

# **Transnational advocacy**

## **In the fields of global climate and trade policymaking**

### **First results**

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For citation:

Beyers, J. and K. Lucas (2016) Transnational advocacy in the fields of global climate and trade policymaking: First results. University of Antwerp.

## Introduction

In this report we proudly present you some first results of a recently conducted study among transnational advocates at international conferences, more specifically at the Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Ministerial Conference (MC) of the World Trade Organization (WTO). This research project is financed by a prestigious grant of the European Research Council (ERC) awarded to Jan Beyers (ERC-2013-CoG 616702-iBias).

Previous studies on advocacy at the international level tend to focus on a small amount of organizations (often within one particular area). Besides, much research on transnational advocacy has been dedicated towards the mobilization of societal interests, the development of advocacy group communities at global diplomatic conferences and (partly) the strategies non-state actors use to seek influence at the international level. However, whether non-state actors are successful in exerting influence has been relatively under-researched. As a result, we partly know *how* advocacy organizations engage in international decision-making, but the current studies do not provide us with knowledge on how successful transnational advocates are (or the *effects* of their engagements). Given the fact that one important goal of non-state actors is having influence on policy outcomes, this is remarkable.

In this project, we build on research conducted by Jan Beyers and Marcel Hanegraaff that was financed by the Research Foundation Flanders (Odysseus Program, 2009-2014). Beyers and Hanegraaff have built a unique data-source which maps the entire community of transnational advocates who attended climate conferences (1995 until 2009) and the MCs of the WTO (1995 until 2011). The current project aims to improve and enlarge the existing datasets with stakeholders that were active at the more recent climate- and trade-conferences. In addition, we focus on how policymakers and non-state actors interact at the international level and how interest groups seek to exert influence. Innovative about the approach of our study is its policy-centeredness. For the study, we identified 15 policy issues that were on the agenda of the WTO and UNFCCC. Non-state actors were, among other things, asked about their policy positions on these issues, the strategies used to get their position heard by policymakers and how much policy influence non-state actors estimated they had with regards to these issues. Policymakers were asked about their interaction with non-state actors and their assessment of the influence of these actors.

In this short research report, we discuss four interesting findings: (1) the most important reasons for non-state actors to attend international conferences, (2) the strategies used by non-state actors, (3) the contacts of policymakers with different types of non-state actors and (4) the perceived influence of non-state actors on both the position of their government and the final outcome of the negotiations.

The data for this report were collected in 2015 and 2016. In December 2015, a small team of four researchers conducted interviews with representatives of the civil society, businesses representatives and policymakers at the UNFCCC Conference of Parties in Paris and the WTO Ministerial Conference in Nairobi (270 interviews at the climate conference and 131 interviews at the trade conference). Of all the interviews conducted in December 2015, 228 respondents represented non-state actors and 146 were policymakers. The rest consisted of representatives of international organizations (N=30). The response rate for both the UNFCCC and the WTO was around 50 percent.

These 401 interviews were combined with data collected through a web-survey immediately after both conferences. All representatives of non-state actor organizations and

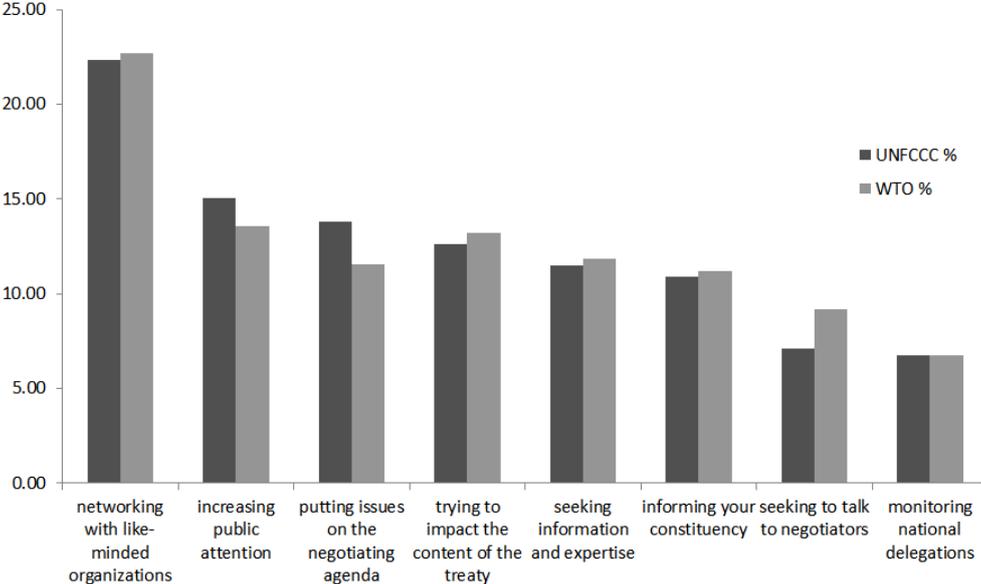
country delegations that we did not manage to interview while we were in Paris and Nairobi, but we knew were accredited to be there, received a survey. Of all the invitations for the survey that we sent (N=3352), 470 respondents completed the survey. That is a response rate of 15 percent, which is good given the fact that we achieved this result by only sending out two electronic reminders, after two weeks and four weeks. Besides, one has to bear in mind that the organizations many organizations active at these conferences lack an up-date website and an/or email-address that is working.<sup>1</sup>

In total, the on-the-spot interviews and online questionnaires led to a dataset of more than 560 completed interviews with representatives of interest organizations from 66 different countries and 255 policymakers hailing from 70 countries. We would like to thank all the respondents for their participation in the on-the-spot interviews or the online survey. For more information on this project, please consult: [www.janbeyers.eu/transnationaladvocacy](http://www.janbeyers.eu/transnationaladvocacy).

**Results**

Why would non-state actors attend global conferences such as the international climate and trade negotiations? The results are shown below in Figure 1 and it appears that networking with like-minded organizations and communicating with the general public is by far the most important motivation. Interestingly, seeking to talk to negotiators or monitoring national delegations are much less important. This indicates that policy influencing and addressing policymakers directly is not the only or most important reason for organizations to attend global diplomatic international conferences.

**Figure 1. Most important reasons to attend international conferences**  
(UNFCCC: N=442, WTO: N=120)

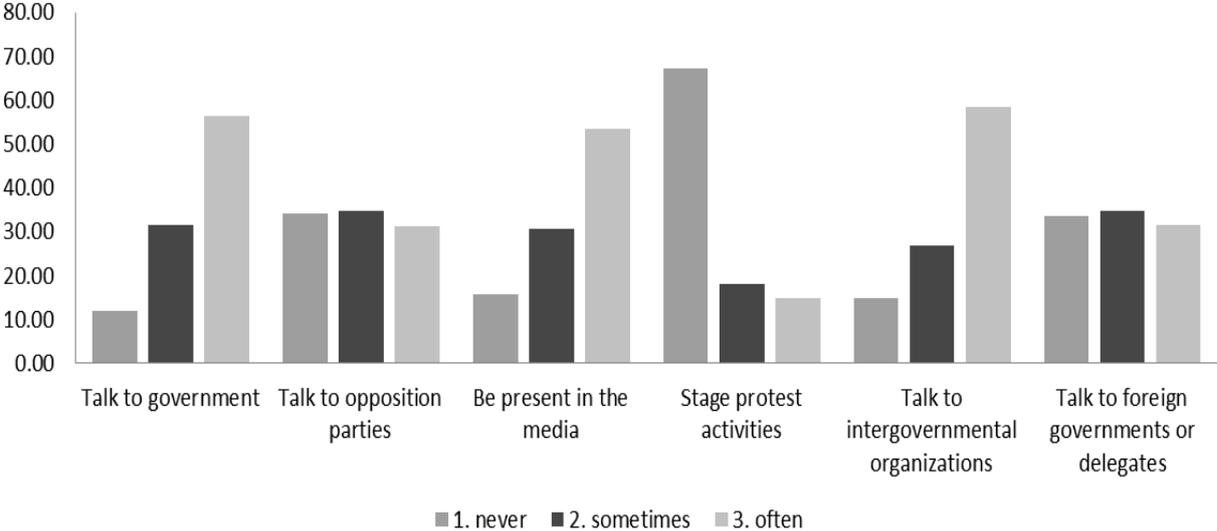


And what about the strategies non-state actors use? We have asked how often they have used the following strategies in the year before the conference: talking to the government, talking to opposition parties, being present in the media, staging protest activities, talking to intergovernmental organizations and talking to foreign governments or delegates. The results show that interest organizations are most likely to talk to national government and/or

<sup>1</sup> Of the organizations that we interviewed/surveyed, around 50 had no website or the website was not functioning.

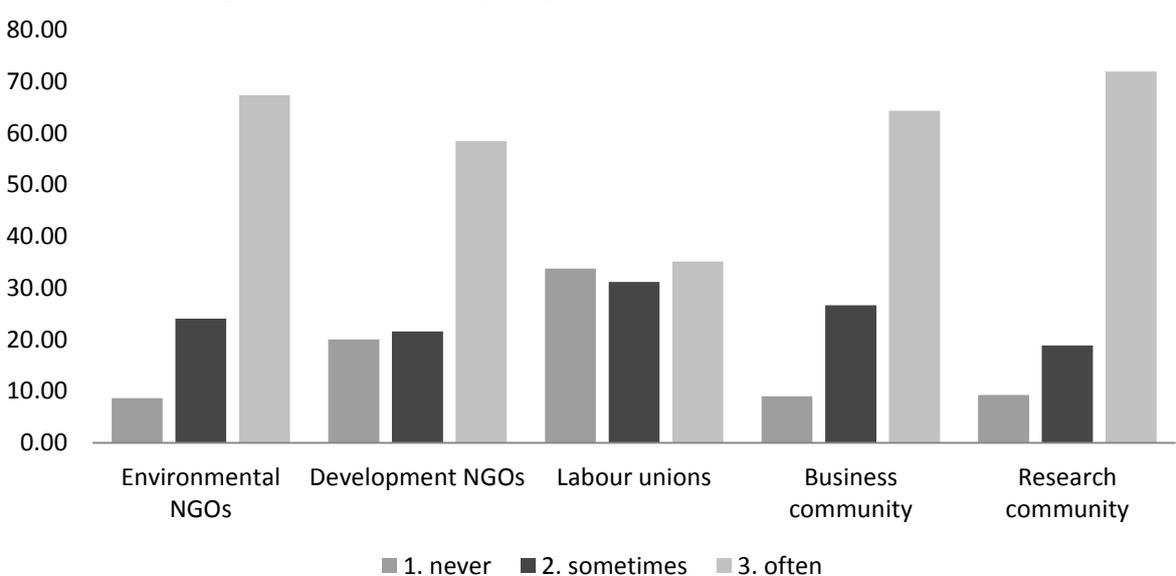
intergovernmental organizations (see Figure 2). The media is also often approached by many non-state actors. Staging protest activities, on the other hand, is a strategy that is not used frequently; 67 percent of the surveyed organizations never staged protest activities in the year leading up to the international conferences.

**Figure 2. Strategies used by non-state actors in the year up to the conferences (in %)**



Our results also show which type of actors policymakers mainly talk to, which is the third finding we would like to discuss in this short report. At both the UNFCCC and WTO, policymakers are most often in contact with NGOs, both with organizations dealing with environment and those working on development issues. The only group of actors that are seldom contacted by policymakers are labour unions. More than one third of the policymakers never talked to labour unions in the year up to the conferences.

**Figure 3. Contact of policymakers with stakeholders (in %)**

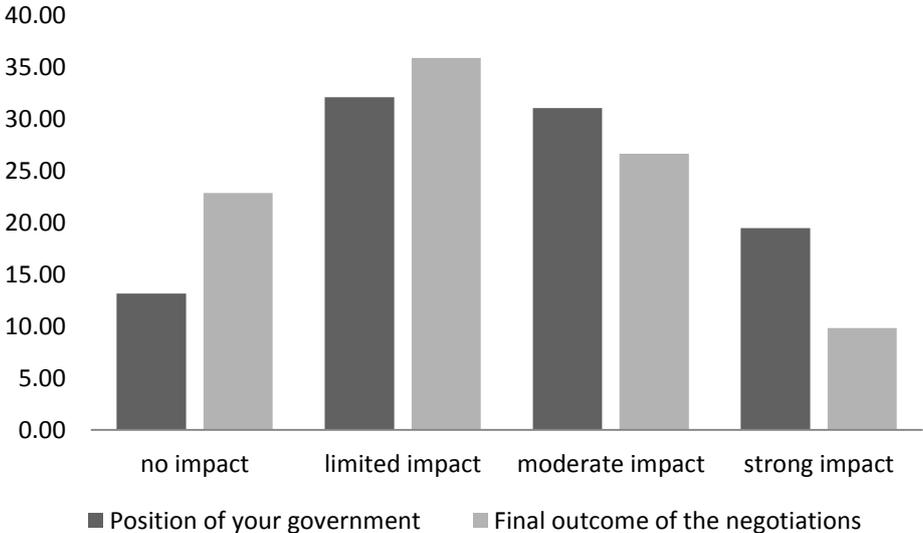


As becomes clear (Figure 3), there is regular contact between policymakers and non-state actors. But who initiates these contacts? The majority of the non-state actors (more than 50 percent) answered that it was mostly them who initiated the contact with policymakers. In 44

percent of the cases, contacts were initiated rather evenly according to non-state actors. The answers of the policymakers show a different picture, though. According to policymakers, the majority of the contacts were initiated equally (more than 50 percent), while in only 35 percent the non-state actors initiated the contact. In 15 percent of the cases, policymakers argued it was them who initiated the contact, while this only happened in 5 percent according to non-state actors.

We also asked non-state actors about their self-perceived policy influence. As discussed before, our interviews and surveys were focused on one specific policy issue that was marked by our respondents as 'important' or 'very important'. For this issue we asked the following question: "You may try to impact different actors or outcomes. With regard to this issue, do you feel you have strong, moderate, limited or no impact on a) the position of your government, and b) the final outcome of the negotiations?". The findings show that interest organizations think they have, in general, a stronger impact on the position of their government, than on the final outcome of the negotiations. The majority of the organizations expected to only have a limited impact on both the position of the government (32 percent) and the final outcome of the negotiations (36 percent). Surprisingly though, almost 10 percent believed that their organization had a strong impact on the final outcome of the negotiations in Paris and/or Nairobi.

**Figure 4. Self-perceived influence of non-state actors**  
(in %)



**Conclusion**

In this short research memo, we have presented four results of our ongoing study on how non-state actors seek to influence global trade and climate conferences. Our results show first of all that networking with like-minded organizations is the most important reason for the majority of non-state actors to attend international diplomatic conferences, while seeking to talk to negotiators (both officials of international organizations and national governments), for example, is perceived much less important. Second, concerning the strategies of non-state actors, they most regularly seek contact with the government and/or intergovernmental organizations. Other strategies, such as staging protest activities, are much less common. Third, policymakers are often in contact with NGOs representing both climate and

development issues, while labour interests seem to adopt a marginalized position. With respect to who initiates contacts between non-state actors and policymakers, we observe some interesting differences of perspective. According to non-state actors, they are usually the ones initiating the contact, while policymakers think that this contact is initiated rather evenly. Finally, our results on self-perceived influence show that non-state actors believe they have a stronger impact on the position of their government than on the final outcome of the negotiations.

In future research, we will provide more in-depth analysis the interaction between policymakers and non-state actors at international level. In addition, we will analyse the strategies that the non-state actors use in order to exert influence. More information about the project and future publications can be found on our website: [www.janbeyers.eu/transnationaladvocacy](http://www.janbeyers.eu/transnationaladvocacy).