

Role of NGOs in Global Governance

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Introduction

What is global governance?

Global governance or world governance is the political interaction of transnational actors aimed at solving problems that affect more than one state or region when there is no power of enforcing compliance. The modern question of world governance exists in the context of globalization. In response to the acceleration of interdependence on a worldwide scale, both between human societies and between humankind and the biosphere, world governance designates regulations intended for the global scale.

Several historical and political developments help to explain the increased presence and importance of NGOs on the world stage. Early in the 20th century, a number of global human rights issues came to the fore that resulted in concerted and organized activity on the part of civil society actors working to temper individual states' power.

NGO's and Global Governance in relation to UN

Mazide N'Diaye (Senegal) said although the UN, World Bank and IMF are part of the world's existing tools for global governance, the view from the South is that the governments of seven to ten major powers control international decision making. While the UN should be more active, present and useful, NGOs have difficulties dealing with its bureaucracy, the pace and nature of diplomatic debates and negotiations, and the time lost on unimportant questions. At the country level, the UN system

often appears to lack responsiveness, flexibility and a sense of urgency, which weakens the UN. In Africa, the competition between the UN and the Bretton Woods Institutions for "their" respective NGO constituencies is highly visible.

Many of the world's most important changes have come about because people risked fighting for their principles. Global civil society made a vital contribution to ending the Vietnam War and apartheid. But since the fall of the Berlin Wall, socialistic thinking is feared, and socialist ideals are seen as a lost cause. Yet it is widely understood that the free market system cannot resolve the problems of the human condition, since it generates inequality between the rich and poor. In the end, NGOs will have to forge a new ideology based on democracy in both political and economic spheres. If NGO views on justice and equality seem old-fashioned, NGOs must face that fact and accept the responsibilities of the principles they espouse. It is not enough for NGOs to criticize aspects of others' decisions--the key challenge is to develop alternatives that work.

NGOs should focus more on the General Assembly; informal NGO participation in the General Assembly has in fact already been taking place. For several years, the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status with ECOSOC (CONGO) has been calling for NGOs with consultative status to have access to the GA. Also, a number of recent calls have been made to establish some kind of people's assembly or civil society forum linked to the work of the GA. The Commission on Global Governance has proposed something along these lines, but its idea goes beyond NGOs and people's organizations to include business organizations, which is problematic. Another idea is to establish

a permanent world conference of NGOs. CONGO has no position on this issue, but it merits discussion. A great deal of thought must be given to how to ensure such a body has relevance, impact and meaning at the grassroots level.

Role of NGOs in Global Governance

Concerning the role of NGOs in global governance, it is necessary to reaffirm the diversity of NGOs, which represent the world in all its dimensions. For a constituency-based organization like Education International, with 23 million members in 150 countries, the issue of representativity is very important. It may be of less importance in other contexts, such as humanitarian emergencies, where the priority is to get the job done. NGOs must reaffirm their independence from governments and ensure their own transparency in financing and other issues. This will reinforce their credibility and strengthen the principles upon which they are based. In this regard, NGOs and the UN would both benefit from more public information on NGOs.

Agenda setting

NGOs have an array of mechanisms through which to pursue their goals and put their issues on the global agenda. They pressure decision-makers through visible and familiar methods such as protesting in the streets and engaging in street theatre. Using modern technology, they launch email and fax campaigns, devise media strategies, and construct websites to educate the public. They also organize attention grabbing summits that parallel inter-governmental conferences, lobby and persuade policymakers and business leaders to reconsider their stated interests and goals, and float innovative policy proposals for domestic and international action. The research and information that NGOs provide to policymakers and the public, has a significant impact on how an issue is framed and whether action is taken to address it. The research and analysis of advocacy

NGOs such as the International Crisis Group or Human Rights Watch have been influential in the debates over what action to take in the Balkans, Kosovo, Rwanda, Darfur, and Afghanistan.

Agenda-setting is one of the most common and significant ways in which NGOs have inserted themselves into issues of peace and security. Their motivations have been both selfless and self-interested, and their values have ranged across the political spectrum. But there is no doubt that they have been able to influence the agendas of other more powerful actors and to change the nature of peace and security affairs.

Negotiation

NGOs have been present at multilateral negotiations for many years, but it is only recently that their participation has garnered attention. The most famous example of NGO influence on international negotiations dates back to 1945 when they successfully pressured governments to include references to human rights in the UN Charter. Since the late 1980s, NGO participation in multilateral negotiations has grown and become more formal. NGOs are often given formal observer status, which enables them to interact with government delegations, make declarations, and submit written documents. International organizations such as the UN have generally facilitated NGO access to multilateral negotiations. There are also examples of NGOs being hosts or facilitators of mediation and negotiating efforts between warring parties. For example, the Quakers were hosting and facilitating talks between the Nigerian government and Biafran rebel leaders in the 1967-1970 conflict. The importance of NGOs in the negotiation of the 1997 landmine convention is well documented, as is their contribution to the negotiation of the Statutes of the International Criminal Court.

Monitoring and Implementation

NGOs have emerged as important players in fostering implementation and compliance by states with intergovernmental

agreements. Activist NGOs pressure governments from within and without to comply with agreements, and promote societal changes necessary to make agreements work. They supply supplementary and respected information and data on global problems, help to assess the overall effectiveness of international agreements, and provide early warning of new problems. They deliver services and assistance to help states comply with agreements. And increasingly states delegate to NGOs some of the tasks involved in implementation.

On refugee and human rights issues, including human rights issues connected to intrastate violence and conventional weapons flows, NGOs play critical roles in warning about emerging conflicts and potential violations of accepted norms. s. NGO activism and protest campaigns can impose real costs when they are able to gain the support of the broader public. For example, Amnesty International has forced governments to release political prisoners through their campaigns on behalf of individuals. The global campaign against Chinese human rights abuses and the upcoming Beijing Olympics has the potential to turn a source of great pride and status for the Chinese into a debacle.

The Sources of NGO Power and Influence

In considering the power of NGOs in the different stages of governance, we need to

examine not only the bases of NGO power but their capabilities relative to other actors. The resources NGOs bring to politics include information and expertise; the ability to raise the costs for other actors through their activism; material resources including money and technology; and most of all their perceived legitimacy. Their reputation is one of their most valued assets. They are able to leverage these resources against more powerful actors despite their relative weakness in most traditional measures of power. . Key international advocacy NGOs, such as Human Rights Watch, have a critical influence on which issues are taken up and when and how a transnational campaign is organized.

NGOs are generally viewed as public-interest/values based organizations, which gives them a degree of legitimacy that other actors, such as corporations, cannot hope to match. Some argue that the voluntary nature of most NGOs brings them moral authority, while others argue that their status and influence comes primarily from formal or informal delegation by states.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we recognize the emerging role of NGOs in advancing broad social issues of major concern around the world and providing critical goods and services.

