



Global Reports: An Overview of their Evolution

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Note: The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of UNDP.

Introduction

This paper examines the evolution over time of the publication of global reports by international organizations, notably multilateral, inter-governmental agencies. "Global reports" are defined as studies that present and analyze issues of global concern and reach. These are issues, such as the control of communicable diseases, which span all countries, and often, also all population segments, or at least, countries and people in several of the world's geographic regions.

The paper was originally prepared as a background document for the publication edited by Kaul and others (2003) titled *Providing Global Public Goods; Managing Globalization*. The objective was to provide some supporting analysis to the chapter by Conceição (2003), in that volume.

Two important findings emerge from this survey. First, the pace of publication of global reports has accelerated in the 1990s: between 1990 and 1999, 29 *new* global reports were issued, compared to less than 10 new reports in each of the prior decades since the 1940s. Second, the breadth of the topics covered by the reports has widened. Besides reports that address *inter*-national (or between-country) issues and at-the-border issues (e.g. international peace or trade), there is a growing number of reports dealing with behind-the-border issues, e.g.: the translation of economic growth into improved wellbeing of people (i.e. human development) on a country-by-country basis; human rights; the status of women; or good governance and economic policy reforms.¹ Globalization and the growing interdependence among countries clearly reflect themselves both in the increasing number as well as the widening issue-range of the global reports covered by multilateral organizations.

Interestingly, non-state organizations, such as civil society organizations and business organizations, are also increasingly contributing with global studies, complementing -- or sometimes, also challenging -- those prepared under the aegis of inter-governmental agencies.

Methodological Note

As indicated, this study focuses on global reports that have been prepared and issued by, or on behalf of, multilateral organizations. These organizations issue each year a large volume of *official* documents and reports that, in a way, also have worldwide coverage. For example, they may report on what governments or other actors have done to implement certain resolutions, let us say, on disarmament or on achieving basic education for all. These documents and reports are also interesting from the viewpoint of global

¹ The trend in the issues covered is noticeable in particular when examining more closely the topics addressed in the major recurrent reports. For example, the topics of the World Bank's *World Development Reports* have included issues such as: health (in 1993), the role of the state (in 1997), and knowledge (1998). The focus areas of the *Human Development Report* have concerned topics such as new dimensions of human security (in 1994), gender (in 1995) and human rights (in 2000).

issues, or global public good concerns. However, they are often a listing of initiatives taken rather than studies of the issue itself. This makes them different from the reports selected for review here: They usually have their eyes set on the issue as such, e.g. on climate stability, communicable diseases, international trade, or cross-border drug trafficking.

A further difference between the global reports that interest here and other multilateral documents and reports is that the latter are often prepared primarily for internal purposes, e.g. to support the discussion on a particular item in a particular multilateral forum. By contrast, the former tend to address themselves to the "outside world", not just government delegates or other participants and observers of intergovernmental negotiation processes. They are also often published by outside publishers rather than by the concerned organization.

Thus, while the "official" documents and reports are often a collection of individual governmental views, assessments and activity accounts, flowing from the countries to the concerned multilateral organization, the global reports that interest here tend to flow from the organization into the world, and back to the country level. No doubt, many of them are also being considered in their policy implications by inter-governmental bodies. But that is not their only, and often also, not the primary purpose.

Of course, besides the global reports of multilateral organizations, individual governments and scholars also write and publish global studies. Just think of the rapidly proliferating literature on globalization. Yet, these studies tend to be perceived as being more particularistic--or, put differently, less global--in their perspective than the other reports. Thus, the reports considered here are global in a dual sense: one, they address issues of global reach; and two, they emanate from a multilateral context.

An effort has been made to identify as many of the qualifying reports as possible. Nevertheless, some relevant publication will, no doubt, have been overlooked inadvertently. Therefore, this first report on global reports is considered "work in progress". Updates of this report will be prepared to both capture reports that may have been missed this time and to list newly published reports.²

Structure of the Paper

This paper is organized in three parts. Part I briefly considers the record of global reporting before the 1940s. Part II looks at the trend in global reporting since the 1940s. The third section briefly discusses global reporting initiatives by non-state organizations.

² It would, therefore, be greatly appreciated, if readers, who are aware of reports not shown in table 1 below, would send information on such titles by email to ods@undp.org.

I- The Pre-1940s Era

By the 1920s, the League of Nations had already produced a number of reports on global issues. Among the key global concerns then were: health, peace and security, international finance and trade.³ As an illustration, consider the following list of annual, serial publications of the League of Nations:

- Annual Epidemiological Records, from 1922 to 1938 (Health);
- International Health Year Book, from 1924 to 1932 (Health);
- Armaments Year Book, from 1924 to 1939/40 (Disarmament);
- Statistical Yearbook of the Trade in Arms, Ammunition and Implements of War, from 1924 to 1938 (Disarmament);
- Memoranda on Production and Trade, from 1926 to 1945 (Trade and Finance);
- Money and Banking, from 1913 to 1944 (Trade and Finance);
- Review of World Trade, Balance of Payments and International Trade Statistics, from 1910 to 1945 (Trade and Finance);
- Statistical Yearbook of the League of Nations, from 1926 to 1942/44;
- World Economic Survey, from 1931/32 to 1942/44; and
- Reports of the Mandatory Powers to the League, several years in the inter-war period.

A further notable global report at the time was *Ten Years of World Cooperation* (The League of Nations, Geneva, 1930). It covers not only the state of affairs in respect the key global issues that were at the center of the international policy attention then (viz. health, peace and security, international finance and trade), but also such topics as international justice, international transit and communications, social and humanitarian activities, scientific cooperation, and the work accomplished by the League.

League of Nations reports were made readily available to the public. In 1932, for example, the Assembly of the League of Nations emphasized its support for the fullest possible publicity of the records on League meetings, and the swift dissemination of League publications to the press (League of Nations 1933, p119). By then, 116 journalists from 35 different countries were permanently accredited to the organization; and this number increased to as much as 400 during the times when the League's Assembly and Council were in session. (League of Nations 1933, p120)⁴

³ For example, the annual international trade statistics covered 65 countries, which at the time accounted for 95 percent of the total world trade (League of Nations 1933, p54).

⁴ By comparison, there were 250 journalists permanently accredited to the United Nations Office in Geneva in 2000, approximately the same number as at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. During important events, such as international conferences, the number of accredited journalists can increase up to 1,500. (GNIR 2000)

II- The Post-1940s Era

Table 1 lists all the reports considered for analysis in this survey, including both pre- and post 1940s reports.⁵ Reports noted with a star (*) were re-issued later. Table 1 also indicates the main issue addressed in the reports listed as well as the organization that *at present* sponsors their preparation.

To facilitate the interpretation of Table 1, consider the evolution of *newly issued* reports from 1940 to 1999 depicted in Figure 1. Each column indicates the number of new reports issued over the decade. Only the first edition is counted, corresponding to the first year in which the report became available, even if it was later re-issued⁶. Since the 1940s through the 1980s there were less than 10 new reports issued in each decade, with the 1960s and the 1980s registering only a few new reports. In the 1990s the number of global reports increased dramatically to 29.

If we consider the cumulative number of new reports in each decade, then by 1999, we can observe about 60 global reports issued with regularity that did not exist in the 1940s. While the steady stream of new reports from the 1940s to 1990 was important, almost 50% of the cumulative total is due to the new reports issued *during the 1990s*.

Figure 1 clearly illustrates the initially rising strength of multilateralism immediately after World War II and its subsequent decline the second half of the 1950s⁷ and during the 60s, reflecting the growing intensity of the Cold War and the widening East-West divide. Obviously, global issues certainly existed and began to become more evident at that time (as, for example, the problems of environmental pollution). But given the rivalry among nations and political blocks during this period, the political climate and preparedness to address these issues was limited, depressing the number of global public reports, and sometimes, even leading to their temporary discontinuation.

⁵ The information on pre-1940s reports is intended to be more illustrative than exhaustive. The main focus of the analysis here clearly is on the post-1940s period.

⁶ More than the specific report itself, our interest is in tracing the emergence of an issue as currently reported. Thus, when we see today that a global report is published, say, by UNESCO on, for example, education, it is sometimes possible to trace to several years earlier the first time that the issue (education) was first subjected to reporting by UNESCO.

⁷ Note that all of the reports included in the table, and considered in the graph as belonging the decade 1950-1959, were actually issued between 1950 and 1955.

Table 1- Database of Global Reports

Title	Sponsoring Organization^(a)	Year of Publication
Postal Statistics	UPU	1875
World Health Statistics Annual	WHO	1922
Weekly Epidemiological Record	WHO	1925
BIS Annual Report ^{#,1}	BIS	1930
Industrial Statistics Yearbook	UNIDO	1938
World Economic and Social Survey	UN	1945
International Court of Justice Yearbook [#]	ICJ	1947
State of the Food and Agriculture	FAO	1947
Direction of Trade Statistics	IMF	1948
International Financial Statistics	IMF	1948
Demographics Yearbook	UN	1949
Global Forest Resource Assessment	FAO	1950
International Trade Statistics Yearbook	UN	1950
WMO Annual Report [#]	WMO	1951
IAEA Annual Report [#]	IAEA	1951
Report on the World Social Situation	UN	1952
World Education Report ²	UNESCO	1955
Narcotic Drugs	INCB	1961
World Health Statistics Annual*	WHO	1962
International Narcotics Control Board Report [#]	INCB	1962
State of the Food and Agriculture *	FAO	1963
Report on the World Social Situation*	UN	1967
Government Finance Statistics Yearbook	IMF	1970
Global Development Finance	WB	1970
Balance of Payments Statistics	IMF	1972
ITU Yearbook of Statistics	ITU	1973
World Culture Report	UNESCO	1975
United Nations Disarmament Yearbook	UN	1976
Civil Aviation Statistics of the World	ICAO	1976
World Development Report	WB	1978
The State of World's Population	UNFPA	1979
The World Health Report	WHO	1979
World Economic Outlook	IMF	1980
Global Financial Stability Report ³	IMF	1980
The State of the World's Children	UNICEF	1980
Trade and Development Report	UNCTAD	1981
The Least Developed Countries Report	UNCTAD	1983
World Urbanization Prospects	UN	1984
World Population Monitoring	UN	1989
World Investment Report	UNCTAD	1990
Global Economic Prospects	WB	1990/1
Climate Change	IPCC	1990/1
Human Development Report	UNDP	1990
World Education Report*	UNESCO	1991
World's Women Trend and Statistics	UN	1991
World of Civil Aviation	ICAO	1992
World Telecommunication Indicators	ITU	1993
The State of the World's Refugees	UNHCR	1993
The Progress of Nations	UNICEF	1993

International Yearbook of Industrial Statistics*	UNIDO	1994
World Science Report ⁴	UNESCO	1994
World Telecommunication Development Report	ITU	1994
World Employment Report	ILO	1995
The State of World's Forests	FAO	1995
The World Health Report *	WHO	1995
Global Environment Outlook	UNEP	1995
Global Report on Human Settlements	UNCHS	1996
World Development Indicators	WB	1996
World Health Report – Global Tuberculosis Report	WHO	1996
World Drug Report	UNDCP	1997
Report on Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic	UNAIDS/WHO	1997
Communicable Diseases	WHO	1997
World Communication and Information Report	UNESCO	1997
World Culture Report*	UNESCO	1998
AIDS Epidemic Update	UNAIDS	1998
Poverty Report: Overcoming Human Poverty	UNDP	1998
World Social Science Report ⁵	UNESCO	1999
Infectious Disease Report	WHO	1999
The State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI)	FAO	1999
World Energy Assessment	UNDP	1999
Global Report on Crime and Justice	UNODCCP	1999
Global Illicit Drug Trends	UNDCP	1999
International Trade Statistics	WTO	2000
Migration Report	UN/IMO	2000
The Progress of the World's Women	UNIFEM	2000
Statistical Yearbook: Refugees, Asylum-seekers and Other Persons of Concern- Trends in Displacement	UNHCR	2001
E-Commerce and Development Report	UNCTAD	2001
World Report on Violence and Health	WHO	2002
State of the World's Vaccines and Immunization Report	WHO	2002
Global Financial Stability Report *	IMF	2002

(a) Organization that sponsored the latest version of the report (and which may not have existed at the time the report was first issued).

* Re-issuance.

These reports complement information on the activities of the organization with a substantive analysis of the issues that fall into the organization's mandate. Thus, the reports are more than just annual activity reports, which are not considered as qualifying for inclusion in this list of global reports.

1- The League of Nations had been publishing since 1913 some of the financial information of substantive interest to BIS, such as on government balance sheets.

2- This report can be seen as carrying forward UNESCO's *World Survey of Education*, Vol. I-V, which were published from 1955 to 1971.

3- This report replaced, in 2002, the annual International Capital Markets Report (published since 1980) and the quarterly Emerging Market Financing Report (published since 2000).

4- Issues similar to the ones covered in this report were earlier addressed in UNESCO's periodical *Impact of Science on Society*, which was published from 1948 to 1992.

5- This report complements the discussion in the periodical *International Social Science Journal*, which UNESCO has been publishing since 1949.

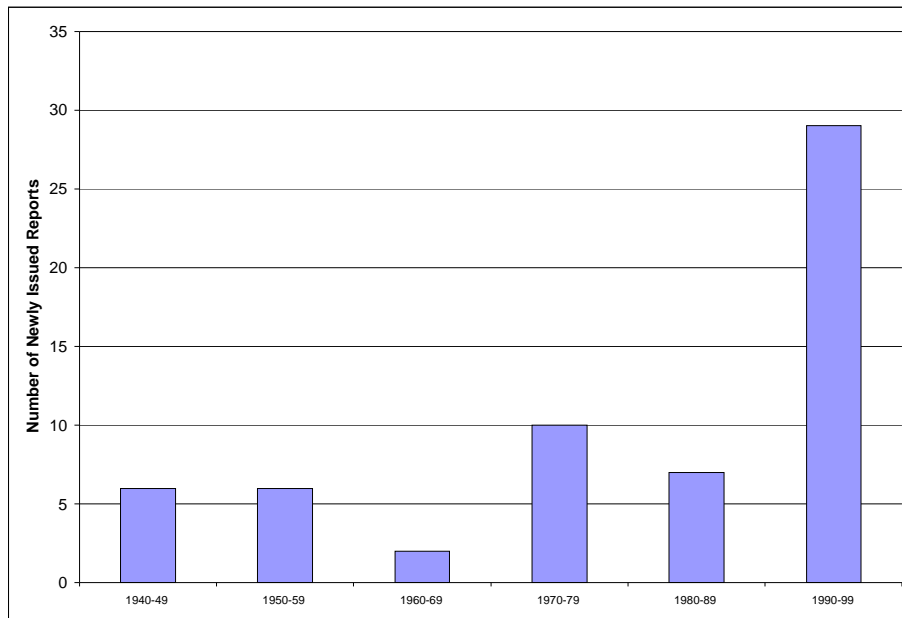


Figure 1- Reports Addressing Global Concerns, 1940-1999

Source: ODS survey completed 15 November (Table 1).

Figure 2 shows reports considered in the analysis for which there was a discontinuity or change in format or in the sponsoring organization. The horizontal axis indicates the year in which the issue was first subject to a report, and the vertical axis the year in which reporting re-emerged, with the reports often being published systematically henceforth. Consider, for example, the *World Health Statistics Annual*, which was first published in 1922 by the League of Nations as the *Annual Epidemiological Report* (as indicated by the vertical line from the point where the report is in the chart to the horizontal axis), but was taken up again in 1962 (as shown by the horizontal line from the point to the vertical axis).

Figure 2 shows that there is a re-emergence of global reports on several issues years after these issues were first subject to global reporting. The reports on food and agriculture and on the world social situation re-emerged in the 1970s. In the early 1980s the global reports on population and the world economic outlook reemerged. But it was in the 1990s that many issues first addressed years before re-emerged, namely on education and culture (by UNESCO), and on health (by the WHO; the *World Health Report*, which had first appeared in 1979, re-emerged as an annual report in 1995).

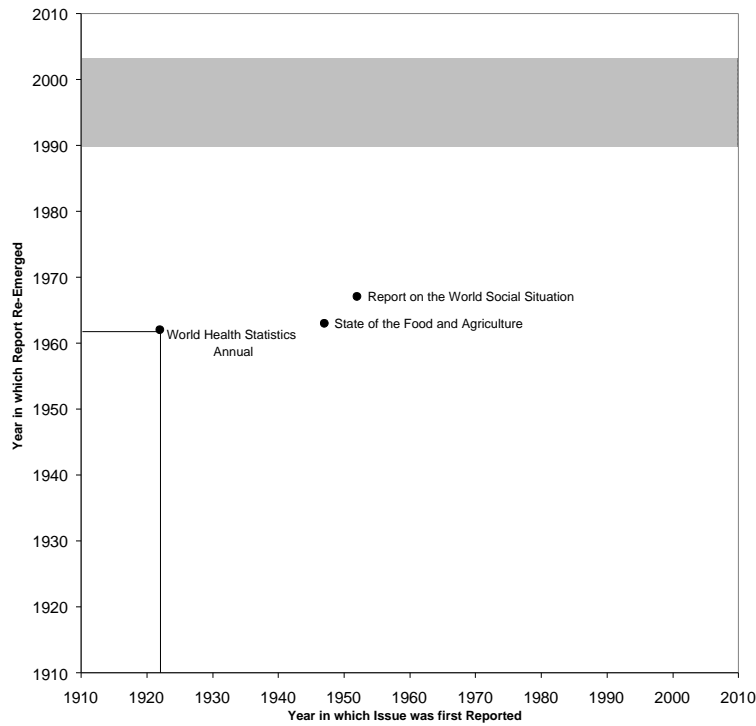


Figure 2- Reports that Suffered Discontinuities: Year in which Reports First Appeared and Year in which Reports Re-emerged

Source: ODS survey completed 15 November (Table 1).

Clearly, some of the global concerns are not new to the 1990s. Rather, they have existed for some time. But in some instances, it was only in the more recent decades that the international community began to focus on them more systematically and decisively. Thus, the fact that the 1990s were an extraordinary period in terms of global reporting is not only borne out by the number of new reports issued. The same message is conveyed when one takes into account reports that *re-emerged* during this time.

Figure 3 presents the evolution of *all--new* and *re-issued--reports* in a given decade. As one would expect, the same trend as depicted in Figure 1 can be seen, with a relatively low number of reports until the 1990s, when the number of reports issued increases dramatically.

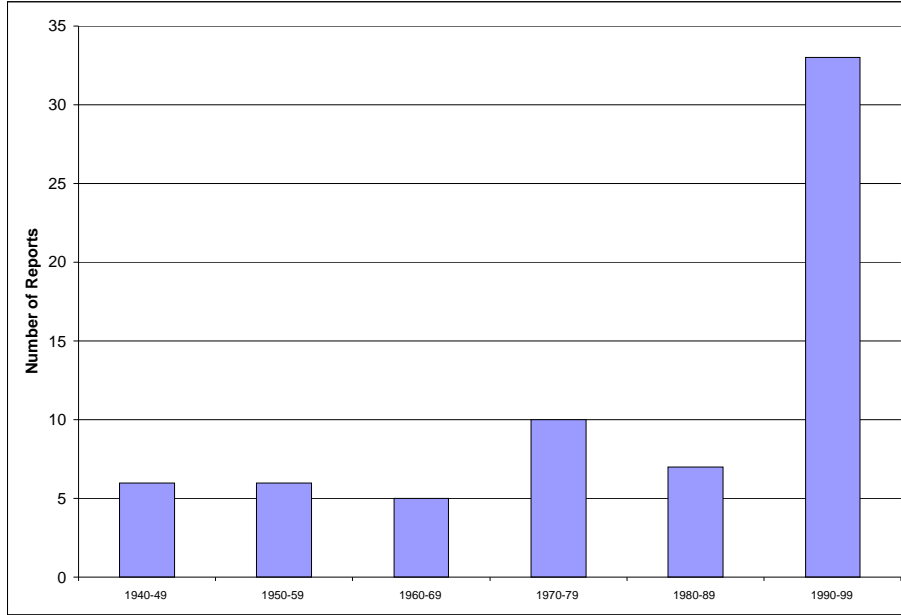


Figure 3- Reports Addressing Global Concerns, 1940-1999 (including re-issuances)

Source: ODS survey completed 15 November (Table 1).

To complement the information in figures 1 and 3, the following two figures present the cumulative number of reports. Since once a report has been published it becomes available as a source of data and knowledge ever after, it is relevant to look at the cumulative number of reports. Figure 4 considers only newly issued reports, while Figure 5 counts all the reports, including re-issued ones. The earlier picture is being reconfirmed: while there has been a steady increase since 1940, the 1990s represent a trend-breaking decade in which the pace in the production of global reports accelerated.

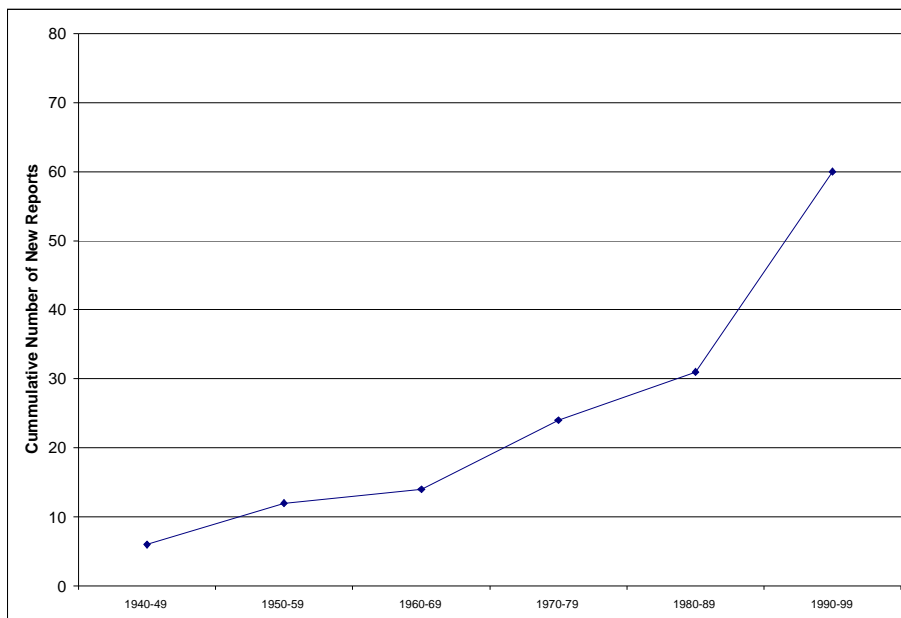


Figure 4- Cumulative Number of New Reports Addressing Global Concerns, 1940-1999

Source: ODS survey completed 15 November (Table 1).

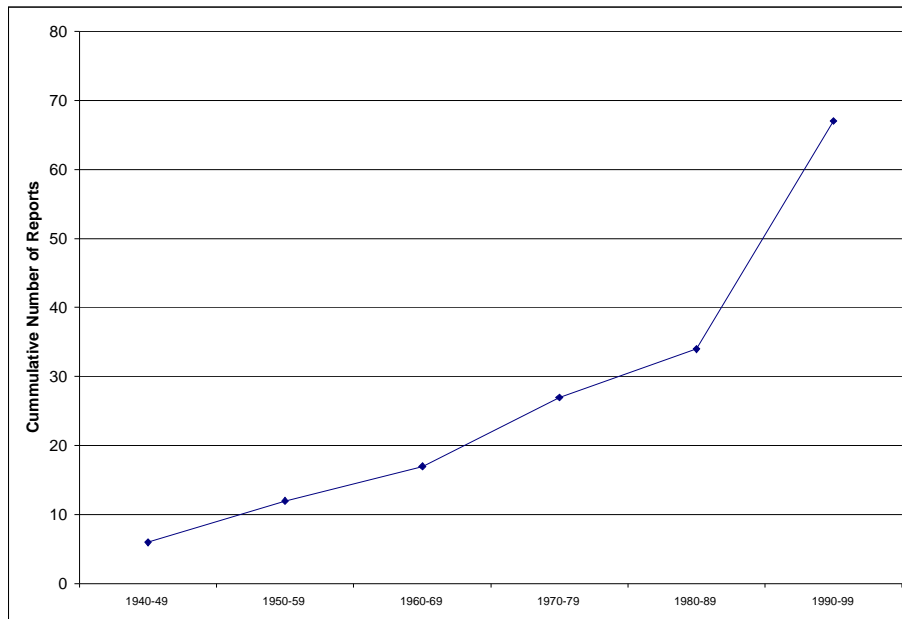


Figure 5- Cumulative Number of Reports Addressing Global Concerns, 1940-1999

Source: ODS survey completed 15 November (Table 1).

The analysis can be extended up to 2002. But since we are only beginning the first decade of the 21st century, the analysis has to be made on average terms, determining the frequency of issuance of new global reports in a shorter period (say, how many new reports were issued, on a two-year average). Figure 6 shows, for each decade from 1950 to 1999, the average number of new reports published every two years. Figure 7 shows all the reports (including re-issuances) published every two years. The 1940-1949 decade was truncated to start in 1945, since in the first half of the decade there were no new reports issued.

The results suggest that immediately after WW II there was a high intensity in the issuance of global reports, since in the following decades the average number of newly issued reports fell from an average of just below 3 every two years (in 1945-1949) to between 0.5 and 2 every two years from 1950 to 1989. In the 1990s, however, there were, on average, almost 6 new global reports issued every year, while the total number of reports published on average (including re-issuances) after from 1990 through 1999 is 6.5. The trend that emerged in the 1990s has broken downward slightly in the first years of the 21st century, but it still shows a higher rate of issuance of global reports that the pace that persisted from 1945 onwards. For new reports, the average number of issuances is in the first years of the 21st century is high than between 1945 and 1950, but given the limited number of years since 2000, it is not safe to read much into the values after 1999.

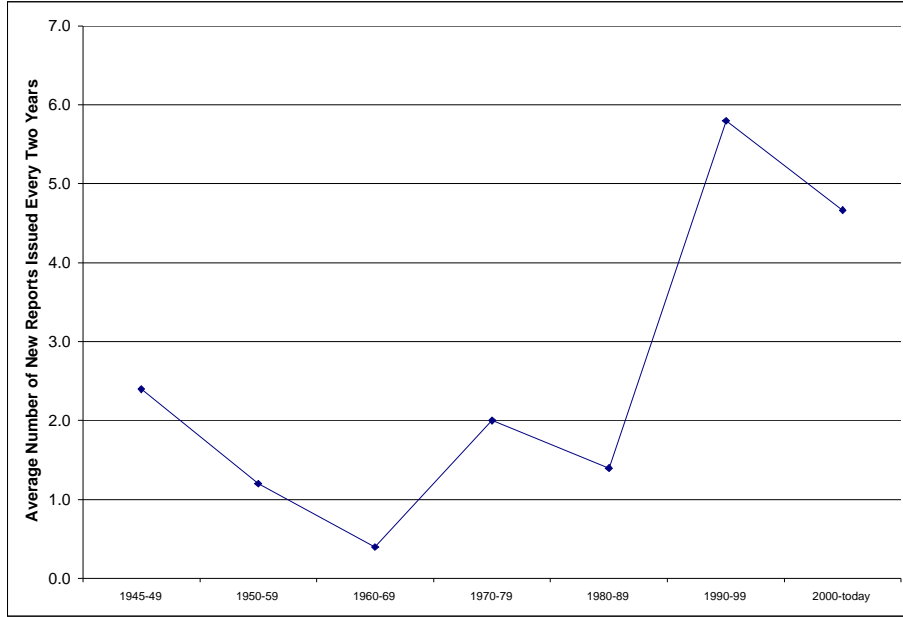


Figure 6- Average Number of New Reports Issued Every Two Years

Source: ODS survey completed 15 November (Table 1).

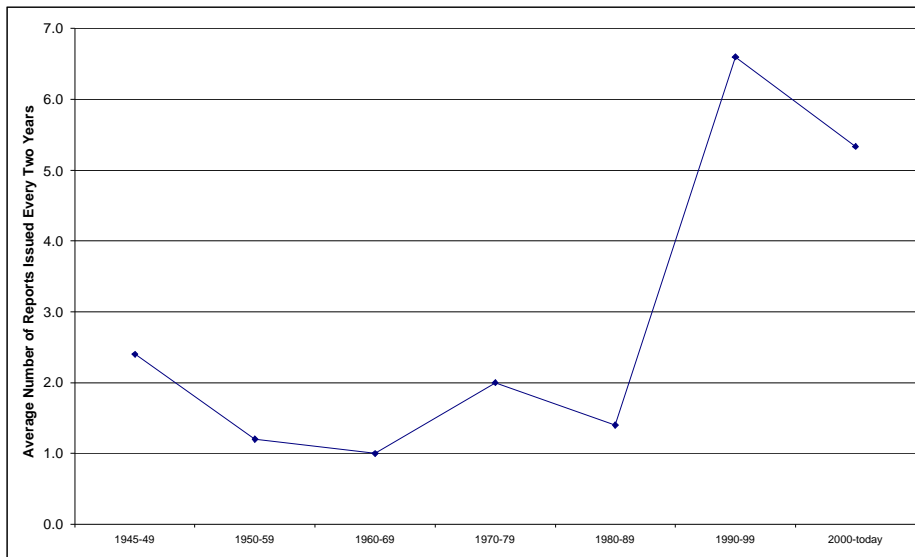


Figure 7- Average Number of Reports Issued Every Two Years

Source: ODS survey completed 15 November (Table 1).

III- Global Reports Sponsored by Non-state Organizations

While the focus of this survey is on the evolution of reports sponsored by multilateral organizations, these organizations, as noted, are by no means the only ones to publish global reports. Several non-governmental organizations have also supported and undertaken the preparation of global reports, often putting on the international agenda issues that were previously neglected or had a low profile. For example, the *Annual Report* of Amnesty International (1962-to present) has given human rights issues great visibility around the world, as has the *Human Rights Watch World Report*, issued by Human Rights Watch (1990-to present). Transparency International (1995-to present), with the publication of the corruption perception index in its *Annual Report*, has brought the challenge of corruption to the international agenda. Non-governmental organizations have also brought new perspectives to traditional fields of global reporting. The *World Competitiveness Report*, published by the World Economic Forum (1979-to present), has, through economic comparisons across countries, helped focus political attention on the concept of country competitiveness, measured by a combination of economic and social indicators.

Non-governmental organizations have equally been highly influential in the environmental area. The World Watch Institute has been publishing two important global reports (*State of the World*, 1984-to present; and *Vital Signs*, 1992-to present) that discuss environmental stress in a broader context of sustainable development. Another important example is *World Resources* (1986-to present), published by the World Resources Institute, which assesses annually the way in which the world is using and managing its natural resources.

Non-governmental organizations have also the ability to raise awareness of specific, but neglected, issues. For example, the Global Forum for Health Research publishes annually the *10/90 Report on Health Research* (1999-to present), which has drawn international attention to the dramatic inequality in research efforts addressing the diseases that cause most of the disease burden around the world. Still in the health area, an independent commission constituted under the auspices of the World Health Organization, the Commission for Macroeconomics and Health, undertook among other things, a systematic assessment the costs and potential benefits of health interventions addressing diseases of the poor (see, CMH 2001).

In the area of peace and security, the *Yearbook* of SIPRI (the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) and the annual *Conversion Surveys* of BICC (the Bonn International Center on Conversion) have, among other studies, become well-recognized standard reference publications of a global nature.

Furthermore, mention can be made of reports such as the *Social Watch Report* (developed by Social Watch since 1996) or the *Global Civil Society Yearbook* (Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor, 2001 and 2002), published for the first time in 2001 as a result of a joint project by the Centre for Civil Society and the Centre for the Study of Global

Governance of the London School of Economics. The *Social Watch Report*, in particular, puts the spotlight on governments and provides civil-society assessments of how well governments are living up to various commitments they made at international conferences.

This short overview, which by no means includes all global reports issued by non-governmental organizations, shows that the practice of global reporting extends beyond multilateral, inter-governmental organizations. An exhaustive assessment of the reports published by non-governmental organizations would surely increase substantially the number of reports considered above, but the overall trend (of a sharp increase in the 1990s) is likely to remain unchanged even if these non-governmental reports are considered.

Conclusion

Just as globalization itself has seen prior episodes and phases, many of today's global reports have. And just as globalization is extending to ever more issue areas, global reports are. Also, just as ever more actors engage in cross-border activities, ever more actors generate data sets and analyses that aim at having global reach and at adopting a transnational perspective. Global reports have been spurred by globalization. At the same time, they are indicators of advances in various dimensions of the globalization process.

Many, if not all, of the themes addressed by the global reports examined here qualify as global public goods, i.e. goods in the global public domain, potentially affecting all countries and people. Because they constitute shared, common concerns, they probably have been taken up for study by research teams of multilateral organizations.

While this paper has tried to shed some light on the evolution of global reports over time, there are many issues that need further study and analyses. No doubt, added efforts are required to make the present data set more complete. A further interesting aspect would be to examine how the approaches that particular reports have taken to "their" issues have changed over time. Another interesting dimension to explore concerns the dissemination of the reports. For example: Is there a growing trend towards pricing and selling these reports?⁸ And if so, how to interpret this trend? Does it reflect financial constraints of the organizations concerned? Or, is in today's globalizing world information on global trends so indispensable that a growing number of state and non-state actors are willing to pay for it? But how is global equity impacted by this trend towards pricing global reports and related data sets?

⁸ To illustrate, the IMF's *World Economic Outlook* sells for US\$ 42; the World Bank's *World Development Report* for US\$ 26; UNDP's *Human Development Report* for US\$ 22.95; UNCTAD's *Trade and Development Report* for US\$ 39 (developed countries) and US\$ 19 (developing countries); UNESCO's *Culture Report* for 39.64 Euros (approximately US\$40.37); and ITU's *Yearbook of Statistics* for 65 CHF (approximately US\$ 44.82).

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