



ROLE OF NGO's FOR SHAPING FUTURE OF INDIA

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Abstract

It is believed that the first international NGO was probably the Antislavery Society, formed in 1839. However, the term NGO originated at the end of World War II when the United Nations sought to distinguish between private organizations and intergovernmental specialized agencies (Hall-Jones, 2006). NGOs are a complex mixture comprised of alliances and rivalries; businesses and charities; conservatives and radicals. The funding comes from various sources, and though NGOs are usually nonprofit organizations, there are some that operate for profit (Hall-Jones, 2006). NGOs originate from all over the world and have access to different levels of resources. Some organizations focus on a single policy objective of AIDS while others will aim at larger policy goals of poverty eradication (Hall-Jones, 2006).



Introduction

History of the Nongovernmental Organizations Movement

The first NGO was the Anti-Slavery Society followed by the Red Cross and Caritas, a movement that arose at the end of the 19th century. Most of the other NGO movements were founded after the two world wars and, hence, were primarily humanitarian in nature. For example, Save the Children was formed after World War I, and CARE was formed after World War II (Hall-Jones, 2006). The decolonization of Africa in the 1960s led to a new way of thinking—one that aimed at causes of poverty rather than its consequences. The armed conflicts of the 1970s and 1980s (Vietnam, Angola, Palestine) led the European NGOs to take on the task of mediators for informal diplomacy. Their support for locals had an impact on the demise of the apartheid regime in South Africa and the dictatorships of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines and Augusto Pinochet in Chile.

In addition, in the mid- 1980s, the World Bank realized that NGOs were more effective and less corrupt than the typical government channels. The food crisis in Ethiopia in 1984 spurred a new market for “humanitarian aid” (Berthoud, 2001).

In the history of the NGO movement's growth, there have been several milestones. One of the first milestones was the role of the solidarity movement in the political transformation in Poland in the 1980s. The next was the impact of environmental activists on the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Another milestone was the Fifty Years Is Enough campaign in 1994.

This was organized by the South Council and was aimed at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the belief that these two institutions had been promoting and financing unsustainable development overseas that created poverty and destroyed the environment. The most recent milestone was the organization of the labor, anti-globalization, and environmental groups that protested and disturbed the Seattle World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in 1999 (McGann& Johnstone, 2006).

Funding

The numbers of NGO organizations have grown dramatically, and NGOs have become a powerful player in global politics, facilitated in part by the increasing funding by public and private grants (McGann& Johnstone, 2006). This funding comes in from all kind of sources and is redirected in every conceivable direction. The world's biggest NGO is the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation with an endowment of \$28.8 billion. The 160 international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) associated with Interaction have combined annual revenues of \$2.3 billion (Aall, 2000).

There are some NGOs that are very sophisticated at wooing the media while other unknown NGOs work tirelessly at the grassroots level. Some NGOs are membership-based, such as Amnesty International, that refuse to accept money from



political parties, agencies, or governments whereas other NGOs are profit-making organizations focused on lobbying for profit-driven interests (Hall-Jones, 2006).

One trend is that NGOs are becoming dependent on governments for funding and service contracts. For example, 70% of CARE International's budget (\$420 million) came from government contributions in 2001, 25% of Oxfam's income came from EU and British government in 1998, and 46% of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) income came from government sources. Similarly, World Vision collected goods worth \$55 million from the U.S. government (Hall-Jones, 2006).

Numbers and Budgets

INGOs rose in number from 6,000 in 1990 to 26,000 in 1996 ("The NonGovernmental Order," 1999). At present, there are 1.5 million nonprofit organizations in the United States and more than 1 million NGOs in India. Along with the growth in the number of NGOs, the memberships have also been expanding at steady rate ("The Non-Governmental Order," 1999).

Some of the biggest NGOs in terms of size and financial strength are to be found in the humanitarian realm. For example, Oxfam, World Vision, CARE, and Save the Children are all strong brands that belong to extremely large organizations with strong financial power. The biggest NGO—World Vision—had an annual budget of \$2.1 billion for 2006 (Karajkov, 2007).

Some of the other NGOs can boast of similar financial resources. Over 70% of the relief funding goes to the biggest NGOs. The biggest eight are comprised of the following organizations (Karajkov, 2007):

1. World Vision, \$2.1 billion (2006)
2. Oxfam, \$528 million (2004–2005)
3. CARE, \$624 million (2005)
4. Save the Children, \$863 million (2006)
5. Catholic Relief Services, \$694 million (2005)
6. Doctors Without Borders, \$568 million (2004)
7. International Rescue Committee, \$203 million (2005)
8. Mercy Corps, \$185 million (2005)

Growth in Power

The real story is how these organizations have networked and impacted world politics.

Global politics have gone through a drastic shift resulting from the growth of nongovernmental agencies. NGOs or CSOs have moved from being in the background to having a presence in the midst of world politics and, as a result, are exerting their influence and power in policy making at global scale. Some organizations such as Amnesty International and Greenpeace have effectively become NGO brands and have helped make NGO a household word. At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, there was a large NGO presence. While 1,400 NGO members were involved in the official proceedings, another 17,000 NGO members staged an alternative forum to the meeting. Encouraged by their success, a larger group gathered in Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women (McGann & Johnstone, 2006).



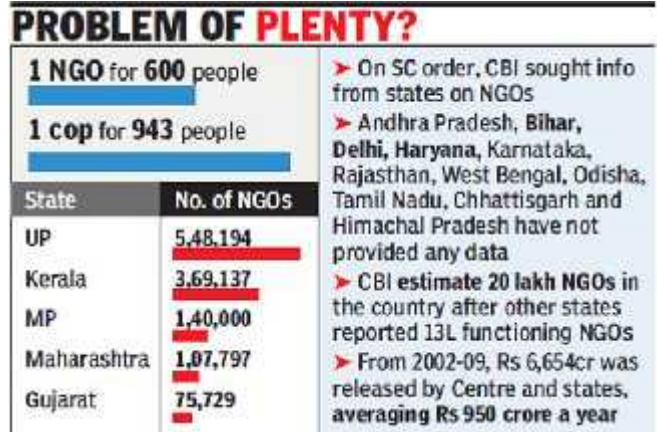
How have NGOs gained this global attention? There are various strategies that have been employed. For example, some NGOs organize largescale protests, capture international headlines, and gain notoriety. The two NGOs that were successful in organizing large-scale action around specific themes were Amnesty International, which focuses on human rights issues, and Greenpeace, which focuses on ecological issues (Berthoud, 2001).

There are other NGOs that have organized meetings to challenge the legitimacy of the WTO, the G8, the World Bank, and the IMF. The effectiveness of these NGOs' efforts took the governments and other global multilateral institutions by surprise. In response, these efforts forced the governments to figure out ways to involve NGOs in their decision making. Now that their place in world politics is firmly established, the majority of NGOs have moved from street protests to a policy making role in the boardrooms of the United Nations, WTO, World Bank, and the IMF (McGann & Johnstone, 2006).



What are the factors that have led to the unprecedented growth of NGOs? Research by McGann and Johnstone (2006) have isolated six interrelated forces as follows:

1. Democratization and the civil society ideal: The emergence of civil society and the addition of more open societies have both led to an environment that was favorable to the proliferation of NGOs.
2. Growing demand for information, analysis, and action: The general public is bombarded with unsystematic and unreliable information. NGOs can collect data to make decisions, a role that is invaluable in developing countries where such information might not readily exist.
3. Growth of state, nonstate, and interstate actors: After World War II, there was a global trend toward increased democratization and decentralization that led to an increase in the number of nations or states after World War II. In addition, numerous intergovernmental organizations (United Nations, WTO, World Bank) were created and were granted certain powers and functions. This led to an unprecedented growth in the number of governmental organizations, NGOs, and nation-states.
4. Improved communications technologies: The growth of the Internet has led to inexpensive, instant, and largely unregulated flow of information. In addition, the nature of the information age makes it very difficult to restrict the inflow of information from the perspective of authoritarian governments.
5. Globalization of NGO funding: The issue of funding is important since many organizations work with small budgets and staffs. In many nations such as in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, there are no tax incentives to fund NGOs. Hence, most of the funding flows from developed countries to developing or transitional countries. However, foreign funding raises questions about the credibility of an organization. Furthermore, the issues of funding, transparency, and accountability become more complicated when NGOs cross national borders.
6. Paralysis and poor performance of the public sector: There has been an erosion of confidence in the government leaders and institutions. The never-ending scandals involving public officials combined with poor performance of policy makers have led citizens to question the legitimacy of governments. When the institutions are considered ineffective and the nation-state is distrusted, the NGOs operating on a local, grassroots level have emerged so that these deficiencies can be addressed.



Role of Nongovernmental Organizations

Given this unprecedented growth in the numbers and financial power of NGOs, how has the role changed or matured? What we see is that NGOs can have a huge impact. These NGOs are unfettered, not answerable to specific agendas, and, in many instances, can act independently.

Even though NGOs are highly diverse organizations, the one common goal is that they are not focused on short-term targets, and, hence, they devote themselves to long-term issues like climate change, malaria prevention, or human rights. In addition, public surveys state that NGOs often have public trust, which makes them a useful proxy for societal concerns (Hall-Jones, 2006).

Next, we will discuss four important roles of NGOs. These roles are

1. Social development,
2. Sustainable community development,
3. Sustainable development, and
4. Sustainable consumption.

Social Development

NGOs play an important role in global social development—work that has helped facilitate achievements in human development as measured by the UN Human Development Index (HDI) (n.d.).

One of the major strengths of NGOs is their ability to maintain institutional independence and political neutrality. Even though NGOs need to collaborate with governments in numerous instances, failure to maintain neutrality and autonomy may severely compromise the NGOs' legitimacy. Unfortunately, if a government insists upon political allegiance, the NGOs encounter the dilemma of either violating the neutrality position or failing to provide needed services to the population. Indeed, some NGOs have been asked to leave in troubled countries due to political reasons (Asamoah, 2003).



The major advantages that NGOs bring to this role include “flexibility, ability to innovate, grass-roots orientation, humanitarian versus commercial goal orientation, non-profit status, dedication and commitment, and recruitment philosophy” (Asamoah, 2003).

The drawbacks in working with NGOs are similar to the advantages that were previously listed. In addition, some other disadvantages include “over-zealousness, restricted local participation, inadequate feasibility studies, conflicts or misunderstandings with host partner, inflexibility in recruitment and procedures, turf wars, inadequately trained personnel, lack of funding to complete projects, lack of transparency, inability to replicate results, and cultural insensitivity” (Asamoah, 2003).

Sustainable Community Development

NGOs have shown leadership in promoting sustainable community development. Due to their particular ideology and nature, NGOs are good at reaching out to the poor and remote communities and mobilizing these populations. They can also empower these populations to regain control of their lives and can work with and strengthen local organizations. In addition, such NGOs can carry out projects more efficiently and at lower costs than government agencies and, most importantly, promote sustainable development (Nikkhah & Redzuan, 2010). The five dimensions of sustainable community development are as follows:

1. Increasing local economic diversity
2. Self-reliance: development of local markets, local production, local processing, greater co-operation among local economic entities
3. Reduction in the use of energy combined with recycling and management of waste products
4. Protection and enhancement of biological diversity and stewardship of natural resources
5. Commitment of sustainable communities to social justice. (Bridger & Luloff, 1999)

Using Strategic Means to Point Out Problems

NGOs are encouraging households to exercise their power as shareholders. In case shareholder power is substantial, this can raise public awareness and change business policies. For example, Friends of the Earth’s (FoE) Green Paycheck Campaign tells individuals how to use their shareholder power and screen their investments so that “money becomes a tool for change” (Kong et al., 2002).

Assessing Environmental Impacts of Products

NGOs rank products and services based on their environmental performance and impacts. The idea is that consumers can then pick and choose what products or brands they would purchase. For example, many consumer organizations have adopted a commitment to sustainability in their mission statements, such as in Austria, Germany, Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands, and their assessment of products reaches consumers via magazines, websites, and other publications (Kong et al., 2002).

Greening the Supply of Products and Services

NGOs are developing or designing products that will minimize the environmental impacts of consumption. The consumer is simply offered an alternative of more sustainable consumption, and this choice is deemed empowering. For example, the WWF is engaging the retail sector to offer more sustainable food products. It also cooperates with the catering sector to design WWF Weeks for the menu and one permanent WWF dish. This campaign has been successful in increasing demand for organic products in Switzerland (Kong et al., 2002).

Focusing on Market Forces

Creating a green demand that will drive changes in supply, NGOs are providing information through labels that would empower consumers to make informed choices. For example, WWF has worked with the industry to design labeling schemes to help in the launch of independent certification bodies. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) was created in 1993 to protect the world’s forest by a coalition of NGOs, businesses, and government entities. Unilever and WWF started the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) to establish a certification scheme for sustainable fishing (Kong et al., 2002).

What can business gain from forging a relationship with an NGO? There are four reasons for this relationship:

Credibility

There is evidence that company-generated social and environmental reports suffer from a credibility gap. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) states that an active dialogue and stakeholder partnership is needed.

Marketing

There has been an increased level of interest in the environmental policies when companies work with NGOs.



Expertise and Innovation

NGOs have expertise in sustainable development issues. For example, retail outlets worked with WWF to come up with the forest stewardship certification.

Networks

Companies can work with NGO networks to tackle sustainability issues in countries where their suppliers are located. Also, international NGO networks can help suppliers gain access to socially and environmentally progressive markets (Bendell, 2010). This partnership between opposites can be attractive. There are tangible differences between NGOs and businesses, in resources and organization structures that make NGOs attractive partners for those companies that are seeking to move toward sustainability. What is important to note is that these differences, such as the capacity of NGOs for independent advice and action, ought not be compromised due to any kind of partnership. The relationship of partnerships, by itself, is a very valuable element in bringing about change. Since NGOs bring a different perspective to the boardroom, this partnering can be an attractive proposition (Bendell, 2010).

Conclusion

There are countless NGOs worldwide, and these organizations have played a significant role in social development, sustainable community development, and promoting sustainable consumption. Businesses that wish to reach out to all their stakeholders can benefit from a productive relationship with NGOs. In addition, there is a category of NGOs called ENGOS that focus on environmental concerns. There are a large number of ENGOS ranging from the Audubon Society to WWF. Lastly, two of the principles of Agenda 21 are relevant to sustainability. These principles are as follows: 1. The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of the present and future generations 2. In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it. (Agenda 21, n.d.-a).



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