



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
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## UNESCO and civil society

Civil society actors have multiplied in recent years. The increasingly important role of these actors in all social, economic and cultural spheres of globalization and the expansion of partnerships represent a new challenge.

By creating a High-Level Panel (presided by the former president of Brazil, F .H. Cardoso) in charge of evaluating the cooperation between the United Nations and civil society, the UN Secretary-General gave new impetus to developing a global partnership with civil society, one of the Millennium Development Goals. To that end, a report was produced by the high-level panel, stressing the necessity of cooperating with civil society, considering that "Public opinion has become a key factor influencing intergovernmental and governmental policies and actions."



"Peoplescape" (Ablade GLOVER). Gift from Ghana to UNESCO in 1991. (©UNESCO)

interest of all to involve and associate the CSA in the promotion of sustainable development. These partnerships are developed in close collaboration with UNESCO National Commissions.

The approximately **335 international non-governmental organizations** with which UNESCO maintains official relations (formal and operational), as well as the 21 foundations with established official relations, mobilize public opinion on the ground, notably in isolated or precarious regions in the world, to promote

greater consideration of the geographic

### UNESCO's interaction with civil society

Today, civil society's new power and its growing and decisive influence have impact on political, governmental and intergovernmental action.

The forging of solid partnerships with civil society, including parliamentarians, local authorities and the private sector, allows the Organization to be more attuned to citizens' concerns and better able to mobilize the active support of public opinion. Since its creation, UNESCO has worked with a number of these civil society actors (CSA), who have been called the new partners of the United Nations.

We can consider at present that this partnership policy is integrated systematically in our action. It is in the

and cultural diversity of the non-governmental community. They also act as relays for the implementation of UNESCO programmes.

Comprised of people of all ages and nationalities from every walk of life, some 3600 UNESCO Associations, Centres and Clubs help spread UNESCO's ideals, work as volunteers to turn them into reality on the ground, and give visibility to the values promoted by UNESCO within local communities. The Clubs, which form an independent network, are involved in global issues with local impact and contribute to reflection on choices of societal models.

Parliamentarians, as legislators and the people's representatives, are the best-

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## A few figures

In Brazil, there are more than 60,000 civil society organizations in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro alone.

An estimated 2 million citizens' associations exist in India.

Egypt has more than 30,000 non-profit organizations. Among them, just the professional groups represent a membership of 3 million people.

Analysts describe the emergence in the last two decades of a "global civil society".

(Source: United Nations)

placed to have direct influence on law-making, voting on national budgets and ensuring that UNESCO's goals are reflected in national legislation. In cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), regional parliamentary organizations and regional forums, some 50 parliamentary focal points and 30 parliamentary leagues grouped under the name of "UNESCO friends", the Organization is taking measures to involve parliamentarians in its activities and priorities.

Cooperation with cities, local authorities and city organizations is crucial for sustainable development of communities. UNESCO, with its global urban networks and programmes (Coalition of Cities against Racism, Creative Cities, Educating Cities, World Book Capital, Multipurpose Community Telecentres, etc.) brings to local authorities the benefits of decades of study, research and experience in the field. The Organization also facilitates connections between cities and with other partners, through sponsoring, twinning and networking operations.

The private sector encompasses all members of the business community (from small and medium-sized companies to multinational corporations, as well as the unofficial economy) and their representatives, through non-profit organizations, chambers of commerce, philanthropic foundations and other groups. Developing partnerships and cooperation agreements, UNESCO mobilizes top quality expertise, networks, services and equipment as well as funding from private sector actors.

## UNESCO's unifying role

UNESCO must create a link and facilitate dialogue between governments and the CSA in order to place global issues at the heart of its action.

In its role as mediator in the spheres of international cooperation and in global governance, UNESCO can provide a space for dialogue to a whole range of stakeholders focused on the same issues.

The Organization must therefore reinforce, harmonize and diversify its framework for cooperation and partnership to coincide with its priorities. By expanding the variety of its partners in this way, UNESCO multiplies the means it can use to pursue its goals, and creates synergy between governmental and non-governmental actors.

"Civil society is now so vital to the United Nations that engaging with it well is a necessity, not an option. It must also engage with others, including the private sector, parliaments and local authorities."

Excerpt from *Cardoso Report*

## To Find Out More

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