

A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE RELEVANCE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD ORDER

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Abstract

The myriad of challenges such as diseases, climate change, wars, terrorism, hunger and starvation, pollution, environmental degradation, etc, confronting the global community today deserve nothing than a concerted effort via international organizations to address on a permanent basis. This is incontrovertibly true because international organizations provide some veritable platforms through which nation states as well as individuals desirous of finding solutions to their common challenges can meet and have these issues resolved. This paper, therefore, intends to discuss the essence of international organizations in the contemporary society. The motive is not just to showcase the crucial roles of international organizations but to also draw the attention of the public to the salient opportunities hidden in these institutions. The data for the piece are based on the secondary source which includes textbooks, journal articles and other online materials. Liberal institutionalism has been adopted as a theoretical backup. The findings suggest that the essence of international organizations lies in their functions which are usually for the benefits of member countries. These are seen in the various activities of organizations such as the International Trade Centre and the World Trade which assist member countries in promoting fair trade with each other; the Natural Capitalism and International Research Centre help to enhance sustainable economic development in the world; the World Bank and the Institute for International Finance provide monetary assistance to the countries as the Food and Agricultural Organizations and the World Food Programme help member countries in the areas food security. They also help in maintaining peace and security, environmental protection among others. To ensure that international organizations remain relevance in the 21st Century, concrete efforts are needed by states and non-states actors to strengthening their capacities and members must be totally committed to the vision and mission of international organization they belong.

Keywords: *Assessment, Relevance, International Organizations, World Order.*

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1. Introduction

Since the advent of the state system following the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 (Rourke & Boyer, 2003) the normative tradition has been the major advocate of states as the unitary rational actor in the international system. This notion, however, is fast changing due to the emergence of other new actors outside the states in the global scene. The new entrants do not only function effectively in their areas of operation but have also succeeded in breaking the monopoly hitherto enjoyed by the states. International organizations are among the non-state actors in the field of international relations. They are ranked as “the second most important actor after the States on the international scene” (Fischer, 2012). As reveals by the above mentioned author, a recent study conducted by the Bertelsmann Foundation in Berlin shows two international organizations: the United Nations and the European Union possess the “world power status”. Such status is determined in the study on the basis of economic powers, political influence, stability, effective research and education. Their emergence, specifically in the second part of the twentieth century was due to the realization by the statesmen, politicians, scholars as well as private individuals that certain problems such as war, contagious diseases, organized crime poverty, hunger, environmental damages which posed threat to human society could best be resolved at the global/universal or regional level beyond the limited range of national boundaries (Fischer, 2012).

Today they have increased tremendously in numbers, activities or functions covering almost all facets of human endeavours. Thus, in the areas of Human Rights protection you find organization like the Amnesty International; on Migration, International Organization for Migration; Humanitarian Services, the Red Cross; Economy/Monetary, International Monitoring Fund (IMF), International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD); Religion, Association of Gospel Rescue Missions, International Organization for Islamic Countries (IOC), the Salvation Army and the Samaritan Purse; Energy, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC); just to mention a few.

International organizations have remained highly influential in responding to emergencies, helping members in time of needs and serving as blocs in presenting a common front on major international issues affecting their members or the entire international community as a whole. It is pertinent, therefore to discuss in some details their essence, why they are necessary, the various roles they

play wherever they are found and how to ensure they are sustained. Consequently, the paper is structured as follows: Introduction, Theoretical Framework, Meaning of International Organizations, Historical Evolution of International Organizations, Classifications of International Organizations, Features of International Organizations, The Essence of International Organizations, Conclusion Recommendations and References

2. Theoretical Framework

This study aligns itself with Liberal Institutionalism also known as Neo-liberalism. Liberal Institutionalism is a modern theory in International Relations which claims that international institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) can increase and aid cooperation between states. The theory emerged in the 1980s as a direct response to the realist's conception of the international system as being anarchic thus, making genuine cooperation among states impossible. Its major proponents like Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye begin with same assumptions used by the realists but differ at some points as they argue that states concentrate on absolute gains and prospect for cooperation rather than relative gain and potential for conflict as espoused by the realist tradition (Keohane 1984, & Nye & Keohane 1977 in Beavis, 2017).

The concept of cooperation is very fundamental to the adherents of Neo-liberalism. As opined by Hellmann & Wolf (1993) states operate in an increasingly complex world with multiple issues and multiple contacts among societies, a world in which states face limitation in accomplishing essentials task on their own. Because of the size or nature of many issues, states are often unable to address the underlying causes of these issues without the cooperation of other states. A similar view has also been shared on why states need cooperation in form of international organizations or institutions by Allison (2000). Accordingly, "The rise of globalization and concerns over terrorism, drug trafficking and pandemics such as HIV/AIDS and Covid-19 have shown that states can no longer react unilaterally to those threats and that it is only through regional and global regimes that response can be coordinated to deal with security threat". Another important theme of this school is its view concerning institutions which proponents consider "useful in three separate ways" as follows: first, institutions help surmount obstacles to cooperation such as mistrust, uncertainty of institution and high transaction costs. Second, they play an important role

in addressing collective action dilemmas such as free riding, the relative gains problem, defection, and the tragedy of the commons' and third. They furnish the practical means for policy coordination through information sharing among other (Webber, 2009). Furthermore, Mordi (2015) states that neo-liberalism frowns at the narrow pursuit of individual self-interest but rather encourages the promotion of cooperation; membership of international institutions because it would lead to a wider view of self-interest for the purpose of encouraging cooperation; and trade relations among states because it would lead to the elimination of war.

This theory demonstrates that states and individuals could proffer solutions to the plethora of challenges bedeviling the global society today if they can cooperate or collaborate with each other through international organizations. These organizations provide avenues where ideas could be generated, resources galvanized towards halting the menaces in the world.

Liberal institutionalism has, however, been criticized severely for its stance on international issues. The criticisms which come mostly from the realist scholars contend that there is nothing like absolute gains when it comes to cooperation among states as preached by the neo-liberalists. Grieco (1988) cited in Stein (2008) argues that "cooperation was more difficult to achieve and sustain because states would give up potential gains of the cooperation that brought them these gains meant that others gained even more". They also argue that states differ in power and as such use it in the creation of international institutions. The powerful states employ "their bargaining power as well as power to structure the choices for others in the construction of institution". So what you see is coercive cooperation or "coordination for the power" (Stein, 1982). Finally, the realists have equally argued that international organizations are prone to failure. And that the fact that they were created to improve outcomes for states provides no assurances that they have achieve their objectives (Stein, 2008)

3. Meaning of International Organizations

Several attempts have been made by scholars to define international organizations. Some of which are seen below. The term international organizations according to Cheever and Havilland (1954 cited in Norman & Perkins, 2007; Chandra, 2004) "is defined as any cooperative arrangement instituted among states usually by a basic agreement to perform some mutually advantageous

functions implemented through periodic meetings and staff activities”. The Encyclopedia of Political Science (2011) defines international organizations as” transnational organizations that are held together by formal agreements ... that contains element of formal institutional structure.” According to Plano & Olton (1975) international organization is define as “a formal arrangement transcending national boundaries that provides for the establishment of institutional machinery to facilitate cooperation among members in the security, economic social and related field”. To the Encyclopedia of social science (1968) international organization refers to “the process by which states established and develop formal continuing international structures for the conduct of certain aspect of their relationships with each other”.

Equally, Acher (1983) cited by Aremu & Saliu (2013) provides a more detail definition of the subject matter. According to him, international organization is “a formal continuous structure established between members (governmental and/or non-governmental) from two or more sovereign states with the aim of pursuing the common interest of their membership”. The above definition spotlights three salient elements worthy to note- firstly an international organization has its membership drawn from more than one country. Secondly, international organization primarily caters for the interest of its members and thirdly, international organization has a “continuous structure formally established by treaty, agreement and constitutive act to which all member states subscribe”.

We see international organizations as organized progressive groups instituted through consent from member states that are drawn from more than one country for the pursuit of common goals which are usually beneficial to member states.

Historical Evolution of International Organizations: A Glance

Explaining the origin of international organizations is yet unfinished enterprise. It becomes all the more difficult when attempt is made at dating its origin (Aremu, 2013).

International organizations have been in existence at least in primitive form throughout most of the recorded history (Norman & Perkins 2007). Ancient states such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, china, Greece, and India established among themselves diplomatic contact, commercial relations, treaties of alliance, code of warfare and terms of peace which served as foundation toward the formation

of international organization (Norman & Perkins, 2007). However, the first set of traditional international organizations dates back to the fifth century BC when the federation of Greek city-states under the authority of the Athens established the Delian League which was one of the first institutional framework responsible for handling common problems and lasted between the periods of 478 to 404 (first Phase) and 378 to 338 (second phase) (Adeniran, 2007). This body was an alliance aimed at opposing the Persia during its first phase and to solve specific problems of its members.

In the periods between 11th and 17th Centuries BC, another organization-Hanseatic League- was established in medieval Germany. As explain by (Adeniran, 2007) the league consisted of merchant guilds and town associations and was responsible for providing security, securing trading right and monopoly for its members. The period of 1600 witnessed the unification of much parts of the world under the authority of the Roman Empire and later the Catholic Church (Aremu, 2013). The Catholic Church contributed immensely through its various activities toward the formation of international organizations. This is evident in the convening of the council of Constantine. This as describe by Norman & Perkins (2007) was “the most spectacular international congress assembles in 1414 to attempt to resolve rival claims to the papacy and thereby shape the political as well as spiritual fortune of Europe.

The Congress of Westphalia in 1648 convened to address the thirty years war and the Congress of Vienna which was held to settle the European political problems after the defeat of Napoleon were also significant steps in the growth of international organizations. The latter according to Groom (1978) marks the beginning of what he refers to as the “modern period western type of international organizations and institutions”. This may be so because Chandra (2004) stresses that the Vienna congress that produced the Quintuple Alliance (with the admission of France in 1818) was very significant for many reasons: “First, it continued even after the Napoleonic war. Second, periodical conference were instituted under the alliance and. Third, there was general agreement that peace depends on some sort of big power collaboration”.

The Hague conference of 1899 and 1907 which brought many nations together in attempt to promote good relationship among themselves and the formation of such body as Rhine and the Danube River Commissions as well as the universal postal union in 1865 (Adeniran, 2007; Dauda,

2010) were vital development in the history of international organizations. By the early part of the twentieth century following the formation of the League of Nations after the First World War international organization became more standardized with regular meetings involving different countries in attendance. The failure of the League of Nations to prevent the outbreak of the Second World War led to the emergence of the United Nations as the global international governmental organization (IGO) charged with the responsibility of promoting global peace and security.

However, it is interesting to note that even as far back as the fifth century when the first set of international organizations, the Delian League was said to have emerged among the Greek city states (Adeniran, 2007) up to the 18th century international organizations was without a well-defined name as it is known today until a professor of law at the university of Edinburgh, Professor J. Lorimer in 1867 supposedly “first coined the expression international organizations” (Meierhenrich, 2012). They have proliferated to the extent that the report of the Union of International Association (UIA), the publisher of the yearbook of international organizations released in 2014 appears quite revealing as shown below: Total Non-governmental Organizations (NGO) = 59,383 (representing 88.45%), Total international Governmental Organizations (IGO) = 7,756 (representing 11.55%), Total international organizations (IOs) = 67,139.

Classifications of International Organizations

There are certain indices used in the classification of international organizations. This ranges from membership composition, geographical spread of membership and sphere of authority, functions or purpose to profit motive (Aremu, 2013). Accordingly, if international organization is composed of only states as members it is known as “International Governmental Organization” (IGO). Examples include the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), the organizations of American States (OAS) and so on. If the membership composition is only limited to non- governmental body it is called “International Non-Governmental Organization” (INGO). Examples include Transparency International, Amnesty International, Political Science Association (IPSA) etc. There are cases where you have both of them combined such as in International Labour Organization (ILO) and World Wide Foundation (WWF) (Aremu, 2013).

In terms of geographical spread of membership and sphere of authority we have universal/global as well as regional and sub-regional. The former involves membership and scope of operation

unrestricted to a particular area of the universe like the UN, the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) while the latter has its membership limited to a particular region usually a continent such as AU in Africa, EU in Europe and so on.

With regard to functions, there are general purpose organizations whose functions cut across political, economic, strategic and socio-cultural spheres. This, you find in the UN, AU, Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Arab League. The mandates of IOs such as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Australia New Zealand and United States (ANZUS) Warsaw pact, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are concerned with security issues. Others are Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) etc.

The last classification according to Aremu (2013) is by separating them into profit and non-profit oriented. For profit oriented international organizations we have multinational corporations while non-profit seeking are Amnesty International, ICRC, etc. The above classifications of international organizations also fall under what Williams (1989) broadly classified as “membership and functions”.

Features of International Organizations

International organizations exhibit certain common characteristics. These as stressed by Aremu (2013) and Haas, (1991) are treated below:

1. International organizations have a permanent institutional framework that carries out a well-defined functions
2. There is freedom of entry and exit. It is a common tradition among international organization that new members who meet certain laid down criteria became their members. Thus, in the 2002 EU summit at Copenhagen Bulgaria, Rumania and the Baltic states Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia became members of the body while Turkey could not due to poor human rights record. Also member states are free to withdraw their membership when consider necessary to do so. A case in point was when Morocco withdrew her membership from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1984 on the ground that the

OAU admitted Western Sahara, a disputed territory between Morocco and Spain into the body (Clifford,1984)

3. International organizations have guiding documents that spell out “the goals structure and modus operandi to which all members subscribe”. For instance, the League of Nations had “Covenant”, the UN has the “Charter”, the African Union has the “Constitutive Act”. (Aremu, 2013)
4. All international organizations have a heterogeneous membership that differs in size, military power, popularity, resource endowment and degree of industrialization (Clifford, 1984).
5. In many international organizations there is an organ that is broadly representative of all member states. Such body grants equal representation to all member countries. The general Assembly of the UN and the North Atlantic Council of NATO are examples to note.
6. The existence of secretariat which performs administrative and other specific functions. It is always headed by the Secretary General and staffed by international civil Servants and diplomats as well. Examples include ECOWAS secretariat in Abuja, UN secretariat in New York and EU in Brussels.
7. Another characteristic is that international organizations operate at the level consent guided by treaty and agreement rather than by compulsion.

3. The Essence of International Organizations

The main objective of all international organizations has been welfare improvement of member countries (Economy watch, 2010). States establish and develop international organization to achieve objectives that they cannot achieve on their own (Bohning, 1999).

Generally speaking, the essence of international organizations lies in the functions or services they provide for their members. Thus according to Economy Watch (2010):

1. International organizations such as International Trade Centre and World Trade Organization assist member countries in promoting fair trade with each other.
2. International organizations like the Natural Capitalism and International Research Centre help to enhance sustainable economic development in the world.

3. The World Bank and the Institute for International Finance are international organizations that provide monetary assistance to the countries
4. The purpose of incorporation of the international organizations such as Food and Agricultural Organizations (FAO) and World Food Programme is to provide food security to member states
5. The endeavours of such international bodies as Global Environment Facility and United Nations Environmental Programme is to ensure environmental protection.
6. Protection of human rights is the responsibility of international groups as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the Amnesty International etc,
7. The emergence and disaster management relief is championed by International Committee of Red Cross and Relief Web.
8. In the same vein, the essence of the World Health Organization is to promote health care facilities among member countries.

Furthermore, the essence of international organizations could also be seen in areas such as conflict resolution, maintenance of global peace and security, environmental protection, economic cooperation, humanitarian assistance and research and development.

Conflict Resolutions

In terms of conflict resolution, international organizations are indispensable tools. This is evidenced in the report by Russett & Starr (1985) as they reveal that “Of Thirty – Nine conflict situations...for the period 1945-1965 period, twenty-three used international organizations to aid in conflict resolution”. Bonchuk (2005) is even more precise on this as he stresses that:

The primary aim of international organizations is to avert war or interrupt the use of force; preventing the aggravation of disputes and keeping the contenders apart, while the processes of international conciliation are set in motion. International organizations create avenue for compromise, accommodation and a common sense of values (Aremu, 2013:127).

Maintenance of Peace and Security

International organizations play prominent roles in maintaining global peace and security. This role is most visible in the United Nations. In fact, according to Article One of the first Chapter of its Charter, the UN is:

to maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threat to peace and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principle of justice and international law adjustment of settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of peace develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal right and self-determination of peoples and to take appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedom of all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, and to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends (Adeniran, 2007:166).

Chapter VII, Article 39 of the UN Charter further places these functions squarely on the Security Council. Thus:

The Security Council shall determine the existence of threat of any threat to the peace, breach to the peace or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken ...to maintain or restore international peace and security.

To achieve this, the organization has adopted preventive diplomacy and mediation, peacekeeping, peace building, countering terrorism and disarmament to maintain international peace and security (Mutiullah, 2013).

Peacekeeping

One of the various functions perform by international organizations is peacekeeping. This has been described as “a third-party contingency approach to conflict management” and also “one of the novel techniques of conflict diplomacy which has become widespread in contemporary international relations” (Bonchuk, 2005). It is believe that through the deployment of the troops

such as the UN force into trouble spots, the force will help stabilize and seal off an exploding military situation until the basis of a more durable settlement is achieved. Thus “the logic of peacekeeping is to provide the parties to a dispute with a buffer zone behind which it is hoped they will use to negotiate and work towards a peaceful settlement of their conflict” (Bunchuk, 2005). The UN, African Union and ECOWAS have all been involved in peacekeeping missions in the world.

Environmental Protection

According to Aremu (2013) “If international organizations had been absent environmental issues would have been in utter disarray and states would have had to resort to ‘might is right’ in addressing environmental damages”.

The above statement clearly underscores the essence of international organizations in regulating the negative impacts of human activities on the environment. Accordingly, international organizations such as the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have been involved in this. They also conduct on environmental problems and share their findings with members.

Humanitarian Assistance

Wars and other natural disasters such as earthquake, tsunami, hurricane, inferno, and so on, have become an integral part of the global system. As a result humanitarian problems, including refugee, hunger, disease, lack of shelter and so on, are created thereby demanding the urgent solution which international organizations come handy through utilization of their widespread network across the globe to coordinate international response programme and scheme in tackling them, especially refugees question (Duada, 2013; Adeniran, 2007).

Research Activities

International organizations also conduct researches that are useful in the improvement and safety of the human society. The International Institute of Applied System Analysis (IIASA) is one of

such organizations. Founded in October, 1972 by representatives of 12 countries, including the US and the former USSR, IIASA draws its membership usually refers to as National Member Organizations (NMOs) from Africa, Europe, Asia, Oceania and Americas. As an international non-governmental organization, IIASA conducts "Independent and Completely unconstrained" research by "Political or national interest" (IIASA, 2017). Its research findings include the 1980s pioneering approach in economics that assisted the US government to take legal action against Microsoft based on the conviction that "small, random events could lead a technologically inferior product to dominate the market"(Options Magazine, 2007). Also, the findings of IIASA research team comprised of chemists, biologists, economists on water pollution since 1980s is still the basis of modern water policy design in Japan, USA and the defunct USSR. It has equally helped to improve significantly the quality of air in Europe (IIASA, 2017)

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper discussed the Essence of International Organizations in contemporary society. It also delved into the historical development of international organizations and highlighted their types and major characteristics. It noted that international organizations exist to provide services to their members and that their essence lies in those functions they perform which are in areas of education, health, cooperation, conflict resolution, environmental protection, maintenance of peace and security through the prevention of war, research activities, et cetera. Also from the study, we found that what a state cannot accomplish individually in the modern society could be achieved when it involves international organizations whose mandates cover those specific areas of interest to the states and non-state actors as well. Though some of them are yet to become standardized operationally due to challenges, effort must be sustained to keep them functional for the overall benefit of mankind.

There is doubt that international organizations could provide solutions to most of the challenges faced by the world today. In view of this, the following recommendations have been considered necessary for their effectiveness:

1. International organizations should be formed when only it is necessary to do so to avoid proliferation.

2. Genuine efforts must be made by states and non-states actors towards strengthening their capacities,
3. Members of international organizations should contribute towards the implementation of their programmes by paying their dues regularly and as at when due; attending meetings when necessary etc.
4. They must be discipline measures in place for erring members as well as rewards for loyal members.
5. They should execute projects that have direct impacts on the members.
6. Most international organizations like the multi-nationals do exploit the poor countries. This attitude must be condemned and made to stop.

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