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Assuring a Safe, Secure and Sustainable Space Environment for Space Activities (4)

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ENGAGING ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN SPACE SUSTAINABILITY GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES

Abstract

Over the last few years, the goal of space sustainability has become increasingly important within the field of space policy. Many national governments and international bodies are currently pursuing policy initiatives to help achieve the long-term sustainability of the space environment and humanity's activities in space. Nobel Prize Winner Elinor Ostrom developed a set of principles for sustainable governance of commons much like the near-Earth space environment. Ostrom's work can inform the many international norm-building efforts currently ongoing that aim to ensure the sustainable use of space.

According to Ostrom's years of research, one key element of successful governance is that all relevant stakeholders must be involved in the process of designing and implementing rules and norms. This collective-choice arrangement, as she calls it, enhances the legitimacy of the rules. It means the rules are tailored to the environment they govern because they were designed by those most familiar with its characteristics. Additionally, it secures buy-in from the entities expected to comply because their views were represented in the process.

There are currently a wide variety of actors engaged in and affected by space activities, including nation states, private companies, international organizations, academic institutions, and even private citizens who use space-based services every day. This diverse set of stakeholders has an equally diverse set of capabilities and priorities. However, all of them should be represented in some capacity in space governance discussions if their outcomes are to have the best chance of success. This is a dramatically different dynamic than at the dawn of the Space Age, when only a few nation States were engaged in space activities and, consequently, in space governance discussions. This new dynamic in space suggests that the traditional State-centric approach to developing space governance is no longer the most effective way forward, especially considering Ostrom's work.

This paper will identify the variety of actors invested in space and their varying capabilities and priorities as a first step toward promoting their greater involvement in space governance development. The paper will also explore the challenges of involving such a wide range of stakeholders in space governance initiatives while drawing on examples from other domains to suggest possible ways forward for ensuring sustainable use of space.