics of non-state actors in the commonweal was US President George Washington who warned: 'All obstructions to the execution of the laws, all combinations and associations, under whatever plausible character, with the real design to direct, control, counteract, or awe the regular deliberation and action of the constituted authorities, are destructive of this fundamental principle, and of fatal tendency' (Washington 1796). Views about NGOs are much more positive today, but there are still concerns about how NGOs may adversely overawe the regular deliberation of constituted authorities.

In 2005 Ruth Grant and Robert Keohane postulated a useful definition of 'accountability' in world politics in an article titled 'Accountability and Abuses of Power in World Politics'. As they posit the term, accountability 'implies that some actors have a right to hold other actors to a set of standards, to judge whether they have fulfilled their responsibilities in light of these standards, and to impose sanctions if they determine that these responsibilities have not been met' (Grant and Keohane 2005: 29).

The Grant and Keohane definition is workable, but does not perfectly fit reality. On the one hand, this definition is apposite in capturing that many international actors have responsibility, that actions can be judged according to a standard and that there may be multiple judges. On the other hand, the definition is inapposite because NGOs have little tangible power and treaty organizations suffer few, if any, sanctions.[1] When an NGO has power it is usually the power of ideas and information (of course an organization like al-Qaeda does have power, that is, a power to terrorize governments). Another problem exists with the imputation of actorhood to collective bodies such as the United Nations (UN) Security Council or the World Trade Organization (WTO). In my view those organizations are more accurately characterized as a community of participants rather than as an autonomous actor.

In general a lack of accountability by an IO would not be met with a sanction. Organizational misbehaviour can be ameliorated, but few episodes come to mind where an IGO has been sanctioned in any purposeful way.[2] But IGOs are sometimes

1 The use of countermeasures against IGOs is discussed in the International Law Commission's ongoing project on the responsibility of international organizations (2009a).

2 Closest to a sanction are unilateral withdrawals by states from IOs. For example, Germany and Japan withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933. The United States withdrew from the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1977 and returned in 1980. The United States withdrew from UNESCO in 1984 and returned in 2003. These

advised to take corrective action. For example, the World Bank and many other official IOs have administrative tribunals that exercise jurisdiction over personnel matters. The UN organization that authors the most sanctions is the Security Council. Yet it is a sender of sanctions, never a receiver despite the misfeasance that may occur in the Council.

For NGOs sanctioning also is a fate rarely sustained. At the national level, of course, NGOs can be sanctioned for violations of national law (e.g. losing a tax-exempt status). With regard to the international responsibilities of an NGO, the only sanctioning that occurs is a withdrawal of consultative status granted by public IOs. Such sanctioning happens infrequently and case studies of such episodes in the UN indicate that these sanctions are often political and do not stem from the violation of a generally-agreed standard (Frouville 2008, Ripinsky and Van den Bossche 2007: 41-4).

Grant and Keohane (2005: 30) distinguish accountability mechanisms from the broader category of constraints on power, but in my view, the role of constraints on IOs is more pivotal than the threat of sanctions. The accountability mechanisms that they discuss, and the ones that will be discussed in this chapter, are remedial rather than disciplinary. They are not sticks (nor are they carrots). States, individuals and associations use the instruments of voice and exit to constrain IOs and to reshape IO behaviour and outputs when needed. A threat of sanctions is far less important than constant monitoring and communication by governments, stakeholders and journalists.

Another widely-used definition of accountability has been offered by One World Trust in its 2008 *Global Accountability Report*. Accountability 'is the process through which an organization makes a commitment to respond to and balance the needs of its diverse stakeholders in its decision making processes and activities, and delivers against this commitment' (One World Trust 2008: 10). That definition captures many of the current realities of IOs in the world economy, but omits respect for legal obligations, especially by IGOs.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds in three main sections. The first section explores the concept of IO accountability. Why should an IO be accountable and to whom? How does accountability differ as between public IOs and private IOs? The second section examines how IO accountability can be measured and discusses the concept of an accountability gap. The third section outlines some best practices in achieving IO accountability.

The Concept of Accountability of International Organizations

To determine what accountability means for an IO, one should first reflect on the nature of IOs and how they differ from states. The most salient feature of IOs is

episodes show a use of both voice and exit.

that they are voluntary (Boli and Thomas 1999b: 14). No one has to join or associate herself with an IO. Humans, governments and associations choose to do so for individual reasons ranging from the selfless to the selfish.

The voluntary nature of IOs stands in sharp contrast to the mandatory nature of the quintessential national organization, the state. States enclose and conscript citizens and use coercion to control the behaviour of nationals (and sometimes aliens). States do not seek consent of an individual before seeking to govern him. By contrast states do typically need to consent to be governed under a treaty organization.

IOs also differ from states in being international whereas states are inherently national. The nationalism of states is not necessarily a personality flaw, but the self-regarding nature of states does give them a different character than IOs. The competitive behaviour of states often means that states will try to externalize costs onto other states. By contrast the IO by its voluntary nature is a cooperative community and IOs do not generally impose negative externalities on other IOs.

The nationalism of states leads to another decisive distinction between states and IOs which is geography. States define themselves by their borders. By contrast the IO is borderless or when defined territory matters, such as in a regional organization, the IO spans contiguous borders. Even when they have exclusive membership, such as the World Health Organization, IGOs use the term 'world' in their titles because they aspire to be global in nature. NGOs began employing the word 'world' in their names in the interwar period and 'global' in the closing decades of the twentieth century.

The non-territorial nature of IOs has made them a good vehicle to promote planetary interests, especially shared awareness of the need to protect nature. Ecological NGOs originated in the nineteenth century and the earliest international NGO cooperation concerned migratory birds. Efforts to establish an intergovernmental environmental organization began in 1909 spearheaded by Paul Sarasin, the Swiss conservationist. A century later that project remains unfinished.

Another difference between states and IOs is that the governing officials in modern democratic states are riveted to short time horizons, often much shorter than those of public and private IOs. Governments change with elections but typically international civil servants and NGO leaders have much more continuity. IOs approach their problem-solving role with a longer-term perspective and seek to make incremental progress over time. This incrementalism in IOs makes it hard for outsiders to judge accountability on a snapshot basis.

Because it is voluntary, notionally independent of states and transnational, the IO is free to delineate and pursue its own mission and interests on the world stage. The protection of state sovereignty will not be uppermost in the decision function of an IO, be it intergovernmental or non-governmental. An IO will want to preserve its own autonomy, however, and so may be reluctant to pledge accountability to diffuse stakeholders.

The legitimacy of an IO is derivative of its voluntary nature. The IO receives portions of the authority and legitimacy of the entities that comprise it. States cannot logically call into question the legitimacy of an IO because states, being coercive

organizations, do not have the inherent legitimacy that comes from voluntary association. For the IGOs there is a second reason why they are legitimate which is that they are created by states. Individuals do exhibit loyalty to their states, but states do not vacuum up the totality of loyalty from individuals. As Pope Leo XIII explained in the great encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891: para. 51), entering into private societies 'is the natural right of man' and if a state 'forbids its citizens to form associations, it contradicts the very principle of its own existence'. So states should not undermine the natural law legitimacy of NGOs with restrictive regulations.

Both public and private IOs are functional in that they pursue a discrete mission. When states establish public IOs, they do so to enhance interstate cooperation in a particular field by providing public goods, addressing market failure, preventing conflict or enhancing human dignity. It is no accident that the earliest public IOs were referred to as public international unions because they unionized states toward a particular public goal (Reinalda 2009: chapters 8-11). When individuals establish private IOs, the founders give the NGO a specific mission, often paralleling the mission of one or more public IOs. Note also that private IOs are regularly set up by associations and in some cases (for example, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature) by governments too.

States sign treaties to promote cooperation and often treaties include detailed obligations for government behaviour. A state member undertakes such obligations voluntarily in order to render itself accountable to other states so that other states will be similarly accountable to it. Of course some dimensions of international law are considered obligations of states even if a particular state abjures such obligation.

Functionality as the defining characteristic of IOs was recognized by the early twentieth century if not before. Beginning in 1921 the League of Nations published a *Handbook of International Organisations* and updated it in new editions periodically. The last *Handbook*, published in 1938, classified IOs into 16 subjects (agriculture, law and administration and so on). The aim of the *Handbook* was 'to provide a source of information for all those who are interested, whether theoretically or practically, in the international movement' (League of Nations 1938: 6). The *Handbook* published information about both public and private IOs without making a distinction between the official and unofficial.

Although there are defined legal (and non-legal) accountability arrangements in local and national space, accountability is more fluid in international space. The internal electoral accountability of states in a democracy is not matched by world-level electoral systems. What keeps states accountable is international law. When international law constrains states, it does so from norm internalization more so than sanction. In 2001 the International Law Commission (ILC) authored its Draft Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts in order to promote accountability by clarifying the legal standard by which a state can be judged.

International law has less to say about the accountability of IOs, particularly the private ones. For public IOs the ILC is currently working on a major project to define the Responsibility of International Organizations, but that project

excludes NGOs (International Law Commission 2009a). Another ILC project, on the Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters, is remarkable in holding that states have a duty to cooperate with the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and with relevant non-governmental organizations (International Law Commission 2009b: 2). Nevertheless there is no explicit statement that public IOs have an obligation to consult or cooperate with private IOs. Thus, to ascertain the rights and responsibility of NGOs, one has to look outside the realm of international law which does not generally consider NGOs to be subjects of law.

The fact that international law does not address NGOs in the same way that it addresses IGOs and states means that there cannot be one unified framework of accountability for all IOs. International law has to be used to inform how states and public IOs are accountable, but international law will not be decisive in defining the accountability of international NGOs. The duties of NGOs and the rights of accountability holders will have to be derived from other normative sources outside of the law.

In their valuable study, Grant and Keohane (2005: 31) distinguish two models of accountability which they call 'delegation' and 'participation'. In the *delegation* model an entity is accountable to those entrusting it with powers. In the *participation* model an entity is accountable to those who are affected by its actions. Each of the models is important, they say, and an effective accountability system should combine elements from both.

Although these dual models are useful, they are difficult to operationalize. The participation model hinges on who is affected. But any significant IO action will affect private interests in different ways; some may be helped and some may be hurt. The delegation model assumes a principal–agent (or principal–trustee) arrangement, but some theories see IGOs as having their individual personality and corporate will (see Nijman 2004, Sarooshi 2005). If that is the case, the duty owed to founders may be only symbolic. As for the NGOs, as Grant and Keohane point out (2005: 38), the voluntary and entrepreneurial character often means that there is no organization that endows NGOs with authority.

Given that IOs are functional, the most evident accountability claim is that the IO be effective in achieving what Pope Leo XIII called a 'unity of purpose' (Pope Leo XIII 1891: para. 56). Yet while effectiveness is an attribute which objective observers might want to use to evaluate an IO, that is different from saying that an IO owes a duty of effectiveness either to principals or to those affected. The case for a duty to principals is clear-cut in treaty organizations as well as the civic sector. For example, states (or governments) are the principals for a public IO so the IO should be accountable to those states members as a group (recognizing of course that some states will be at loggerheads with other states). Privately-organized NGOs by contrast are not directly accountable to states, but rather instead to the NGO's governing board and to donors.

The case for duties to whoever is affected is less obvious. Grant and Keohane explain why individuals with power ought to be accountable to those who are affected, but they do not explain why individual NGOs without governmental power

should be similarly accountable. A possible answer to that conundrum can be found in Terry Macdonald's *Global Stakeholder Democracy* where she explains the types of 'public power' that NGOs have, namely influence in regulatory norm-building and on the imposition of material constraints (Macdonald 2008: Chapter 3).

Although a duty of effectiveness makes sense to a beneficiary, a victim might prefer that an IO not be effective in achieving its intended programme. For example, a labour union in an uncompetitive industry might prefer that the WTO not be effective in achieving another round of trade liberalization. An indigenous group might prefer that the World Bank not be effective in financing a new dam. Consider Walter Lippman's wry observation in 1943 that the disarmament movement had been 'tragically successful in disarming the nations that believed in disarmament' (Stephens 2009). In that episode the pro-disarmament NGOs of the 1920s and 1930s may have looked effective in that era, but history judges them harshly.

In summary, IOs should not be accountability-free actors, but the voluntary and transborder nature of IOs suggests that the stakeholders for accountability will need to be collective. A purist might object and argue that an organization accountable to everyone is accountable to no one, but diffuse accountability is the only orienting concept that makes sense for IOs. Another way of putting this is that IOs should be expected to have democratic accountability. As the political theorist Daniele Archibugi has noted: 'In order for global governance to be subject to the values of democracy, international organizations must take on board more functions and greater legitimacy, embracing the principles of accountability, participation and equality' (Archibugi 2008: 279).

Measuring Accountability of International Organizations

An accountable IO is one that fulfils the purposes of its charter while delivering higher benefits to the world community than whatever costs are exacted. Any attempted judgment of this type will always be contestable, however, because each observer will bring different values into an individual conception of an ideal world public order of human dignity. Thus the direct measurement of accountability is problematic.

Taking indirect measurements of accountability will be the more useful approach which is achieved by looking at process in all of its forms: legal, social, scientific and the like. For example, an accountable IO follows its own organic law and utilizes best practices in administrative law. An accountable IO bases its policies and programmes on the latest science and justifies them through data collection. An accountable IO takes on problems that truly need to be resolved at the international level. In other words, an accountable IO practices subsidiarity and does not subvert lower levels of decision making.

Accountability mechanisms for an IO need to be calibrated to whatever the salient variables are for that IO. Two important variables are what might be called 'conscriptiveness' and coerciveness. Conscriptiveness means the extent

to which there is pressure to join the IO. For example, because WTO rules allow discrimination against non-members, the WTO has high conscriptiveness with 30 long-waiting applicant countries. Coerciveness means the extent to which the IO mandates governments or private actors to take or refrain from taking action. For example, the WTO has high coerciveness because it imposes hundreds of rules detailing when governments may restrict trade, regulate markets or subsidize. By contrast CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation lacks any coerciveness.

The higher the conscriptiveness and coerciveness of an IO, the greater the need for active accountability. For example, the International Criminal Court can be coercive and so needs intensive accountability but the International Chamber of Commerce has limited coerciveness and therefore needs only light accountability. The Chamber's coerciveness comes from its promulgation of standards that are widely used in international business transactions. An example of an accountability gap is the fact that the Chamber's most widely known set of standards, INCOTERMS, is not disseminated freely on the Chamber's website. Instead traders and interested individuals must pay over 112 Euros for a copy of those standards. The Chamber may be the only global NGO that keeps its outputs out of the public domain and overcharges for them. This lack of transparency undermines the very goal that the Chamber was to set in 1919 to achieve, that is, to promote world trade.

Another variable in an accountability equation is the extent to which the IO engages in distributive programmes. Almost all IOs engage in normative programmes in which they attempt to influence governments, other IOs, individuals or markets. But some IOs also engage in distributive programmes in which they allocate money, goods or services to clients. Some common services provided by IOs are relief, medical care and education. When IOs are distributive there are greater claims for accountability than when the outputs are purely normative. Thomas Pogge has analysed moral decision making by NGOs carrying out programmes (Pogge 2007).

Note also that judging accountability cannot be done *in vitro*. In other words, one cannot look at an IO in isolation and judge its accountability. Rather the IO needs to be studied *in vivo* to observe its dynamic interplay with other IOs. For example, there is a danger in looking at an NGO like, say, Greenpeace, that engages in over-the-top activities and drawing the conclusion that it lacks accountability. Certainly there is never an excuse for making false statements or causing wanton damage. But when an NGO for tactical reasons takes extreme positions or engages in outlandish symbolic behaviour, one should not rush to the conclusion that the NGO is unaccountable.

A question that has arisen in the literature is whether multilateral institutions, or IGOs, are more accountable than NGOs. Grant and Keohane (2005: 40) claim that 'multilateral institutions are in general more accountable than NGOs'. The two reasons why accountability of NGOs scores so badly in Grant and Keohane's analysis (2005: 38) are: first, 'international NGOs are not legitimated by ties to a defined public' and second, 'NGOs are typically the result of entrepreneurial initiatives by activists' and hence 'do not result from a process of delegation' in the same way that IGOs do. As a result 'there is no organization that endowed them with powers formally responsible for holding them to account'. In other words,

Grant and Keohane claim that because the NGO's powers are not monitored by the process of delegation and only partly by the process of participation, the NGO will tend to be less accountable than other institutions in world politics. Embedded in this analysis is the assumption that whatever power, status or influence the NGO has needs to be externally 'legitimated'.

That proposition remains unconvincing. While legitimacy may be entailed when NGOs perform certain functions delegated by the international community (e.g. Red Cross prison inspections), other NGO functions such as policy advocacy should not need an act of legitimation because the 'power' of the NGO comes from the validity of its ideas, not from legal authority. NGOs come out looking badly in Grant and Keohane's analysis because there is no global public to legitimate their actions. Yet if the accountability of the NGO is to be downgraded because of the lack of a global public, then the same reference point should apply to IOs, and even to states. Grant and Keohane conclude that NGO accountability may become a more serious issue because they do not give sufficient attention to the basic unit of the public at any level of governance, namely the sentient human being.

The real question on IO accountability is not how much accountability exists, but rather how much is lacking for a particular IO. As discussed above, IOs that exercise power need more accountability than those that do not (International Law Association 2004: 225, Bendell 2006: 4). So while the WTO may be more accountable than the One World Trust, the accountability gap from the perspective of the world community is surely larger for the WTO because of its influence on governmental fiscal and regulatory policy.

Active accountability can be divided into two types: internal and external.[3] Internal accountability means that the organization is accountable to its governance structure which might include a management board, membership voting, constituent organizations and other features based on organic law. External accountability means that an organization is accountable to IOs to which it is associated, and to an array of stakeholders. Accountability that is not active is passive. Every voluntary organization has passive accountability in that members can quit the organization if it veers from its intended purpose.

Best Practices for Accountability of International Organizations

IO accountability is achieved when internal and external mechanisms provide needed ongoing corrective guidance to influence the IO so as to attain optimal

3 Another spatial approach to accountability has been offered by Michael Edwards and David Hulme (2002: 194) who distinguish between NGO accountability *downwards* to partners, beneficiaries, staff and supporters, and accountability *upwards* to trustees, donors and host governments.

outputs (see Lamy 2007). The importance of adhering to internal rules is evident. The importance of using countervailing pressure to achieve organizational balance was an early finding in political science and has been cogently discussed in a stream of literature exemplified by Madison (1788: No. 51), Tocqueville (1988 [1850]: Part II, Chapter 4), Lasswell and McDougal (1992: 1197-8, 1247) among others. This section discusses some of the best practices that have evolved for achieving accountability and constraining the use of power. It starts with *internal* mechanisms and then discusses *external* mechanisms.

Internal Mechanisms

The most important internal mechanism is a balanced and robust management board. A balanced board is one that represents the key interests and constituents. A good example of best practices is the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS which is governed by a Programme Coordinating Board with representatives of 22 governments from all geographic regions, the UNAIDS cosponsors and five representatives of NGOs, including associations of people living with HIV. A robust board is one whose decision-making rules allow it to take decisions easily. Organizations that lack management boards and that make decisions via consensus will display organizational dysfunctions. A good example of this is the WTO which has been stymied in completing the Doha Development Round since 2001.

Another important mechanism is for international governance institutions to exhibit a clear separation of power. Executive versus policy-making responsibilities should be delineated. For organizations with authority, such as public IOs, there could also be benefit in having a judicial branch to review the legality of acts by the organization. Such independent judicial review is rarely attained in IOs.

A complaint mechanism is another useful internal mechanism. A leading example is the successful World Bank Inspection Panel in which aggrieved individuals or groups can seek review of a development project as to whether the Bank is following its own internal procedures (Carrasco and Guernsey 2008). Another example came in October 2009 when the XIII Olympic Congress recommended that 'Transparent and enhanced dispute resolution mechanisms must be in place in all sports organisations, at all levels. All disputes which cannot be settled amicably or through local arbitration or mediation should be submitted to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS)' (Olympic Congress 2009: para. 43). Sometimes a formal Ombudsman position is created as, for example, in the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).

A Code of Conduct is another fruitful internal mechanism which several IOs now employ. In 1968, in a speech to NGOs, UN Secretary-General U Thant called attention to the need for codes of conduct, subject to self-regulation and self-criticism, for the promotion and protection of human rights (U Thant 1968: 12). Such codes did not eventuate at that time, but by the 1990s codes were developed in human rights and other fields of international action. For example, in 1994 several organizations initiated the Code of Conduct for the International Red

Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (Hilhorst 2004). In 2003 the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) was established to be an international self-regulatory body of member humanitarian organizations. The HAP website pledges 'accountability to beneficiaries' and provides a link for making complaints about HAP members. In 2006 the International Non-Governmental Organisations Accountability Charter was launched by 11 leading NGOs including Amnesty International and Consumers International. NGOs may sign the Charter and commit to a set of Principles including, *inter alia*, 'responsible advocacy', 'accurate information', a 'governing body' and encouragement for internal 'whistle-blowers' (INGO Accountability Charter 2006; see also Chapter 28 by Mihr in this volume).

Finally, it should be emphasized that making a public commitment to accountability can spark internal actions to achieve that commitment. For example, in March 2010 the UN General Assembly enacted a resolution on Global Partnerships that requested the Secretary-General to promote 'impact-assessment mechanisms of partnerships, taking into account best tools available, in order to enable effective management, ensure accountability and facilitate effective learning from both successes and failures' (United Nations 2010: para. 21). 'Global partnerships' are working alliances between UN agencies, NGOs and the private sector.

Organizations that want to enhance their accountability may request performance audits from specialized providers. For example, SGS, an inspection and certification company founded in 1878, offers third-party benchmarking and certification services to NGOs. According to its website, an SGS audit provides 'all stakeholders with the highest possible assurance that a given NGO's objectives and activities are implemented in an accountable, efficient and sustainable manner' (SGS 2010). Another example is the accountability principles for research organizations devised by One World Trust (Whitty 2008).

External Mechanisms

External mechanisms can improve the performance of organizations by drawing in ideas from outside the organization. A notice and comment process is an example of a best practice for an organization to use to obtain advice from the public. This is listed here as an external mechanism, but it is also internal in the sense that the IO sponsors it. In recent years notice and comment processes have become more widely used by IOs to seek input on pending decisions. For example, the UN Clean Development Mechanism has sought public comment on methodologies for estimating greenhouse gas reductions. The Basel Committee regularly posts new papers on the Bank for International Settlements website and seeks public comments. In 2001 the author of this chapter suggested the creation of a Global Federal Register that could on a daily basis list new opportunities for public comment to any international organization (Charnovitz 2001: 274). No progress has been made on this idea. Yet with advances in internet technology, such a website would be much easier to implement and use now than it was a decade ago.

Sometimes organizations use public communications to signal the need for more accountability by another organization. This can also occur between two organizations that are sub-sets of a larger organization. For example, at the World Summit in 2005 the UN General Assembly enacted a resolution that, among many other points, urged the Security Council to 'continue to adapt its working methods so as to ... enhance its accountability to the membership and increase the transparency of its work' (United Nations 2005a: para. 154).

The most dialectical external mechanisms are the NGOs set up to monitor an IO and to provide information and analysis to the public about the IO's activities. Some examples of watchdog NGOs are the Bank Information Center that monitors international financial institutions and UN Watch that monitors UN human rights programmes. The expanding role of NGOs has led to greater self-awareness and to the establishment of NGOs that seek neutrally to monitor other NGOs. Some examples of this phenomenon are NGOWatch and NGO Monitor. As Robert Blitt noted several years ago, the initial reaction in the NGO community to the idea of watchdogs focusing on NGOs was negative, and that reaction confirmed the inability of some activists to acknowledge the 'urgent need for some kind of reform directed at enhancing accountability' (Blitt 2004: 397-8).

One of the most interesting innovations of the past several years is the project by One World Trust to rank numerous IOs for their accountability according to the same performance metrics (Kovach 2006). The One World Trust looks at IGOs, NGOs and transnational corporations. In the most recent study, published in 2008, the top-ranked public IO was the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The top NGO was the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), a grassroots organization composed of 750 member organizations in 116 countries. The top multinational corporation was BHP Billiton. Projects that use periodic quantitative rankings of countries or organizations have the potential of making the low-ranked organizations aware of their low standing and putting pressure on them to raise the attribute (accountability) that is being ranked. Similar ranking systems have been developed for sustainability and environmental performance.

Conclusion

This chapter offers a unified theory of IO accountability that applies to both public and private organizations. It explains that the need for accountability is a function of the power of the IO, and that both internal and external accountability mechanisms are important. The chapter also provides a detailed list of best practices for IOs to use in achieving accountability, such as inviting public complaints and using administrative law procedures like notice and comment. Maintaining organizational transparency is also vital.

Further Reading

Recommended for further reading are Grant and Keohane (2005), INGO Accountability Charter (2006), Jordan and Van Tuijl (2006) and Macdonald (2008).

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Edited by
BOB REINALDA
Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands

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