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**New Dimensions of Multilateralism**  
**The Evolving Role of NGOs in Global Governance**

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**Introduction**

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have long played an important role in forcing policymakers to act on issues of public concern. Their activities have grown steadily and today they address every conceivable issue and they operate in virtually every part of the globe. Although there may be no universal agreement on what NGOs are exactly, there is widespread agreement that their numbers, influence, and reach are at unprecedented levels. This fourth background paper of the New Dimensions Project outlines the rapidly evolving roles of international NGOs during the past two decades. As NGOs have long interacted with governments, intergovernmental institutions and the corporate sector on public policy issues, the analysis of the role of this diverse group of actors provides us with a useful angle to understand the transformations that are taking place in the way multilateral cooperation is conducted, as well as the implications for transnational problem-solving in general.

**Background**

Although most NGOs still operate within a single country or even a purely localized setting, it is the growth in international NGO activity over the past two decades that has received most scholarly attention. NGOs range from large-scale charities with hundreds of staff to transnational volunteer-run networks with hardly any expenditures at all; from single-issue campaign groups that only exist on the Internet to professional service providers and voluntary organizations offering humanitarian assistance; and from grassroots organizations with a large membership base to small networks of specialists that do not claim to represent anybody.

Although NGOs are hardly a new phenomenon, their number and influence on global public policy have increased dramatically, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. According to the Union of International Organizations, the number of known NGOs increased from about 13,000 in 1981 to over 47,000 by 2001.<sup>1</sup> During the fiscal year of 1998, twelve large humanitarian NGOs had a combined budget of \$3 billion and employed over 27,000 staff worldwide.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Northern NGOs are the primary implementers of international humanitarian assistance, including the refugee and food aid programs, respectively, of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Program (WFP).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Helmut Anheier and Nuno Thumudo, 'Organizational Forms of Global Civil Society: Implications of Going Global', in H. Anheier, M. Glasius, M. Kaldor (eds), *Global Civil Society 2002*, 2002, p. 194.  
<sup>2</sup> Marc Lindenberg and Coralie Bryant, *Going Global, Transforming Relief and Developments NGOs*, 2001, p. 12 & 17; facts sheet: p. 37-38.  
<sup>3</sup> Idem, p. 11.

There are a number of reasons why NGOs have become more involved in international policymaking and service delivery now than they were two decades ago.

*1. Global and more complex nature of new problems*  
As a result of increased interdependence, many of the most urgent problems of this time are global or regional in nature and need an international policy response. Examples include environmental problems such as global warming and the rapid loss of forests and species, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the new wave of complex emergencies following the post-Cold War collapse of former client states, the increase in global refugee flows, structural inequalities in the global trading and financial systems, and new forms of urban poverty in emerging markets, to name just a few. Many NGOs felt compelled to increase their advocacy efforts as the lack of global regulation in these fields became apparent.

*2. Collapse of public social services*  
In the 1980s, a world-wide vacuum was created as public delivery of social services gradually eroded in the wake of world recession, fiscal crisis, and the widespread adoption of liberalization and privatization policies. NGOs were faced with the dilemma whether to substitute for the weakening state mechanisms or whether to pressure the state to play a stronger role again. In addition, as private companies had become more powerful global actors, NGOs had to decide whether to form new partnerships with them to improve environmental, health, social or educational service delivery, or to engage in strong advocacy efforts to press the corporate sector for more "socially responsible" behavior. Northern as well as Southern NGOs stepped up their activities to respond to these challenges. In fact, service provision has been the fastest growing area of INGO activities in the 1990s,<sup>4</sup> and in extreme cases of complete collapse of state authority, such as in Somalia and Haiti, NGOs and international agencies provided virtually everything from infrastructure maintenance to education and health care services.<sup>5</sup>

*3. End of the Cold War; increase in democratic regimes*  
The end of the Cold War resulted in the removal of important constraints on the actions of INGOs as the number of democratic states dramatically increased in regions that were previously the stage of Cold War tensions. These new regimes provided expanded civil guarantees that permitted local NGOs to register and organize without great fear of reprisal, and allowed Northern NGOs to enter countries where they previously couldn't work.

*4. Donor incentives for the development of NGOs*  
An additional incentive for the growth of NGOs has been the increasing use of bilateral, multilateral and private resources to stimulate NGO development. The justifications for this increase in funding are multiple, but most commentators mention either the shortfall in social services or the promotion of grass-root democracy in the post-Cold War era as an important reason. In addition a consensus had grown on the failure of large-scale government-to-government aid transfers and development projects, with community-based

<sup>4</sup> Mary Kaldor, Helmut Anheter and Marlies Glasius, 'Global Civil Society in an Era of Regressive Globalization', in Mary Kaldor, Helmut Anheter and Marlies Glasius (eds.), *Global Civil Society 2003*, 2003, p.8.  
<sup>5</sup> Shepard Forman and Abby Stoddard, 'International Assistance', in Lester M. Salamon (ed.), *The State of Nonprofit America*, 2002, p. 246.  
<sup>6</sup> Marc Lindenberg and Coralle Bryant, *Going Global, Transforming Relief and Development* NGOs, 2001, p.11.

NGOs seen as a constructive alternative to government corruption, waste, and mismanagement.

Many bilateral donors now provide umbrella grants to INGOs that are then used to fund projects and initiatives designed and implemented by local NGOs. In 1999, Norway channeled 24 percent of its bilateral aid through NGOs, Sweden 29 percent, Finland 11 percent.<sup>7</sup> The United Nations Development Program claims that 250 million people are now "reached" by NGOs (as opposed to 100 million in the 1980s) and their rising budget of \$7.2 billion is equivalent to 13 percent of net disbursements of official aid.<sup>8</sup> The 1999 annual report of the World Bank states that the percentage of World Bank approved projects, run through NGOs, increased from an average of 25% over the period 1987-1995, to 50% in 1998.

Following the rapid growth in wealth creation during the 1990s, private and corporate foundation giving increased from \$11.3 billion to \$22.8 billion between 1994 and 1999 (this growth slowed down somewhat, following the stock-market decline in 2000).<sup>9</sup> On average, just over 11% of total US foundation giving was allocated to international activities in the 1990s; private donations to domestic NGOs for foreign projects increased 65 percent over the decade.<sup>10</sup>

### 5. Changing UN-NGO relations and interactions

The decision, taken by the UN, to embark upon a series of major World Conferences and Summits through the 1990s, provided another stimulus for NGO-growth and changed the nature of UN-NGO relationships. This change was characterized by a much larger scale of the NGO presence across the UN system, the more diverse institutional character of the organizations involved, now including national, regional, and international NGOs, networks, coalitions and alliances,<sup>11</sup> and the greater diversity of issues that NGOs seek to address at the UN. Above all, UN-NGO relations became essentially political, rather than formal and ceremonial, reflecting the increasing willingness of the UN to see NGOs as international actors and partners, and the desire of NGOs to engage with the UN as part of the institutional architecture of global governance.<sup>12</sup>

### 6. Improved global communications

A final reason that facilitated the global proliferation of NGOs was the availability of inexpensive global communications technologies such as telephones, e-mail and the Internet. It facilitated close coordination and collaboration, enabling global NGO networks to

<sup>7</sup> Frances Pinter, 'Funding Global Civil Society Organizations', in H. Anheier, M. Glasius, M. Kaldor (eds), Global Civil Society 2001, 2001, p. 201.

<sup>8</sup> Jenny Pearce, 'Between Co-operation and Irrelevance? Latin American NGOs in the 1990s', in: David Hulme and Michael Edwards (ed.), *States and Donors: Too Close for Comfort?*, 1997, p.268.

<sup>9</sup> This included some influential new philanthropies, based on newly accumulated technology-sector wealth, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Glaser Family Foundation, Social Ventures Partners, and Microsoft corporate giving.

<sup>10</sup> Frances Pinter, 'Funding Global Civil Society Organizations', in H. Anheier, M. Glasius, M. Kaldor (eds), Global Civil Society 2001, 2001, p. 205.

<sup>11</sup> While the UN (ECOSOC) used to grant formal consultative status mostly to INGOs, Resolution 1996/31 changed the legal framework for UN-NGO relations and opened up UN consultative status to national NGOs. <sup>12</sup> Tony Hill, *Three Generations of UN-Civil Society Relations: A Quick Sketch*, United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service, April 2004.

develop more rapidly than in the past.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the mass media increased public awareness of global crises, which put pressure on NGOs to become more globally responsive.

However, it is not just the number of INGOs that has grown. The developments described above have created new challenges that impacted the magnitude of their tasks, transformed the way they organize, raise money, and relate to state and business actors. These changing roles of INGOs have implications for their effectiveness and legitimacy in a rapidly changing global environment.

## Challenges

### 1. Increased Donor Dependency

There are indications that competition for financial resources is increasing among professionalized INGOs.<sup>14</sup> At the core of the greater competition is the fact that in some fields, such as development and humanitarian relief, the growth of INGOs seems to have surpassed the expansion of resources available to them, either from private or public sources.<sup>15</sup>

To cover their expanded range of activities, NGOs started to rely more on public sources of funding than on membership dues and private donations that used to be their main source of funding. On average, public grants represented 1.5% of NGO income in 1970, 35% in 1988, and over 40% by the end of the century.<sup>16</sup> This increasing dependency on a limited number of funders increases the possibility of donor conditionality and other forms of external influence that potentially limits their capacity to act independently. Political advocacy by an NGO might become problematic when the government that is being questioned is also the organization's largest donor.

In an effort to reduce their dependency on government funding, NGOs increasingly accept money from businesses, foundations and rich individuals, but these grants can create similar relations of influence. An alternative source of income for a growing group of NGOs is the commercial selling of products and services. Thousands of NGOs have taken up a business-approach – creating commercial enterprises such as charity shops, mail-order catalogues, or Fair Trade products. An extreme example of this tendency is the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). In 1996 it had \$3.8 billion in gross revenue for supplemental health insurance and nine mutual funds with \$13.7 billion in assets.

As resources become tighter, NGOs face new pressures for greater accountability for program impact and quality. Private donors want to know whether their funds really improve peoples' lives; donor governments, more subject to scrutiny by their parliaments, want to know if their resources were used effectively. In response, many NGOs increased efficiency and adopted out-put oriented approaches. However, the outcome of these

<sup>13</sup> The formation of global NGO networks was also facilitated by the UN World Conferences that provided NGOs from around the world with an organizational focal point.

<sup>14</sup> K. Foreman, 'Evolving Global Structures and the Challenges Facing International Relief and Development Organizations', in *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 28/4 Supplement: p. 178-197, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Helmut Anheier and Nuno Thémudo, 'Organizational Forms of Global Civil Society: Implications of Going Global', in H. Anheier, M. Glasius, M. Kaldor (eds), *Global Civil Society* 2002, 2002, p. 205.

<sup>16</sup> James A. Paul, *NGOs and Global Policy Making*, Global Policy Forum, 2000.

pressures might be the adoption of organizational forms and generalized best practices that are efficient, but potentially less effective. In addition, the semblance of NGOs cooperating too closely to governments or corporate actors, as well as their adoption of for-profit activities, might potentially erode their most important asset: legitimacy, derived from being perceived as an independent voice, protecting the common good.

## 2. Organizational Innovations

Although many NGOs have expanded their activities without having to change their organizational structure, most *international* organizations have had to balance pressures towards centralization, in order to preserve a common signature in a diverse enterprise, and decentralization, to remain responsive to local environments and needs around the world. As a result, NGOs typically adopted a federation model, a network structure, or a partnerships arrangement, depending on the purpose and nature of the organization.<sup>17</sup>

Although large NGOs that are involved in service delivery might have started as a unitary, hierarchical organization, such as CARE, or a loose configuration of largely independent organizations, such as MSF, the pressures towards both centralization and decentralization have led both organizational forms at the extreme end of the spectrum to move towards the middle. Many large NGOs, including Oxfam International, Save the Children and Friends of the Earth, have adopted some kind of federal structure that combines largely independent affiliates with a central coordination mechanism.

Most international advocacy campaigns are organized as a network; either in the form of a more structured advocacy coalition or as a loosely coordinated transnational advocacy network. Facilitated by the revolution in information technology, these networks lack a clear hierarchy or membership, but bring together actors from around the globe in ad hoc coalitions. Networks, such as International Campaign to Ban Landmines, the Coalition for an International Criminal Court, the International Action Network on Small Arms, Jubilee 2000, The Climate Action Network, and the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers are issue oriented, have a very fluid constituency, and little accountability or oversight mechanisms. Every network member is independent and has its own sources of funding, making it relatively easy for a network to dissolve as soon as its goal has been reached and also facilitating the rapid formation of new networks when a new issue arises.

As donors became increasingly disappointed in purely state-led or market-led approaches, partnerships emerged in the beginning of the 1990s as the preferred form to organize cross-sectoral alliances that were building on the comparative advantages of NGOs, governments and corporate actors. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are now engaged along the entire policy cycle. Their activities include advocacy, rule making and standard setting, coordination of the gathering and dissemination of knowledge, the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of existing treaty obligations, and the delivery of social services in under-served communities.<sup>18</sup> Well known examples include the Global Reporting Initiative, the Apparel

<sup>17</sup> Helmut Anheier and Nuno Thémudo, 'Organizational Forms of Global Civil Society: Implications of Going Global', in H. Anheier, M. Glasius, M. Kaldor (eds), *Global Civil Society 2002*, 2002, p. 204.  
<sup>18</sup> Jan Martin Witte & Wolfgang H. Reimcke, 'Beyond Multilateralism: Global Public Policy Networks', in *International Politics & Society*, 2/2000.

Industry Partnership, the Forest Stewardship Council, and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, as well as bilateral partnerships such as the CARE-Starbucks alliance.

Finally, because so many INGOs combine advocacy with fundraising, service delivery and norm setting, an increasing number has adopted a hybrid organizational form<sup>19</sup> that combines federation, partnership and network elements within the same organization. World Wildlife Fund International, for example, is structured as a federal organization, is a member of advocacy coalitions including the Climate Action Network and the Global Mining Campaign, engages in partnerships such as the Marine Stewardship Council and the bilateral Conservation Partnerships with Canon and Nokia, and operates commercial Panda Stores around the world. Hybridization is necessary to remain flexible and adapt to a global environment in which state and market approaches are combined while operating at both national and international levels.

While INGOs have *gotten involved* along the entire policy cycle in most fields they were traditionally involved in, they have recently expanded their activities into fields where the state traditionally was the sole provider of public goods and maintained a strong grip on the international agenda.

### **New Fields of NGO Involvement**

The end of the Cold War opened up space for NGO involvement in the fields of arms control and the management of threats to international peace and stability. The success of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines is well known of course, but is still limited to conventional weapons. However, NGOs have also moved into the more sensitive field of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Examples include the role NGOs played in the permanent extension of the Non Proliferation Treaty in 1995, the successful campaign of the World Court Project for an advisory opinion on the legality of nuclear weapons by the ICJ in 1996, the campaign for the adoption of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the role of chemical manufacturing associations from around the world in setting up an effective verification regime for the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention,<sup>20</sup> and the role of the Nuclear Threat Initiative in reducing the proliferation of WMD.

With regard to the management of threats to international peace and stability, the NGO Working Group on the Security Council emerged as an important interlocutor of the UN's most powerful body in the late 1990s.<sup>21</sup> In addition, where humanitarian NGOs used to maintain absolute neutrality to be able to get access to regions affected by conflict (with the exception of MSF that took up the additional role of "witness" from the very beginning), many relief organizations now hesitantly engage in direct negotiations with warring parties to reduce the suffering of civilian populations as much as possible. Finally, NGOs have also become directly involved in peace negotiations. *Comunita di Sant'Egidio* initiated the peace-talks in Mozambique, while the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue even had troops assigned to them to overlook the peace-agreement in Aceh.

<sup>19</sup> Helmut Anheier and Nuno Thernudo, 'Organizational Forms of Global Civil Society: Implications of Going Global', in H. Anheier, M. Glasius, M. Kaldor (eds), *Global Civil Society 2002*, 2002, p. 208.  
<sup>20</sup> P. J. Simmons, 'Learning to Live with NGOs', in *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1998.  
<sup>21</sup> James A. Paul, *NGOs and Global Policy Making*, Global Policy Forum, 2000.

A final field in which NGO involvement increased considerably during the 1990s was the international judiciary. The members of the Coalition for the International Criminal Court clearly moved beyond simple advocacy and advisory roles in their campaign to establish the ICC. At the ICC negotiations, NGOs and governments were fully collaborating, and countries such as Sierra Leone and Bosnia were provided with legal advice by the NGO No Peace Without Justice. NGOs also play an important role in the establishment and functioning of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions as an addition to government established criminal courts and tribunals. Finally, Anne-Marie Slaughter predicts that international law will increasingly confer rights and responsibilities directly on individuals, which would open additional avenues for NGO involvement. This trend is already reflected in the statutes of the ICC and the NAFTA, and might be extended to the WTO dispute settlement panels, where Environmental Defense and Human Rights Watch are trying to secure openings for NGO involvement.<sup>22</sup>

It is unclear whether the role of NGOs in identifying and framing problems and possible solutions in these fields will become as substantive as it is in the fields of international trade, human rights, and environmental policy.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the global expansion of NGO activity and their close collaboration with intergovernmental institutions and the private sector does raise a number of dilemmas.

### **Issues and Dilemmas How Accountable Are NGOs?**

In response to the NGO claims and protests of the 1990s, governments, corporate actors, the established media, and intergovernmental organizations have started to question the accountability and legitimacy of the NGOs themselves. These are important concerns NGOs have to come to terms with; in particular issue-oriented networks, which tend to pursue a narrow, if important goal, and have a very fluid constituency and little accountability or oversight mechanisms.

In this respect, it is important to distinguish between membership-based organizations that give their members the right to vote in organizational governance, and supporter-based organizations that don't.<sup>24</sup> The contribution of supporter-based organizations such as Greenpeace and WWF to democratization is increased pluralism to society generally. This may include giving voice to disenfranchised groups and taking up emerging issues that need to be heard. However, their direct accountability is weak, while their legitimacy depends on the support they gather behind their claims.

Membership organizations, including trade unions and cooperatives, have the greater potential for democracy and accountability. However, their membership tends to be decreasing, suggesting that much of the growth of NGOs was based on an increase in supporter-based NGOs, reducing their potential for improving global democracy. On the other hand, though it is true that many NGO leaders do not stand for election, they are held

<sup>22</sup> Anne-Marie Slaughter, 'Leading Through Law', in *The Wilson Quarterly*, Autumn 2003, p.43.  
<sup>23</sup> Thomas Bernauer, 'Warfare: Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Weapons', in P.J. Simmons & Chantal de Jonge Oudraat (eds), *Managing Global Issues, Lessons Learned*, 2001, p.631.  
<sup>24</sup> Helmut Anheier and Nuno Thumudo, 'Organizational Forms of Global Civil Society: Implications of Going Global', in H. Anheier, M. Glasius, M. Kaldor (eds), *Global Civil Society* 2002, 2002, p. 211.

accountable by boards of directors, supporter groups, and other constituencies. They also must win voluntary financial support each year from members and donors and cannot rely on legally-enforced taxation as governments do.<sup>25</sup>

The debate on accountability and legitimacy goes to the heart of the debate on the integrity of civil society, and the ability of NGOs to engage these concerns will reflect its future influence. The best way for NGOs to allow others to hold them accountable is to take the time to explain their mission, goals, funding, and information sources.<sup>26</sup> Since NGOs are usually not subject to elections or market pressures, nor want to be closely regulated, providing the necessary transparency is essential. Most NGOs acknowledge this need and have made important steps in enhancing their accountability. In fact, Paul Wapner argues that when one compares the mechanisms of accountability, most existing NGO mechanisms allow for greater accountability than those of states or TNCs.<sup>27</sup>

### Enhancing Effectiveness

The rationale behind the widespread endorsement of the partnership approach in the 1990s was that the combination of the strengths of corporate, state, and non-profit approaches would improve the effectiveness of existing policy and implementation mechanisms. However, studies that actually investigated such claims often reach conflicting conclusions. In terms of effectiveness, a recent evaluation of the performance of public-private partnerships in German development cooperation found that these initiatives tended to divert development aid from the least developed countries to middle income countries and from health and education programs to activities that were more profitable for the private actors involved.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, a recent report by the Food Policy Research Institute concluded that they saw 'few examples of successful public-private partnerships, and even fewer examples where such collaborations have contributed to food security, poverty reduction, and economic growth'.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, Hans Peter Schipulle, Deputy Director General of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in Germany, reached the conclusion that many multi-stakeholder initiatives proved to be dynamic and successful.<sup>30</sup> Although these preliminary assessments indicate that partnership arrangements are no panacea for effective governance, even reports that reach sober conclusions about the observed impact of these partnership usually do mention their potential, in particular when properly managed and with guarantees in place for the meaningful participation of the weaker partners, such as NGOs.

- <sup>25</sup> James A. Paul, *NGOs and Global Policy Making*, Global Policy Forum, 2000.  
<sup>26</sup> Ann Florini, *The Coming Democracy: New Rules for Running a New World*, 2003, p.141.  
<sup>27</sup> Paul Wapner, 'Defending Accountability in NGOs', in *Chicago Journal of International Law*, Volume 3, No.1, Spring 2002, p. 197-205.  
<sup>28</sup> Uwe Hoeting, *Zauberformel PPP, Entwicklungspartnerschaften mit der Privatwirtschaft, Ausmaß - Risiken - Konsequenzen*, Oktober 2003, p.44.  
<sup>29</sup> David J. Spielman and Klaus von Grottel, *Public-Private Partnerships in Agricultural Research: An Analysis of Challenges Facing Industry and The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research*, January 2004, p.i.  
<sup>30</sup> Hans Peter Schipulle, 'Lessons Learned from Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships Supported by German Development Cooperation', in Jan Martin Witte, Charlotte Streck, and Thorsten Benner (eds.), *Progress or Peril? Partnerships and Networks in Global Environmental Governance, The Post-Johannesburg Agenda*, 2003, p. 53.



Increasing North-South divisions is another issue INGOs have to come to terms with. How equal are the relationships between Northern and Southern parts of the same organization or between Northern and Southern organizations working in partnership or within a coalition? One emerging trend is the increased division of labor between Northern and Southern NGOs. Many Northern organizations start to put more emphasis on advocacy and resource mobilization in Northern power centers (because of proximity and familiarity), while Southern organizations play a stronger role in service delivery in the developing world.<sup>31</sup> The resulting division of labor is based as much on efficiency and the urge to improve effectiveness as on normative pressures exerted by donors that stipulate NGO collaboration and partnership as a precondition for funding.<sup>32</sup>

However, there is a real danger that Northern NGOs claim to "represent" Southern NGOs without proper consultation, and partnerships being little more than rhetoric in practice. This might lead to an amplification of certain, Northern, views, which would reinforce the North-South power-divide. Global corporate social responsibility campaigns, for example, often focus on the improvement of environmental practices, the abolishment of child labor, or the right of collective bargaining. However, these campaigns don't necessarily reflect the priorities of Southern factory workers, often women, such as the protection of employment following pregnancy,<sup>33</sup> prohibition of enforced pregnancy testing, and the provision of safe transport home.

Within global NGOs, the distribution of power between headquarters and national affiliates is critical for addressing this question. Action Aid recently moved its headquarters to South Africa in an attempt to differentiate itself from typical Northern NGOs as well as an effort to make Action Aid more effective and more accountable to their Southern constituencies. Other examples include the World Rainforest Movement that has set up its international secretariat in Uruguay, but keeps a fundraising office in the UK and the World Social Forum that is developing a ring structure with rotating headquarters where any country member can become the headquarters for a period of time.

Other INGOs experiment with their internal governance structure rather than their organizational set-up. Amnesty International tries to create "global democracy" by varying the number of representatives from a member country according to the size of that country's membership.<sup>34</sup> Friends of the Earth made the more radical choice to create a governing board election system that gives majority to Southern members, even though Southern countries contribute fewer resources and members to the organization.

While Southern NGOs remain seriously disenfranchised at the global level, homegrown Southern organizations and networks continue to expand. According to Lindenberg and Bryant, important factors facilitating Southern NGO-growth include<sup>35</sup>: the success of a few

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<sup>31</sup> Marc Lindenberg and Coralie Bryant, *Going Global, Transforming Relief and Developments NGOs*, 2001, p.61.  
<sup>32</sup> Helmut Anheter and Nuno Themudo, 'Organizational Forms of Global Civil Society: Implications of Going Global', in H. Anheter, M. Glasius, M. Kaldor (eds), *Global Civil Society 2002*, 2002, p. 194.  
<sup>33</sup> Rhys Jenkins, *Corporate Codes of Conduct, Self-Regulation in a Global Economy*, UNRISD, April 2001, p. 17.  
<sup>34</sup> But because most of Amnesty International's members reside in the North, in particular in Europe, it still leads to an overrepresentation of the North at the global level.  
<sup>35</sup> Marc Lindenberg and Coralie Bryant, *Going Global, Transforming Relief and Developments NGOs*, 2001 p.26.

<sup>36</sup> Steve Charnovitz, 'Two Centuries of Participation: NGOs and International Governance', in *Michigan Journal of International Law*, Winter 1997 Charnovitz claims that the PCIJ and the economic Consultative Committee of the League of Nations were more open to NGO participation than, respectively, the ICJ or ECOSOC.

<sup>37</sup> F. H. Cardoso, *Civil Society and Global Governance*, High Level Panel on UN-Civil Society, 2003.

Alternatively, parliamentary associations could provide for improved accountability within international institutions. Parliaments are the focus of accountability at the national level and national parliaments have the potential capacity to provide adequate checks and balances over their governments' positions at international fora. At the global level, accountability and coherence of public policy could be enhanced by the increased involvement of global parliamentary associations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Parliamentarians for Global Action, and World Women Parliamentarians for Peace as well as regional

substantial than in the past. Given the reduction in membership-based NGOs, their participation does not necessarily make intergovernmental institutions more accountable. Their contribution to global policy making should be seen in terms of increasing pluralism, facilitating the voice for otherwise excluded groups to be heard, and taking up critical issues that develop too slowly to turn up at the political radar screen. In the words of former Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso: 'the legitimacy of civil society organizations derives from what they do and not from whom they represent or from any kind of external mandate. In the final analysis, they are what they do. The power of civil society is a soft one. It is their capacity to argue, to propose, to experiment, to denounce, to be exemplary. It is not the power to decide.'<sup>37</sup>

The degree of NGO penetration into intergovernmental meetings and organizations is not fundamentally different from seventy years ago<sup>36</sup> and in that sense it is premature to claim that a state to non-state power-shift is taking place. However, the number of NGOs has grown enormously and NGO participation is more formalized and takes places at many more levels and in many more fields than ever before, making their overall impact more

concerns. The lack of Southern voice doesn't just affect NGOs, it is also constitutes a potential crisis of legitimacy facing the United Nations and other intergovernmental institutions. In 1998, Jackie Smith did a survey of affiliates to a transnational environmental organization and found that many Southern affiliates in particular argued that they did not want to support stronger United Nations unless there were serious shifts to democratize the institution and increase the representation of marginalized groups. The forthcoming recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relations address some of these

### Implications for International Institutions

large Southern NGOs such as the Grameen Bank, the Bangladesh Rural Action Committee (BRAC), and CIVICUS, that serve as a model; the occurrence of social movements based on a renewed consciousness of social problems (liberation theology in the 1960s, New International Economic Order in the 1970s, and the anti-globalization movement of the 1990s); the growth of secondary education in developing countries; and increased public and private funding to create and build Southern capacity.

parliamentary assemblies such as the European Parliament, the Latin American Parliament, and the African Union Parliamentary Assembly.<sup>38</sup>

### Looking Forward

#### NGOs as Global Decision Makers?

Some advocates want to push more UN-decision-making forums in the direction of the International Labor Organization (ILO), which gives formal voting rights to business and labor representatives as well as governments. A small number of variations on the tripartite ILO model exists, predominantly dealing with technical issues and standard setting, such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). However, the reason that the ILO system works fairly well is because national employer and labor umbrella groups already existed, making the democratic selection of representative delegates simpler than in other fields.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, during the 1990s some NGOs did move beyond advocacy and implementation and got involved in policy making. NGOs are increasingly included as partners and decision makers at the country level in expanded UN Country Teams, and the Inter Agency Standing Committee for Humanitarian Affairs includes the leaders of three NGO consortia, as well as the International Red Cross Committee and Federation. In addition, UNAIDS became the first UN organization to include non-governmental actors in its governance structure.<sup>40</sup> It is unclear whether these are exceptions to the rule or whether they signal a shift towards deeper NGO-involvement in global policy-making.

#### Eroding NGO Involvement?

Although NGOs are more globally connected, better resourced and more influential than ever before, some commentators have recently suggested that this could be a brief window.<sup>41</sup> Since 9/11, the operating environment of NGOs has changed dramatically. Activities of NGOs across the board are under increased scrutiny as states are trying to regain control over previously unregulated activities. Funding has become more focused on specific geographical regions and competition between grantees has increased.<sup>42</sup> As organizations attempt to remain distinct from political-military agendas and operations, humanitarian NGOs have to come to terms with the new security-environment in which the attitudes of aid recipients are potentially hostile and their staff is subject to direct attacks.

Also, some observers have expressed their concern about the growing influence of so-called GONGOS (government organized NGOs) in intergovernmental processes. Although many NGOs receive an increasing share of their funding from governments, especially in Europe, governments usually allow them to operate independently. In the case of GONGOS, however, governments, such as China and Cuba, tend to have a rather repressive attitude

<sup>38</sup> World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, *A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All*, 2004, p.121.

<sup>39</sup> P.J. Simmons, 'Learning to Live with NGOs', in *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1998.

<sup>40</sup> UN System and Civil Society – *An Inventory and Analysis of Practices*, Background Paper for the Secretary-General's Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations Relations with Civil Society, May 2003, p.9.

<sup>41</sup> John Clark, *Worlds Apart*, 200; John Ralston Saul, 'The Collapse of Globalism, And the rebirth of Nationalism', in *Harper's Magazine*, March 2004; and Mary Kaldor, Helmut Anheier and Marlies Glasius, 'Global Civil Society in an Era of Regressive Globalization', in Mary Kaldor, Helmut Anheier and Marlies Glasius (eds.), *Global Civil Society 2003*, 2003.

<sup>42</sup> Shepard Forman and Abby Stoddard, 'International Assistance', in Lester M. Salamon (ed.), *The State of Nonprofit America*, 2002, p. 249.

towards independent NGOs, and the NGOs they sponsor can hardly be considered to speak for themselves, although, at the intergovernmental level, they are often treated as such.

Finally, many successful NGO campaigns of the 1990s have failed to sufficiently engage the most influential global actor, the United States. The U.S. has denounced the multilateral efforts to curb global warming, negotiated numerous bilateral agreements that exclude American nationals from prosecution through the ICC, they withdrew from the ABM treaty, and reneged on President Clinton's pledge that the United States would sign the Ottawa Treaty banning antipersonnel mines by 2006.

It is too early to predict how these latest developments will affect the activities of INGOs. A key issue is whether states will choose to continue to engage with NGOs, or whether the insecurities generated by globalization and international security threats will lead them to increasingly favor more state-centered approaches that discourage civic participation.

### Conclusion

This paper sought to map out the evolving role of NGOs in global governance and their proliferation in the 1990s. While doing so, it tried to assess the changing nature of NGO operations, and analyze the implications — in terms of effectiveness, accountability, and sustainability — of a deeper involvement of NGOs in international public policy efforts.

A number of developments in the 1990s, described in this paper, have led to an unprecedented growth in the number of NGOs, created new challenges that impacted the magnitude of their tasks, and transformed the way they organize, raise money, and relate to state and business actors. NGOs are now engaged along the entire policy cycle. Their activities include advocacy, rule making and standard setting, coordination of the gathering and dissemination of knowledge, the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of existing treaty obligations, and the delivery of social services in communities around the world.

A striking new trend is the emergence of more collaborative NGO approaches, alongside more traditional advocacy and "naming and shaming" strategies. They involve like-minded coalitions of governments and civil society (International Criminal Court, Landmine Convention), the inclusion of NGOs in the governance structures of UN agencies, and various forms of multi-stakeholder, public-private, public policy networks and partnerships such as the Global Compact, the GAVI initiative, and the many partnerships emerging from the 2002 World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

At the political level, the UN has shifted from an organization in which only governments spoke, to one that brings together the political power of governments, the economic power of the corporate sector and the public opinion power of NGOs as participants in the global policy dialogue. Although this could potentially lead to positive outcomes, many advocacy NGOs view these developments with skepticism, given the context of growing inequality in the global economic and political sphere and the lack of institutional mechanisms that guarantee that marginalized voices are being heard. Serious concerns have been expressed about recent attempts by certain governments to limit the activities of NGOs within the UN. Others worry about the growing power of corporate entities within the UN system and how it might lead to the eclipsing of citizen's voices.

How to create more effective governance structures that address these power inequalities seems to be one of the crucial questions that needs to be addressed to avert a potential crisis of legitimacy facing the UN. Growing discontent among Southern groups and the more militant protests at sites of global negotiations reflect some of this loss of legitimacy or lack of responsiveness of global institutions. It is striking that the global justice movement that expresses itself through the World and Regional Social Forums (that have been held since the historic Porto Alegre World Social Forum in 2001) have largely ignored the UN – although some of the leading organizations of the Social Forums are also active at the UN.<sup>43</sup>

Continued constructive UN-civil society engagement is crucial. Inside the UN, the report of the Secretary General's Panel of Eminent Persons on UN-Civil Society Relations will set the agenda for improving the UN's responsiveness to marginalized groups and the modalities for NGO involvement. Outside the UN, much will depend upon the extent to which civil society groups continue to invest their time and resources in UN processes, as well as upon their ability to manage transparency and accountability concerns. Given that the UN needs global civil society to support its work and to press governments to support multilateralism, a loss of citizen attention to and support for the UN system would mean a weaker system of global governance and is thus reason for concern.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Tony Hill, *Three Generations of UN-Civil Society Relations: A Quick Sketch*, United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service, April 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Jackie Smith, 'Transnational Activism, Institutions, and Global Democratization', in *Transnational Activism in Asia: Problems of Power and Democracy*, Nicola Piper and Anders Uhlén, eds., 2004, p.61-77.

