

Introduction

Jan Aart Scholte

Contemporary society is a more global society. Over the past half-century people have, alongside their local, national and regional spheres, also come to interact globally on an unprecedented scale. More than ever, persons are interconnected with one another wherever on the earth they happen to live. Many of the principal policy challenges of the present day, including climate change, crime, infectious disease, financial stability, employment, (dis)armament, identity politics, social inequality and human rights, have pronounced global dimensions.

Whenever a given arena becomes important in people's collective lives, rules and regulatory institutions emerge to bring a certain order and predictability to that realm. Governance arrangements are needed if the societal space in question is to have any measure of stability and longevity. Thus at various historical junctures, village councils have developed in respect of localities and nation-states in respect of countries. More recently, regional domains have begun to acquire formal regulatory apparatuses, such as the European Union (EU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). By the same logic, global-scale regimes could be expected to grow as global-scale social relations rise in prominence.

Such a trend has indeed occurred. The past half-century has witnessed an unprecedented expansion of governance instruments that apply to jurisdictions and constituencies of a planetary scope. The United Nations (UN), the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO) are some of the best-known examples of global governance agencies. Many more planet-spanning regulatory bodies get less public attention, such as the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). To be sure, these proliferating and growing global-scale regimes have not replaced nation-states and local authorities, which on the whole remain as vibrant as ever. However, global governance has become highly significant in contemporary history, even if the various institutional frameworks show no signs of coalescing to form a world government, in the sense of a sovereign state scaled up to planetary proportions.

To be effective and legitimate, governance needs to be accountable. With accountability the governors are answerable to the governed for their (the governors’) actions and omissions. Regulatory processes that lack sufficient accountability generally fail to achieve their purposes adequately, i.e. they are not effective. In addition, poorly accountable regimes generally attract limited support from affected populations, i.e. they are not legitimate. On both counts – ineffectiveness and illegitimacy – weak accountability yields weak governance, and weak governance means that the public policy needs of a society are not adequately met.

Accountable global governance is therefore essential for today’s more global world. As the chapters in this book demonstrate, shortfalls in accountability substantially hamper planet-spanning regulatory institutions in delivering on their respective goals and mandates. These shortcomings in global governance in turn undermine the realisation of core societal values such as material wellbeing, distributive justice, ecological sustainability, cultural vibrancy, moral decency, democracy, solidarity, liberty and peace. Seen in this light, the stakes in securing accountable global governance could not be higher.

How, then, can regulatory arrangements that apply over different continents and oceans across the earth be made suitably answerable to the people whose lives are affected by them, in many cases deeply so? Global governance institutions lack the kinds of formal accountability mechanisms that are generally found in national and local governments. Bodies such as the Commonwealth, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM), and the World Bank have neither a popularly elected executive, nor a directly elected parliamentary arm for oversight, nor their own (non-partisan) judiciary. Hence different kinds of accountability processes need to operate for global-scale regimes.

Fifty years ago the answer to the problem of global governance accountability was relatively straightforward. At that time a regulatory agency of planetary scope (or ‘international organisation’, as the prevailing vocabulary then described it) was accountable to affected people through the member states of the institution. Each state was meant to ensure that the actions of the global governance body concerned benefited the citizens of that state or, in the case of malfunctions and harms, that due compensation would be exacted. In addition, states collectively were meant to ensure that the global governance arrangement served the general interests of a putative ‘international community’.

However, this ‘statist’ formula (where the accountability of global governance is obtained wholly and solely through national governments) is insufficient today on at least nine major counts. First, a number of planet-spanning regulatory agencies have over the past half-century become so

large and influential that many of their (especially smaller) state members lack the power, by themselves, to hold the institution sufficiently to account for its impacts on their citizens. The government of Malawi in its relationship with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is a case in point. Second, stronger as well as weaker states often demonstrate a lack of energy in exacting accountability from global governance bodies. National parliaments have generally been particularly remiss in this regard, while legal immunity has shielded many global authorities from national courts. Third, the officials who act for states in global governance institutions are usually unelected technocrats with little connection to the everyday lives of most of their fellow national citizens. Fourth, a number of important global governance arrangements such as the Group of Eight (G8) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have far-reaching impacts on countries spread across the globe whose governments are not members of the institution in question. Fifth, some emergent elements of global governance directly involve substate local governments or suprastate regional institutions rather than nation-states per se; for instance, organisations such as United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) function largely outside the purview of states, while the EU maintains its own representation in over a hundred countries across the planet. Sixth, large parts of contemporary global governance operate through private regulatory bodies where states are not members at all. The many examples include the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO), which groups producer and consumer organisations, and various schemes of corporate social and environmental responsibility (CSER), where the protagonists are firms. Seventh, turning traditional assumptions on their head, today some non-state actors directly engage global governance arrangements in order to call their national governments to account. Thus, for instance, a number of women's groups and other human rights campaigners have sought to counter the democratic failings of their state through the UN. Eighth, in contemporary global affairs many people embrace political identities and solidarities that are often not adequately represented through nation-states. In this vein various diasporas, faith groups and indigenous peoples do not look solely – and in some cases only barely, if at all – to the government of the country in which they reside to be their agent of global governance accountability. Finally, some people with cosmopolitan orientations feel that, as 'global citizens' in addition to, or perhaps even more than, national citizens, their relationship to global regulatory arrangements should be one of direct accountability, unmediated by states.

Thus many constituents and stakeholders in today's world cannot obtain sufficient accountability from global governance arrangements

through their state alone. National governments remain very important channels for holding planet-spanning regulatory agencies answerable for their decisions and policies, but in many cases this check is not working well, or by itself is insufficient. Given the absence of official mechanisms of direct accountability and the inadequacy of indirect accountability through states, current global governance has large accountability deficits in respect of formal channels. Insufficient accountability compromises effectiveness and legitimacy, which in turn exacerbate many of the foremost problems of contemporary society (for example poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, disease and violence). Weakly accountable global governance is therefore not just a peripheral preoccupation for democratic purists, but a core challenge for anyone concerned with obtaining decent human lives for all in the twenty-first century.

How, then, can states be supported when (as in the first six circumstances identified above) they are unable by themselves to secure sufficiently accountable global governance for their citizens? Moreover, how can accountable global governance be achieved when (as in the last three situations indicated) states could not be adequate on their own even if they had the necessary capacities? In particular, how can this more accountable (and thus more effective and legitimate) global governance be attained when there is little prospect in the foreseeable future of directly elected global executives and legislatures or a fully-fledged global judiciary being introduced?

This book explores one possible avenue for the reduction of these accountability gaps in contemporary global governance, namely through civil society. The various studies in the book examine ways and extents that citizen action groups can further the answerability of global-scale regulatory organisations to the people whose lives and life chances are affected by them. Many academic theorists and policy practitioners alike have welcomed dynamic, value-driven, democratically mobilising civil society activities as a potential (at least partial) answer to accountability deficits in global governance. On the other hand, sceptics have worried that incompetent, co-opted, elite-centred and themselves poorly answerable civil society associations could actually exacerbate accountability problems in global governance. What do experiences to date suggest regarding this debate?

In order to investigate these matters, this book opens with a conceptually oriented chapter, elaborating on the issues introduced above surrounding 'global governance', 'accountability', 'civil society' and the relationships between them. Then thirteen more empirically oriented chapters explore how civil society activities have and/or have not promoted the democratic accountability of a diverse range of global governance institutions: UN,

World Bank, IMF, WTO, the Commonwealth, OIC, OECD, G8, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the global climate change regime, GFATM, ICANN and WFTO. Each of these chapters sets out: (a) the mandate and activities of the regulatory apparatus concerned; (b) the accountability challenges that the global governance arrangement in question faces; (c) the range of civil society engagements of the institution; (d) the accountability effects of that civil society involvement; and (e) the main circumstances that have helped or hindered civil society contributions to global governance accountability in the case at hand. The concluding chapter synthesises these findings and reflects on their implications for future practices of civil society and democratically accountable global governance.

To enhance the quality of these findings and recommendations, the investigations for the book have developed through processes of practitioner-researcher exchange. Thus the project design and execution have emerged and evolved through consultations among academics, civil society actors and global governance officials, and most of the authors have extensively interviewed relevant practitioners in preparing their case studies. The draft chapters received detailed scrutiny by civil society and official actors in a workshop at Gothenburg University in June 2007. Also in order to engage practitioner circles, the project results have been presented orally at various civil society and global governance venues.

The resulting book gives a fuller version of the above analysis and aims thereby to enlarge an as-yet small corner of knowledge. Although the issue of accountable global governance is increasingly recognised as being highly important, research on the subject remains sparse. Only a handful of published academic studies have explored the general problem of accountability in global regulation (Keohane and Nye 2003; Held and Koenig-Archibugi 2005; Ebrahim and Weisband 2007). Among think tanks the Global Accountability Project of the One World Trust has conducted important research on the subject (Kovach *et al.* 2003; Blagescu and Lloyd 2006; Lloyd *et al.* 2007, 2008). A few other works have examined accountability in relation to particular global governance institutions, albeit without focusing on the role of civil society (Woods and Narlikar 2001; Carin and Wood 2005). Some notable research has considered civil society engagement of global regulatory agencies, but without systematic and explicit assessment of accountability issues (Weiss and Gordenker 1996; Willetts 1996; Charnovitz 1997; Foster and Anand 1999; Florini 2000; O'Brien *et al.* 2000; Edwards and Gaventa 2001; Scholte and Schnabel 2002; Clark 2003; Friedman *et al.* 2005; Martens 2005; Joachim 2007; Scholte 2007; Steffek *et al.* 2008; Walker

and Thompson 2008; MacKenzie 2009; McKeon 2009; Gaventa and Tandon 2010; Jönsson and Tallberg (2010)). To date just one book regarding the World Bank, and two other general pieces, have focused on the civil society angle to accountable global governance (Fox and Brown 1998; Scholte 2004a; Van Rooy 2004). To that extent this book endeavours to map largely uncharted territory in contemporary global political analysis.

Regarding general themes that run through the text as a whole, the various chapters consistently show that the accountability equation between civil society and global governance is highly complex. For one thing, accountability in global governance is anything but straightforward: precisely who is accountable? For what? To whom? By what means? And when? Civil society is no less problematic: what sorts of citizen action groups make global regulatory agencies most accountable? To which constituencies? And using what kinds of strategies and tactics? Moreover, global regulatory arrangements are highly diverse, such that civil society interventions which advance democratic accountability in respect of one institution may not do so in respect of another. Civil society contributions to accountable global governance can also vary according to issue: for example, they have generally greater impact in regard to human rights than macroeconomic policy. Given these intricacies, the question of the role of civil society in democratically accountable global governance is not open to a single, precise and concise answer.

That said, the chapters do in general suggest that civil society activities can, when the circumstances are conducive, serve to reinforce, complement or in some cases even supplant states in exacting accountability from global governance institutions. Indeed, it is largely civil society interventions that have alerted policymakers, the mass media and the wider public to shortfalls of democracy in contemporary global governance. Moreover, efforts by citizen groups can – and, as the case studies show, often do – induce global authorities to be more answerable to various constituencies. In particular, civil society inputs can in some instances increase global governance accountability to disadvantaged and marginalised circles, including countries of the global south, impoverished people, women, and other social groups that experience silencing and exclusion. The chapters in this book contain many examples of positive civil society contributions that could inspire further initiatives in the future.

At the same time, however, the studies also give cause to temper enthusiasm for civil society activism as a means to attain more accountable global governance. For one thing, the scale of civil society relations

with the various global regulatory bodies is generally rather small and/or sporadic, thereby limiting the extent of accountability benefits that can be generated. In addition, many civil society actors have only limited awareness of the aims, institutional organisation and policy tools of the global governance agencies that they address. Moreover, when civil society associations engage a given global governance apparatus they often do not have an explicit focus on, or a clear strategy for, enhancing the accountability of that institution. Greater contacts and exchanges do not of themselves generate greater accountability. Thus future politics would benefit from more – and more deliberate – civil society efforts to make global authorities answerable for their actions and omissions.

On another sobering note, the investigations in this book indicate that civil society involvement does not inherently improve the *democratic* accountability of global governance. For instance, certain civil society interventions may mainly make global regulatory agencies more answerable to constituents like big business that are already disproportionately served through other channels. Indeed, civil society involvement may even detract from democratic accountability, for example if in consequence a global agency gives more attention to certain special interest groups than to popularly elected parliaments. In addition, ritualised global governance ‘consultations’ with civil society associations may produce little policy change and instead serve to defuse challenges to deeper structures of unaccountable power. The ability of civil society actors to exact global governance accountability can also be compromised to the degree that the citizen associations are insufficiently answerable to the constituencies that they purport to serve. Civil society, too, faces its own accountability challenges. Thus future democracy would benefit from more critical self-awareness on the part of civil society actors as they seek to make global governance more answerable to affected publics.

In sum, civil society most certainly can influence accountability in global governance; however, the impacts could be greater and more beneficial, and it is important for vitally needed effective and legitimate global governance that these results improve. This general conclusion, as well as suggested forward actions that follow from it, are elaborated further in the closing chapter of the book.

1 Global governance, accountability and civil society

Jan Aart Scholte

Introduction

As an initial step in exploring the relationship between civil society and accountability in global governance it is important to clarify the core terms. Each of the principal elements in this equation is subject to multiple and often conflicting interpretations. The point of this opening chapter is not to resolve these theoretical and political disputes with definitive definitions. Such an aim is neither achievable nor – from the perspective of creative democratic debate – desirable. Hence the following discussion only sketches broad conceptions and concerns in order to provide a starting framework of analysis for the subsequent case studies. Individual authors will, in those chapters, elaborate their particular understandings of the general issues in relation to specific global governance arrangements.

The present chapter has three parts that successively address the three central concepts in this study. The first part identifies ‘global governance’ as *a complex of rules and regulatory institutions that apply to transplanetary jurisdictions and constituencies*. In line with globalisation as a major general trend of contemporary history, global governance has grown to unprecedented proportions and significance in recent decades. The second part of the chapter discusses ‘accountability’ in terms of *processes whereby an actor answers for its conduct to those whom it affects*. Shortfalls of accountability (especially democratic accountability) in respect of global governance agencies constitute a major challenge to the delivery of effective and legitimate public policy. The third part of the chapter introduces ‘civil society’ as *a political arena where associations of citizens seek, from outside political parties, to shape societal rules*. The present enquiry considers the ways and extents that civil society activities can contribute to greater accountability in global governance.

Global governance

Globalisation is one of the most striking broad trends of contemporary history (Held *et al.* 1999; Scholte 2005b). Over the past half-century

the collective lives of human beings have acquired much larger planet-spanning (or ‘transplanetary’) dimensions. All manner of flows connect people with one another wherever on earth they might be located: for example through communications, merchandise, microbes, migrants, money, organisations, pollutants and weapons. Although global-scale exchanges have been going on for many centuries, transplanetary social relations have today reached unprecedented and qualitatively larger amounts, ranges, frequencies, speeds, intensities and impacts. Concurrently, society is also marked by greater global consciousness: that is, people have acquired heightened awareness of planetary realms as a significant aspect of their social existence. Indeed, many individuals have oriented their cultural identities and political solidarities partly to global spheres, as witnessed with phenomena like so-called ‘world music’ and humanitarian relief programmes. Materially and ideationally, therefore, contemporary society operates substantially through global frames alongside (and in complex interrelations with) social spaces on other scales such as neighbourhood, province, country and region.

Like all realms of social relations, global social relations require governance: that is, an array of rules along with regulatory institutions to administer those norms and standards. As any arena of human collective life becomes significant – be it a locality, country or other social space – frameworks of governance develop to bring a certain order and predictability to that sphere. Rules are set, maintained, adjusted and enforced. The rules may be strict or loose, formal or informal, permanent or transitory, enabling or oppressive. But even if it is softly applied and barely perceptible, regulation of some kind will transpire if a given social space is to have any stability and longevity.

So it is with global domains also. The intense globalisation of recent history has entailed, as part of the process, increased governance of transplanetary affairs. Much of this regulation has developed through pre-existent institutions such as nation-states and local governments. In addition, however, growing needs to govern global matters have prompted the establishment and expansion of many suprastate regulatory arrangements. Some of these new apparatuses, like the European Union (EU), operate in respect of regional jurisdictions while others, like the United Nations (UN), govern in respect of transplanetary jurisdictions. The latter type of regulation – namely rules and administering agencies that apply to places and people spread across the earth – can be termed ‘global governance’.

The phrase ‘global governance’ first surfaced in the late 1980s in connection with the Commission on Global Governance, which reported in 1995 on various challenges of regulating a more global world (Carlsson

et al. 1995). Twenty years later the vocabulary figures in the titles of textbooks and countless other publications. A journal named *Global Governance* was launched in 1995 and quickly became a significant outlet in its field (Coate and Murphy 1995; Carin *et al.* 2006). More than a dozen universities across the world now house research centres specifically dedicated to the study of 'global governance'. Indeed, a number of recently created regulatory arrangements with a planetary scope have incorporated the adjective 'global' into their names, rather than the previously favoured term 'international'. Examples include the Global Environment Facility (launched in 1991), the Global Reporting Initiative (1998), the Global Compact (2000) and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (2002).

Like any key concept, the notion 'global governance' can be problematic if it is invoked loosely and uncritically (Hewson and Sinclair 1999; Sinclair 2004; Grugel and Piper 2006; Soederberg 2006). However, if used with precision and vigilance this idea can open important insights into contemporary politics. In particular, the newer term 'global governance' is arguably more exact and revealing than the older label 'international organisation', which dates from the early twentieth century. 'Global' specifically designates activities and conditions on a planetary scale, whereas 'international' covers any circumstance (bilateral, regional or global) that extends beyond the confines of a country-nation-state unit. Moreover, 'global' suitably highlights planetary realms as having become significant social domains in their own right, while 'inter-national' (as well as its cousin 'trans-national') still frame phenomena with primary reference to country arenas. Meanwhile, the word 'organisation' in 'international organisation' could encompass any association, whatever its activities, whereas 'governance' specifies the regulatory character of the circumstances in question. Furthermore, 'international organisation' has usually been understood in terms of relations among nation-states, while contemporary 'global governance' involves not only nation-states, but also other types of actors such as business enterprises, civil society associations, local governments and regional agencies. Finally, in contrast to the traditional conception of international organisations as being wholly and solely the servants of states, contemporary global governance institutions are to some extent also players in their own right: they influence states (and other actors) at the same time as being influenced by states (and other actors).

Global *governance* is not the same thing as global *government*. To speak of global governance is not to suggest the existence, emergence or goal of a world state. Global-scale regulation can operate in the absence of a centralised, sovereign, public entity that is elevated from a national to a