

How IFS Members Can Work With the United Nations



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Introduction

Most IFS members know that our organization has the “highest level of consultative status at the United Nations.”

But what does that mean?

How are we taking advantage of that status to further our work?

How can we do it better?

How does it all work (it IS very complicated)?

We will start with an obscure UN body called ECOSOC (sounds very official, and it is....)



What is ECOSOC?

The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is at the heart of the United Nations system to advance the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental. It is the central platform for fostering debate and innovative thinking, forging consensus on ways forward, and coordinating efforts to achieve internationally agreed goals. It is also responsible for the follow-up to major UN conferences and summits.*



*Source UN.Org

How Does it all Work?

United Nations

NGOs have been engaged with the UN since 1945

ECOSOC

In order to work with the UN the NGOs have to work through ECOSOC

NGOs

Through ECOSOC, NGOs contribute to: information dissemination, awareness raising, development education and policy advocacy, joint operational projects, and participate in intergovernmental technical expertise

The UN wants to strengthen its relationships with NGOs

Benefits of our ECOSOC Consultative Status

- Attend international conferences and events
- Make written and oral statements at these events
- Organize and host 'side events'
- Enter UN premises and observe open meetings
- Have opportunities to network and lobby within these bodies



Please note that NGOs operate in a lobbying capacity and do not vote

Three Categories of Consultative Status

Based on specialization and scope of work

General status which is given to NGOs that represent large segments of societies in several countries. Their area of work covers most of the issues on the agenda of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies. These tend to be fairly large, well-established international NGOs with a broad geographical reach. **IFS has general status.**

Special status which is reserved for NGOs that have a special competence in, and are concerned specifically with, only a few of the fields of activity covered by ECOSOC. These NGOs tend to be smaller and more recently established.

Roster status which is conferred on NGOs that have a more narrow and/or technical focus and make occasional and useful contributions to the work of ECOSOC or its subsidiary bodies.

Requirements for Having Consultative Status

- The work of the NGO must be relevant to the work of ECOSOC
 - Economic, social, environmental, and related fields
- Transparent and democratic decision-making mechanism and a democratically adopted constitution
- Have an established headquarters with an executive officer and in existence for two years
- The authority to speak for its members with a representative structure
 - Appropriate mechanisms for accountability; and to provide financial statements
 - Contributions and other support
 - Expenses, direct or indirect

Responsibilities of NGOs with Consultative Status

1. Submitting a [report](#) to the Council Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations through the Secretary-General every fourth year a brief report of their activities, specifically as regards the support they have given to the work of the United Nations.
 - a. Brief description of the organization's activities, particularly highlighting their contribution to the work of the United Nations, including the Sustainable Development Goals and other internationally agreed goals.
 - b. If report is not submitted to the NGO Branch by our organization in given time, it will result in the recommendation for withdrawal of our consultative status by the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs.

What this Means for the IFS

1. As a member with the highest status, IFS members in NY currently hold positions on five NGO Substantive Committees working with the UN (there over 30 in total):
 - a. NGO Committee on Migration;
 - b. NGO Committee on Human Rights;
 - c. NGO Committee on the Status of Women;
 - d. NGO Committee on Aging and;
 - e. NGO Committee on Social Development.

There are numerous other NGO Committees spread across three locations: Geneva, New York, and Vienna. IFS Members in Europe are encouraged to engage with the Committees in Geneva and Vienna.

CoNGO and ECOSOC

- All of these committees are members **the Conference on Non Governmental Organizations (CoNGO)**. These committee are NOT part of the UN but have significant access to the UN and UN delegations from member states.
- To be a part of CoNGO you must be a part of ECOSOC*
- CoNGO is also not part of the United Nations but theoretically acts as a facilitator for NGOs to access the UN
- It also allows for NGOs to meet and discuss issues through committees



ECOSOC
United Nations Economic
and Social Council

*This means you must have consultative, associated, or observer status with the United Nations. If you have formal relations with any part of the UN, you may apply for associate status.

IFS, Its Status, and Committees

As mentioned, the International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers (IFS) has Consultative status with the United Nations. IFS members currently participate on five NGO Committees:

1. Committee on Ageing
2. Committee on Human Rights
3. Committee on Migration
4. Committee on the Status of Women
5. Committee on Social Development



NGO Committee on Ageing (NY, Geneva, Vienna)

Works to raise world awareness of the opportunities and challenges of global ageing. The Committee advocates within the United Nations community to further integrate ageing in UN policies and programs through:

- Representation from both international and national organizations, some that are solely concerned with ageing issues while others embody them within a broader framework.
- Meetings each month from September through June to hear presentations on critical priorities and emerging issues under discussion at the United Nations, such as the 5-year review and appraisal of the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) at the Commission on Social Development (CSocD) in 2008, and the adoption of a Convention on Disability
- sponsoring special events and projects, most notably the annual celebration of the International Day of Older Persons (IDOP) held in early October, to which the public is invited

NGO Committee on Human Rights (New York)

Encourages the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the United Nations Charter. This is done through:

1. Encouraging UN bodies and agencies to include human rights frameworks in their planning and social policy considerations.
2. Acting as a forum which receives and shares information on human rights norms and standards.
3. Cooperating with UN departments, bodies, organizations and agencies to raise public awareness in order to promote, protect and defend human rights.

NGO Committee on Migration (New York)

Encourages the protection and promotion of migrants' human rights in accordance with the United Nations Charter. As a member of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (CoNGO), we are in consultative relationship with the United Nations. This is done through focusing on:

- Implementation, Follow-Up, and Review (IFUR) Processes for the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM)*
- Xenophobia & Social Inclusion
- Climate-Induced Displacement
- Refugee & Migrant Children

NGO Committee on the Status of Women (NY, Geneva, Vienna)

Advocates for women's rights and the advancement of women and girls worldwide and represents 100 organizations that monitor and participate in the daily UN events in NY. The Committee supports:

- The Beijing Platform for Action, UN Security Resolution 1325, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- The NGO Consultation Day that prepares for the UN Commission on the Status of Women sessions that take place in February or March
- Bringing together activists from around the world for two weeks at the United Nations, and enables members to network, share strategies and best practices, and lobby governments to implement resolutions and treaties they have signed
- Bringing NGO Representatives together to caucus, issue joint statements, and provide wording for the Agreed Conclusions of the annual United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

NGO Committee on Social Development (NY, Vienna)

Raises awareness and holds discussions on social development issues taken up by the United Nations (UN) System and in particular by the UN Commission for Social Development. They also:

- Advocate on social development issues in other forums such as the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, Commission on the Status of Women, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and General Assembly.
- Committee members keep one another informed and deliver group statements to the UN voicing ideas and positions on key social development issues
- Reviews the outcome of the World Summit on Social Development

When and how do our interactions with the UN happen?

- ❑ During ECOSOC Commissions
- ❑ Through the Third Committee of the U.N. General Assembly
- ❑ Via Special Rapporteurs



ECOSOC Commissions

- ❖ **During ECOSOC Commissions.** Of the eight functional ECOSOC Commissions, two are most relevant to our work:
 1. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) (meets annually in New York, usually in March, 45 members elected by ECOSOC)
 2. The Commission of Social Development (CSocD) (meets annually in New York in February, 46 UN members elected by ECOSOC)NGO Committees implement side events during the annual meetings of these Commissions, at which UN representatives are often present or even speak.
- ❖ Additionally, **The High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development** (formerly the Commission on Sustainable Development), jointly overseen by ECOSAC and the General Assembly, affords NGOs the opportunity to interact with UN representatives and representatives of member states at its annual meeting.

The Third Committee of the General Assembly

❖ **Through the Third Committee of the General Assembly**

A bit of background:

The General Assembly is the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative body of the United Nations. Along with ECOSOC, it is one of six principal organs created by the U.N. Charter and it is the only one with universal membership. It currently has 193 members.

The bulk of the work of the General Assembly is carried out by six Committees:

- First Committee (Disarmament and International Security)
- Second Committee (Economic and Financial)
- Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural)**
- Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization)
- Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budget)
- Sixth Committee (Legal)

The Third Committee (continued)

- The Third Committee meets for 8 weeks every October-November (during the main session of the General Assembly). All UN members are members of the Committee.
- During its session, the Committee members negotiate a number of resolutions on various topics, interact with UN experts on different subjects, and hold discussions on other agenda items.
- IFS members can influence the drafting and outcome of resolutions through meetings with member states (mission visits) and through briefings
- They also raise and reinforce important issues via side events that take place during the session
- It is important to remember that NGOs do not have a formal role on the Third Committee, or any General Assembly body

Special Rapporteurs

Via Special Rapporteurs

Special Rapporteurs are independent experts working on behalf of the United Nations who have a specific country or thematic mandate from the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC)

The Human Rights Council oversees 44 thematic and 12 specific country mandates for which it can assign special rapporteurs

NGOs, particularly IFS members, have a distinct role in influencing the findings and recommendations of special rapporteurs because of our on-the-ground local approach to global challenges. These interactions can take place through in-person meetings, at conferences/side events, and via written testimony, both during the ECOSOC Commissions and Third Committee sessions as well as outside of them.



E. Tendayi Achiume, the UN Special Rapporteur on Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals

IFS's growing engagement with the UN can be seen through the prism of working to achieve the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, including those related to poverty, health, education inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice.

All IFS members work on these issues to some degree and our work at the UN can be seen as a bridge between the macro- and the micro, between the global and the local, between international policy and on-the-ground solutions.

