Cooperative Multistakeholder Action
Discussion Paper for the May 23-25 Convenings

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The Stanley Foundation has embarked on an exploration of the role cooperative multistakeholder action plays in global governance – a topic whose importance has increased rapidly but with little deep analysis or development of shared tools for understanding or making use of the opportunities it presents to strengthen global governance.

With the initial aim of developing a toolkit to aid understanding, generating and enhancing cooperative multistakeholder action, Stanley and its partners New America and the Stimson Center convened two workshops of leading experts in the field, resulting in both a stimulating scoping of the dimensions of the issue and a broader introduction to the roles played by non-state actors in global governance. This paper introduces and opens the debate around four categories of questions that arise among scholars and practitioners alike, and on which we believe workshop participants can make major contributions to the state of understanding of the field. These debates in turn point toward the question we will pose at the end of the workshop days – what are the most important elements, and most useful modes of presentation, of a toolkit for practitioners and analysts of complex coalition statecraft?

Definitional notes

Coalitions that combine states, interstate organizations, and non-state actors have become major features of the global governance landscape. This effort aims to consider transnational and multi-actor efforts to create the International Criminal Court, manage climate change, govern cyber-space, and help war-torn countries transition away from violent conflict, say, but not the network of drug cartels, gun runners, financiers and human traffickers that has wrought mayhem in Central America. We therefore propose the following definition:

**Cooperative multistakeholder action in global governance**: transnational and multi-actor coalitions which combine states, international organizations, and non-state actors

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1. [http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/resources.cfm?id=1584](http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/resources.cfm?id=1584).
2. [http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/resources.cfm?id=1563](http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/resources.cfm?id=1563).
that seek to strengthen and promote new international norms and achieve responses to policy challenges.

This definition does not entirely remove conflict and questions of motives: one can anticipate, and indeed already observe in the arenas of trade, communications, privacy and security, among others, issues contested by two or more coalitions of state and non-state actors, each claiming the validation of international norms and rules.

The field also faces an emerging challenge which we call “the state strikes back;” efforts by nation-states to defend their own prerogatives and interests by opposing or de-legitimizing multi-stakeholder coalition activities (even when such coalitions provide opportunities for states to exert influence). This phenomenon – and its extent and future directions – have been widely-remarked but little-studied. Experience and analysis of how to anticipate, prevent, accommodate or oppose those efforts is much-needed, along with an understanding of what provokes states to block coalition activities and whether that response can be expected to intensify or decline in future.

The problem of who is a stakeholder can also be a vexed one. With questions of legitimacy plaguing all actors in the international system, from international organizations and states to bodies claiming to represent citizens or interest groups of various kinds, one of the central contributions of this project may be its effort to survey and catalogue how multi-stakeholder coalitions have successfully built, maintained and defended legitimacy. Practitioners’ experience scoping and defining the field of stakeholders, creatively expanding it, and perhaps also limiting or contracting it, holds critical lessons for future coalitions – and for the overall health of the international system in an age of intensely competing claims of legitimacy.

How Do Multi-Stakeholder Coalitions fit into strategies for effective global governance?

Stanley’s series of consultations has identified several avenues through which multi-stakeholder coalitions may fit into strategies for effective governance:

- Filling governance gaps by tapping the capabilities, ideas, and networks of coalition members
- Identifying and raising the alarm about fragile/authoritarian states, buttressing their weaknesses and addressing their consequences, and raising the pressure for response from governmental institutions
- Strengthening, implementing or actually developing international norms and processes
- Dampening the influence of international terrorist and criminal syndicates in both shaping global norms and policy outcomes
In each of these cases, we have a wealth of informal observations about the role(s) played by multistakeholder coalitions, but little theory or deep analysis of how those roles play out, which roles are maximally effective, and what makes them effective.

We are looking toward a possible typology of how multi-stakeholder coalitions interact with international norms.

How do peacebuilding strategic frameworks (whether through the Peacebuilding Commission, the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, or various kinds of “donor-host country compacts”), norms and networks interact?

The 2015 Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement seem to usher in an era in which intra-state agreements explicitly rely on non-state actors working in coalition with states to establish new norms. What are the early indications of how this is working, and what does it imply for the place of multistakeholder coalitions within the international system?

The specific case of efforts to promote multistakeholder coalitions to deal with conflict, and Combating Violent Extremism in particular, deserves particular scrutiny both for what it may reveal about the field as a whole, and how it may be developing into a particular subfield with different parameters, norms, expectations and participants. Some understanding of how it relates to the full field will be crucial.

Simultaneously, but in opposition to this partnership paradigm, we are also seeing cases where multistakeholder coalitions are actively contesting the parameters of what constitutes good governance, and who administers it. On the one hand, we have stakeholders who argue that multistakeholder coalitions are inherently more legitimate than some national authorities, or even international bodies, claiming greater popular legitimacy for in particular civil society groups. Others counter that only institutions with national or international legal status can claim to be representative, while just about every actor has at one time or another sought to delegitimize the participation or goals of another category of actors – business interests, authoritarian governments, Western NGOs, to name a few.

These questions of legitimacy are not issues that we can resolve – or intend to delve into deeply – in a one-day convening. Rather, we aim to map them and understand how different constellations of actors are dealing with the issues they pose, and rifts they expose, to improve governance – and where, instead, they have proved insurmountable obstacles to effective cooperation.
Techniques of Effective Coalition Formation and Management

Social science and practitioners provide extensive literature on creating coalitions and movements within societies and on managing polarization within political systems, both longstanding democracies and post-conflict societies.

Some of the standard works from those fields which we believe are relevant to coalition-building at the international level – and/or which we believe have influenced some of the most active international coalition-builders to date – are:

- **CANVAS Core curriculum: A Guide to Effective Non-Violent Struggle** (Belgrade, 2007).
- *Materials and Trainings of the Program on Negotiation, Harvard University Law School.*

We have as yet, however, little or no research or documentation on what techniques have succeeded – or been tried and failed – in engage state and non-state actors simultaneously and effectively. Nor do we have even strong anecdotal evidence of what case studies or subject-specific explorations of coalition-building have been influential in their own fields or across sectors. For example, there is an extensive academic literature on the possibilities and limits of environmental peacemaking and coalition-building, and some histories and first-person accounts of the efforts that led to the creation of the International Criminal Court. The brief list of resources above includes those for which we do have anecdotal evidence of inspiration across issue areas and national boundaries. This list is short and U.S.-centric, however; it is provided as a prompt, in hopes that practitioners and analysts add to it with their own work, work that has inspired them, or analyses documenting their coalition-building.

Some central questions include:

- How are multi-stakeholder coalitions filling gaps in global governance?
- What, in your view, are examples of successful multi-stakeholder coalitions, and where have efforts come up short?
• Where does the impetus for successful multi-stakeholder coalition-building come from? Are patterns through which states engage non-state actors in effective coalition-building different from those in which the impetus comes solely from non-state actors? Though prevalent today, do multi-stakeholder approaches clash with traditional (20th century) state-centric models of global governance in responding to specific policy challenges.
• How is the field scoped and defined, and by whom?
• Are there distinct models of formal or informal coalition priority-setting, management, maintenance, and accountability?

In which functional areas (e.g., initial coalition-building around a policy issue, advocacy/norms development and dissemination, policy agenda-setting, implementation, and oversight/accountability) is cooperative multistakeholder action most effective?

**Accountability**

The question of how and to whom multi-stakeholder coalitions — in particular their non-governmental members — are held accountable has been a challenging one in both theory and practice. It is the organizers’ perception that accountability concerns have not proven a bar to the rapid growth of such coalitions, but are likely in future to be challenge their effectiveness and their ability to institutionalize themselves and partner with other, formal, institutions of governance. Thus, identifying accountability mechanisms — theoretical as well as any which have been used on the ground — is an important to the longer-term toolbox for sustainability. For example, various kinds of peacebuilding strategic frameworks have sought to foster “mutual accountability” between a conflict-affected host nation and its international peace and development partners. In addition, the myriad commitments made by state and non-state actors seeking to mitigate the most severe effects of climate change are now being monitored and coordinated through multiple, over-lapping processes and mechanisms that together constitute a new (top-down and bottom-up) model for global climate governance.

**Elements of a Toolkit**

We aim to prepare a resource that will provide users from government, civil society, and the private sector with tools to analyze, strategize, scope, manage and hold accountable multi-stakeholder coalitions. We foresee those tools falling in the following categories:
• **Multistakeholder coalitions as a way to bridge gridlock and promote effective governance:** We aim to provide an introduction for those new to the field, and make a case for the skeptic, about how multistakeholder coalitions can solve major problems of global governance. The toolkit’s first contribution will be a typology of roles such coalitions can effectively fill – buttressed by case studies considering where they have and have not been effective. Practical experience and guidance for selecting the roles and functions of a coalition, and for objective-setting, will also be included.

• **Considering the universe of possible partners:** we will offer methodology and lessons learned from processes of mapping the context, defining who is a stakeholder, and balancing broad inclusion with targeted goals.

• **Managing Challenging Contexts:** Multistakeholder coalitions face specific challenges of legitimacy, and basic ability to operate, in environments where state governance is limited or non-existent. They may struggle with extreme polarization, within a host society, among international community members, or even inside the coalition itself. They may struggle to gain legitimacy with one or more of these audiences, and they face increasing demands for accountability.