





A critical analysis of the difficulties faced by international organisations within the context of the role of the United Nations



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Dates:

Received: 07 Feb. 2019 Accepted: 23 May 2019 Published: 18 July 2019

How to cite this article:

Shai, K.B., Langa, N., Maphoto, T.E., Ngoepe, C.C., Rapanyane, M.B. & Ravhutulu, K., 2019, 'A critical analysis of the difficulties faced by international organisations within the context of the role of the United Nations', *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review* 7(1), a263. https://doi.org/10.4102/apsdpr.v7i1.263

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Background: Dr C. Archer has made serious theoretical and practical contributions to the understanding of the evolving scholarly and policy discourse on international organisations.

Aim: This article critically analyse a selection of major and common difficulties faced by international organisations.

Setting: Based on historical sensibility, this article heavily employs the United Nations as a test case to gain a crispy understanding of the difficulties faced by international organisations.

Methods: This article was based on the study of secondary sources and critical discourse analysis. Data drawn from the emerging discourse were analysed thematically.

Results: It has been established that the multifaceted nature of the difficulties faced by international organisations can best be understood when located within a historical context.

Conclusion: There is no gainsaying that inasmuch as Archer's study is not extensively cited by scholars, it remains a principal reference source for practitioners of the United Nations and other international organisations. The value for this article largely lies in its scholarly contribution, especially because of late the activities of international organisations have come under serious scrutiny within the diplomatic and academic circles.

Keywords: Archer; difficulties; international organisations; international system; United Nations.

Introduction

International organisations such as the United Nations (UN) are an important component of the international system. As a result, numerous studies pertaining to them have been carried out, and a number of scholars have dedicated some of their time and energy solely to studying these organisations (Art & Jervis 2011; Goldstein & Pevehouse 2011). One such scholar is Dr. Clive Archer, who has published a number of editions of his book *International Organizations*. Among other things, in this book, Archer highlights or rather laments the difficulties faced by international organisations. In order to tease out Archer's theoretical contributions to the study of international organisations, the aim of this article, therefore, was to critically discuss these difficulties within the context of the UN. Having said that, it is the well-considered view of this study's authors that this subject is worth revisiting with a critical lens. This is particularly because in the recent past the role or [ab] use of international organisations such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have been under the spotlight (Malito 2019). It is therefore important and timely that an alternative critical perspective by South[ern] angled scholars like ourselves on this subject be proffered. Such contribution is poised to enhance the existing body of knowledge on the UN and international organisations in general. This premise should be understood within the context that this article is the product of a study that was conceptualised and operationalised by scholars who have a completely different epistemological identity from Archer.

Against this background, this article pauses to give critical highlights of its structure. Firstly, definitional clarity of some of the terms that are an integral part of the article is provided. The basis for this section is the reality of the contested meaning of concepts in academy, particularly within the social sciences and humanities (Rankhumise, Shai & Maphunye 2008). Then, the article briefly discusses the roles of international organisations. Thus, it would be impossible to clearly identify and understand the difficulties faced by international organisations unless the reader and us engage fairly within the space in which such actors operate. This would entail a clear articulation

of their roles with the view to discerning the difficulties they face from the quest to seize existing opportunities, which are crucial for their success. It is at this stage that an extensive discussion of the difficulties faced by international organisations is interwoven. It must be noted that although the article heavily relies on Archer's work, the works of other scholars were also consulted for enriching this critical analysis. As such, a section of this article is also dedicated in passing to unpacking the views of other scholars on the subject under study before concluding remarks are advanced.

International organisations and their typologies

International organisations

Archer (2001:33) defined an international organisation as a 'formal, continuous structure established by agreement between members (governmental and/or non-governmental) from two or more sovereign states with the aim of pursuing the common interest of the membership'. International organisations normally differ on the basis of membership, wherein they are either universal (i.e. World Bank) or regional (i.e. Arab League of Nations). Emphatically international organisations can be governmental or non-governmental. The typology of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) are therefore provided below.

International non-governmental organisations

Archer (2001:35) submits that the United Nations Economic and Social Council proclaimed that 'every international organisation which is not created by means of intergovernmental agreements shall be considered as a non-governmental international organisation'. Traditionally, INGOs concerned themselves with economic, social, educational, cultural and scientific matters; however, presently INGOs can be found in a variety of other sectors (Archer 2001:27; Viotti & Kauppi 2010). Among others, INGOS includes the Red Cross and Doctors without Borders.

Intergovernmental organisations

From the definition of INGOs, one can conclude that IGOs are those that are created through intergovernmental agreements (Baylis, Smith & Owens 2008). Among others, IGOs includes UN and African Union (AU).

The roles of UN and other international organisations

This section uses the UN in the main with the aid of other international organisations in order to paint a qualitatively rich picture of these actors in the international system. Archer (2001:68) finds that international organisations play the role of an instrument, arena and actor in the international system. As instruments, international organisations are used by member states to achieve their foreign and, to some extent, domestic policy objectives (Archer 1992:135). The foregoing

observation should be understood within the context that foreign policy is not necessarily delinked from the macro domestic policy framework of the country that formulates and implements it (Shai 2016a). The use of international organisations as instruments for the furtherance of foreign policy is more prevalent in IGOs than in INGOs (Raphala & Shai 2016). Additionally, the utilisation of an international organisation as an instrument is likely to lead to the most powerful members fighting over it; this limits the prospects of the organisation taking independent action (and therefore being impartial) (Archer 2001:69). As an example, Archer (2001:69) recalls that in its first eight years of existence, the UN was used as an instrument of United States of America (hereafter referred to as the US) diplomacy, mainly against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which is commonly known as the Soviet Union.

As arenas, international organisations perform the function of a forum or stage on which member states can discuss, cooperate, argue or disagree on numerous issues (Archer 1992:141; Archer 2001:73). Traditionally, international organisations have given their members an opportunity to articulate their viewpoints and suggestions in an open and public forum, hence a study of forty-one academic publications written between 1970 and 1977 found that 78 per cent presented the UN as an arena (Archer 2001:74). The use of the UN and its agencies in the 1970s by Third World countries as a platform to voice their views on a New International Economic Order (NIEO) serves as a classical example (Archer 2001:74). Equally important, the defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU) has been very useful in granting an international stage/spot light to the pioneers of liberation in Africa who were meeting to condemn the inhume and brutal system of apartheid, imperialism and all forms of colonialism (Maleka, Vuma & Shai 2016; Shai & Molapo 2017).

As actors, international organisations play a more central and pervasive part in international affairs (Archer 1992:147). Assertions such as 'the UN should do something' or 'the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has increased petroleum prices' demonstrate that organisations are at times seen as existing somewhat independent of their membership (Archer 2001:79; Shai 2018). Moreover, Archer (2001:81) argues that UN peacekeeping operations demonstrate that international organisations are capable of performing on the global stage with a degree of independence and effectiveness that is often incomparable to that of state actors (Archer 2001:81; Shai 2016a).

The difficulties faced by international organisations

Drawing from Archer's (1983) seminal theoretical contribution, it is observed that many international organisations lack the power to have a meaningful impact in the international political and economic system. Most IGOs rely on member states to execute their mandates, which include tasks such as peacekeeping and making,

and as a result, their success is largely determined by the member states' will to cooperate and contribute resources to their course (Archer 2014:156; Rannenyeni 2009). The failure of the League of Nations to intervene in violent conflicts in Manchuria, Ethiopia and some Latin American states, and ultimately to prevent the outbreak of World War II (WWII) serves as an example (Archer 2001:21). One of the factors contributing to the failure of League of Nations to prevent the outbreak of WWII is that the then major powers, the US and the Soviet Union (after its expulsion), were not part of the League (Archer 2001:21). Apart from Britain, which was reluctant to intervene in war zones, members of the League lacked the capacity to prevent the instability, which led to the outbreak of WWII (Archer 2001:21).

The lack of power of most IGOs was also evident during the Cold War. Because the ideological rivalry was between two of its permanent members, the US and the Soviet Union, the UNSC was rendered ineffective and toothless (Archer 2014:168). Both the Warsaw Treaty Organisation and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) faced the same predicament as the UNSC. As a result, the Soviet Union and the US could engage in their nuclear arms race without any deterrence despite the dangers that this race posed to the world. This also speaks to the dependence of these organisations on member states and supports the argument that at times they are used as instruments for the pursuance of foreign policy goals (Ramalepe & Shai 2016).

Another challenge that international organisations face relates to funding. International organisations are funded through contributions from member states, and a country's contribution is conventionally determined by its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Archer 2014:156; Rannenyeni 2009). Archer (2014:156) notes that prior to the outbreak of WWII, the UN and its agencies were unable to deal with the challenges of that period, and this was largely due to insufficient funding, understaffing and undue state interference. In corroboration of this argument, Keskin (2002:282) finds that in and before 2002, the UN spent approximately US\$10 billion yearly, which is a small amount when compared to most countries' government budgets. Keskin (2002:282-283) further submits that some countries are defaulting on their payments to the UN and an example is the US, which owed the UN US\$1.63bn at the end of September 1999. This obviously has a negative impact on the capacity of the organisation to deal with numerous challenges facing the international community.

The use of international organisations by member states as instruments of foreign policy has adverse implications for their development. Under such circumstances, it becomes nearly impossible for IGOs to develop their own decision-making powers; the UN's Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), which only had modest institutions owing to the unwillingness of member states to 'lose control over their economic policies' is a fitting example (Archer 2001:70).

To retain control of an IGO, member states usually limit the powers of the secretariat. Therefore, the secretariat has to stay in the good books of member states, in particular the powerful ones, in order to avoid a confrontation that could result in the ousting of the Secretary-General or any senior figure as was the case with Theo Van Boven of the UN's Human Rights Committee, and Trygve Lie and Boutros-Ghali of the UN (Archer 2001:71). The foregoing analysis should be understood within the context that the major powers in the UN, such as the US, are able to sway voting patterns in the UN General Assembly in a particular direction, thereby manipulating the poor and weak countries (i.e. Malawi), who largely depend on the US foreign aid to make ends meet (Shai & Iroanya 2014). Contextually, experience shows that major powers have a tendency of sufficiently supporting the working of international organisations especially as and when their strategic and tactical interests are at stake (Shai 2012).

Archer (2001:71) observes that a secretariat that is constituted by diplomats or officials seconded from national missions is vulnerable to undue pressures, influence and manipulation by their home governments. The classical case in this regard is the UN Secretariat during the 1960s, the peak of the Cold War era. Owing to the hierarchical structure of the UN Secretariat, Secretaries-General are able to make appointments to key positions without great consideration of competence or competition; this is why during his tenure as the Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan was accused of making appointments to executive posts in order to please major donor nations (Archer 2001:71). This obviously has a bearing on the efficiency of the organisation and may enable some member states to influence the implementation (or lack thereof) of policies agreed on at plenary meetings (Archer 2001:72).

Decision-making mechanisms can also present a challenge to international organisations. In most international organisations, decisions only bind members that have voted in favour of them; this is however not the case in the UN, where resolutions of the UN General Assembly only amount to recommendations, but those of the UNSC, despite the possibility of being vetoed by any of the permanent members, are binding to all member states (Archer 2001:72). The disadvantage of the principle of universal consensus is that it slows down the pace of the decision-making process and may cripple the organisation if unanimity is required for all decisions (Archer 2001:72-73). It is on this basis that in the recent past, there has been calls in certain quarters for the UN to be reformed so that its composition and structure can dovetail with the current practical realities in the international system.

Counter-balancing Archer's views: A scholarly perspective

In concurrence with the view that some international organisations are underfunded, Bennett (1995:95) submits that the ineffectiveness of some organisations is a result of

financial constraints. Opiye (2012:75) also holds that 'the United Nations is currently facing chronic underfunding and understaffing, especially in the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), which manages UN peacemaking activities globally'. In the early 1960s, a financial crisis threatened the existence of the UN and since then the organisation has been in a delicate financial situation, which was further exacerbated by the 1986 US Congress proposal to significantly reduce the country's contribution to the UN budget (Bennett 1995:96). Financial problems are not unique to the UN, as Matheba (2011) and Rannenyeni (2009) also acknowledges that the AU has a challenge of poor financial resources.

International organisations also face the challenge of their legitimacy being questioned. Sato (2009:11) states that the legitimacy of organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the European Union (EU), UN key organs such as the UNSC, and international financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) has at some point been questioned. Sato (2009:18) argues that the intensification of UNSC enforcement measures under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, as well as the 'supposed overreach' of the UNSC in the post-1990-1991 Gulf War period sparked the concerns over the legitimacy of the UNSC and its decisions. A case in point is the Lockerbie bombing of an airplane wherein the US and the United Kingdom of Britain (UK) used the UNSC to demand the surrendering of the suspects to them by Libya (accused of orchestrating the bombing) (Sato 2009:18; Shai 2016a). In defiance of this demand, Libya approached the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in order to seek the protection of its right to try the suspects itself; however, the US and the UK (with the support of other UNSC members) used Chapter 7 of the Charter to force Libya to comply with their demand and the case was subsequently withdrawn from the ICJ (Sato 2009:19). This case dented the legitimacy of the UNSC as there were questions of whether it was the appropriate platform to handle the case because the ICJ was also in the picture. It can also be argued that this case demonstrates the use of international organisations by member states to achieve their own objectives because the airplane was destined for the US city of Detroit and was also operated by an American airline.

The legitimacy of international organisations and their decisions or actions is closely linked to and can stem from accountability and transparency. These are the fundamental principles of good governance and its application is not limited to international organisations (Shai 2016b). Karns, Mingst and Stiles (2015:39) state that the UNSC, World Bank, WTO, and IMF have been accused of operating in secrecy. Additionally, Sato (2009:21) posits that the WTO's predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was criticised for being opaque as there was a perception that 'you have to go to the GATT in order to get any information on the GATT'. Karns et al. (2015:39) point out that some organisations have established measures to ensure accountability, and one example is the World Bank's Inspection Panel. However, they also submit that many IGOs

suffer from what Schillemans and Bovens (2011) termed the 'multiple accountabilities disorder' due to having multiple tasks and constituencies. The 'multi accountabilities disorder' in the international system can also be attributed to an overlap in the membership of certain international organisations. The case in point is the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) (Ndaguba, Nzewi & Shai 2018; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa 2018).

One of Archer's central contentions is that the optimisation of international organisations depends largely on the level of cooperation between themselves and their members. In carrying out its mandate, ICC, for example, relies heavily on the signatories to the Rome Statute as it does not have its own police force, military or territory (Human Rights Watch 2001:1; Shai 2016a). Without the cooperation of member states, it is virtually impossible for the ICC to perform its duties. It is for this reason that it is yet to apprehend the former Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir, who is accused of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. In the case of the ICC, the lack or limited cooperation received from the majority of African states should be understood within the context of the perceived racialisation and targeting of African heads of state and government. This may be partially true because the ICC is yet to purse the major brains behind the illegitimate US-led war against Iraq during the year 2003. Although this has an element of truth, it fails to appreciate the reality that most of the very cases involving African leaders that are on the rolls of the ICC have been referred by the Africans themselves. It is our well-considered view that the foregoing observation does not in any way imply that Africans do not have moral loco standi to critique the operations of ICC in Africa. This is because Africans' understanding and knowledge of the cases under consideration in Africa have been largely influenced by foreign interests and actors, who still wield an enormous power in terms of the continent and the world's knowledge economy (Nabudere 2010).

Technological advancement and globalisation are some of the factors that have significantly changed global politics and contributed to the increased need for global governance (Karns et al. 2015:4). Organisations such as the UN have thus been utilised more rapidly and their scopes have been expanded, consciously or unconsciously, owing to the increased demand for their involvement in numerous phenomena throughout the world (Keskin 2002:274). These include issues relating to human rights, refugee flows and sustainable development (Keskin 2002:274). However, the increased demand has in most cases not been accompanied by increased capacity. The close assessment and scrutiny that international organisations are being subjected to can therefore be attributed to the aforementioned factors.

Conclusion

International organisations face multifaceted difficulties, but the unwillingness of members to cooperate with them, legitimacy concerns and their utilisation for the pursuance of foreign policy objectives (in the case of IGOs) are the most prominent of these difficulties. This web of challenges particularly find expression in the UN, which clearly possess many lessons for the past, present and future key stakeholders of global governance. In order to improve or at least sustain their effectiveness, some international organisations need to be heavily capacitated financially, with human and other resources. Powers given to secretariats, and funding are some of the aspects that need to be dealt with in the short term. The utilisation of IGOs by some countries for securing their own national interests, and their impartiality in the eyes of some member states, as is the case with the ICC and some African countries, will hamper their development prospects. In final analysis, our article extends the frontiers of knowledge on the major and common difficulties faced by the UN and other international organisations, as expounded by Archer (1983) and other like-minded scholars.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exist.

Ethical consideration

This article followed all ethical standards for carrying out research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Author's contributions

K.B.S. conceptualised and led the operationalisation of the research for this article; made substantial addition to the arguments advanced and subsequently his contribution has equalled 1294 words; and he also performed editing and proofreading services for the entire article. Above all this, he solely attended to all queries and corrections in the various post-review stages towards the production of this article. N.L., T.E.M., C.C.N., M.B.R. and K.R. collectively researched and wrote 2596 words of the entire article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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