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Leon Gordenker

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Pluralising global governance: analytical approaches and dimensions

LEON GORDENKER & THOMAS G WEISS

Nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) have in increasing numbers injected unexpected voices into international discourse about numerous problems of global scope. Especially during the last 20 years, human rights advocates, gender activists, developmentalists, groups of indigenous peoples and representatives of other defined interests have become active in political work once reserved for representatives of states. Their numbers have enlarged the venerable, but hardly numerous, ranks of transnational organisations built around churches, labour unions and humanitarian aims.

The United Nations (UN) system provides a convenient, accessible vantage point to observe some of the most active, persuasive NGOs in the world. During the last 50 years, various UN organisations have felt the direct and indirect impact of NGOs. According to the Union of International Associations, the NGO universe includes well over 15 000 recognisable NGOs that operate in three or more countries and draw their finances from sources in more than one country; this number is growing all the time.¹ In their own ways, NGOs and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) grope, sometimes cooperatively, sometimes competitively, sometimes in parallel towards a modicum of 'global governance'. We define global governance as efforts to bring more orderly and reliable responses to social and political issues that go beyond capacities of states to address individually. Like the NGO universe, global governance implies an absence of central authority, and the need for collaboration or cooperation among governments and others who seek to encourage common practices and goals in addressing global issues. The means to achieve global governance also include activities of the United Nations and other intergovernmental organisations and standing cooperative arrangements among states.

This introductory essay generally discusses the NGO phenomenon. It proposes a definition of NGOs to serve for the purpose of this issue, although much controversy remains about the concept and individual authors may offer refinements. It also provides a general backdrop of historical, legal and political factors for the study. It offers some analytical detail needed for deeper understanding of the phenomenon, and outlines a set of fundamental factors for studying NGOs. It does not assume that NGOs always or even usually succeed in reaching their goals or, if they do, that the result is beneficial for peace, social or personal welfare, or human rights.

The studies that follow all employ the United Nations as a central and reasonably transparent point of observation that has legal and historical underpinnings, and branching activities that reach to the social grass roots. Moreover, NGOs are omnipresent in many aspects of international relations, and they may

have become crucial to the UN's future. It is significant that in its essay, 'Reforming the United Nations', the Commission on Global Governance—whose members are virtually all former governmental officials or international civil servants—examined NGOs and observed that 'in their wide variety they bring expertise, commitment, and grassroots perceptions that should be mobilized in the interests of better governance'.² NGOs assume centre stage for activities that once 'were irrelevant to the overall plot'.³ The case studies, each written by an author who has directly observed or experienced NGO activities, examine NGO work on human rights, complex humanitarian emergencies, the United Nations relationship, the global environment, AIDS, the international women's movement, scaling up and scaling down, operational coalitions and state relations. The final essay draws on the specific studies to reach conclusions about the nature, function and prospects for NGOs in relation to the UN system.

The phenomenon

In spite of the growth of the NGO phenomenon, confusion or ignorance persists as to the definition of the participants and the nature of their relationships to the UN system and to one another. Theoretical explorations have tended to be few in number and specific to a particular sector of activity, especially aspects of economic and social development and of the environment. A considerable body of writing has a primarily legal character, which overlooks or understates the richness of NGO activity and politics. Definitional clarity connects closely with concepts of structure, organisation and institutionalisation.

The very site of NGO activity under examination here suggests paradoxes. IGOs join with governments in common undertakings. By definition, NGOs have no formal standing in this realm. Yet they have become exponentially more visible precisely in connection with governments. IGOs were intended to serve governments and to assist in cooperatively reaching goals on which both generally agree. Yet NGOs have now become an integral part of the process of setting agendas for cooperation and in carrying the results not only to governments but to other NGOs and individuals. This study seeks to analyse this process, which requires examining both broad and deep interorganisational relationships.

The term 'nongovernmental organisation' itself is challenged by a host of alternative usages. These include officials, independent sector, volunteer sector, civic society, grassroots organisations, private voluntary organisations, transnational social movement organisations, grassroots social change organisations and non-state actors. Some of these refer to highly specialised varieties and many are synonyms for each other. There seems no quarrel, however, with the notion that these organisations consist of durable, bounded, voluntary relationships among individuals to produce a particular product, using specific techniques. Like-minded organisations may analogously develop lasting relationships to one another and thus form meta-organisations.

Although the term 'non-state actors' may more closely resemble our inclusion of several varieties of meta-organisations that are engaged in transnational relationships, we maintain the term 'nongovernmental organisations' because of its common currency and because this is the term that appears in article 71 of

the UN Charter. At the same time, 'non-state actors', according to a Lexis-Nexis search, connotes a host of transnational entities that we deliberately exclude from our inquiry. These include profit-making corporations and banks, criminal elements (both organised crime and terrorists), insurgents, churches in their strictly religious function, transnational political parties and the mass communication media.

A metaphor suggested by Marc Nerfin provides a starting point for locating NGOs in the political realm: the prince represents governmental power and the maintenance of public order; the merchant symbolises economic power and the production of goods and services; and the citizen stands for people's power.⁴ As such, the growth of NGOs arises from demands by citizens for accountability from the prince and the merchant. In this perspective, NGOs compete and cooperate with the prince and the merchant for guidance in aspects of social life. They function to 'serve undeserved or neglected populations, to expand the freedom of or to empower people, to engage in advocacy for social change, and to provide services'.⁵

Such an approach contains much that is subjective. Citizens may believe themselves under-served by, or deprived of, rightful power, or they may seek more freedom and advocate change. Doing so implies reform or drastic changes in existing societies. Yet it is equally conceivable that citizens could demand preservation of the status quo as part of the accountability of merchants and princes. The objective point of such approaches, however, lies in the identification of organisation and activity beyond the conventional categories of state and business.

Questions can be raised about the accuracy of this metaphor. Although recognising the legitimacy of each sector of society, it tends to glorify NGOs at the expense of states and markets. NGO 'citizens' are portrayed as vanguards of the just society, as 'princes' and 'merchants' strive to dominate or to make profits. In a study of environmental NGOs in world politics, two authors concluded that the crucial function of NGOs was to create transnational links between state and non-state. NGOs, in this model, politicise the previously unpoliticised and connect the local and the global.⁶

Some NGOs do, in fact, politicise issues otherwise regarded by some as part of the nonpolitical realm, AIDS being a recent case in point. They also bring local experience to bear on international decision making. This may be the most important contribution NGOs have made to global governance. Once again, however, generalisation is dangerous because some NGOs continue to lead a more marginal existence, without links to international bodies. Most NGOs have not managed to break out of the local setting and become engaged in transnational activities.

If NGOs exist and operate above and beneath the level of government, they parallel the pattern of IGOs, particularly those of the UN system. These entities, too, are intended to operate to some degree beyond the states that form them. IGOs do not govern; they attempt to cope with and help manage complex interrelationships and global political, economic and social changes by arranging cooperation of other actors, especially governments. In doing so, they have also

extended their operations below the classical boundaries of governmental autonomy.

Distinctions between IGOs and NGOs rest on legal grounds and tend to exaggerate the boundary between the two categories. In reality, there are great variations within, and unclear borderlines between, the two categories. The sheer number of different types of NGOs, ranging from community-based self-help groups to international NGOs with staff and budgets surpassing those of many IGOs, calls for conceptual differentiation and clarification.

Students of international relations have proposed alternative terminologies to conceptualise transnational relations. James Rosenau, for instance, distinguishes between sovereignty-bound and sovereignty-free actors.⁷ While sociological rather than legal, this dichotomy can also be misleading insofar as organisations composed of governments are automatically assumed to be sovereignty-bound and other actors sovereignty-free. Perhaps it would make more sense to speak of sovereignty-bound and sovereignty-free behaviour.⁸ Regardless of their legal status, organisations may engage in behaviour that is guided by, or pays heed to, state sovereignty to varying degrees. Loyalties do not always follow state borders, and secretariats of IGOs are not necessarily more dominated than secretariats of big NGOs.

This essay and this journal issue retain the traditional IGO–NGO distinction for lack of better alternatives, while remaining attentive to sovereignty-bound and sovereignty-free behaviour by IGOs and NGOs alike. The important puzzle is what specific roles NGOs may play in transnational networks as intermediary organisations that provide links between state and market, between local and global levels.

The challenges to sovereignty, according to a recent analytical study, include four categories of interdependence—trade and finance, security, technology and ecological problems—and ‘the emergence of new social movements with both local and transnational consciousness’.⁹ Both NGOs and IGOs, then, busy themselves with the paradox of global economic and technological integration with local fragmentation of identities.

Apart from the function of representing people acting of their own volition, rather than by some institutional *fiat*, NGOs have other defining characteristics. They are formal organisations that are intended to continue in existence; they are thus not *ad hoc* entities. They are or aspire to be self-governing on the basis of their own constitutional arrangements. They are private in that they are separate from governments and have no ability to direct societies or to require support from them. They are not in the business of making or distributing profits. The NGOs of interest here have transnational goals, operations or connections, and have active contacts with the UN system.

Not every organisation that claims to be an NGO exactly fits this definition of a private citizens’ organisation, separate from government but active on social issues, not profit making, and with transnational scope. At least three significant deviations from these specifications can be identified. The first of these is a GONGO—government-organised nongovernmental organisation. They achieved notoriety during the Cold War because many so-called NGOs owed their very existence and entire financial support to communist governments in the Soviet

bloc or authoritarian ones in the Third World. There were also a few such 'NGOs' in the West, particularly in the USA, where they were often a front for administration activities. Although the Western species may have been more nongovernmental than their Soviet or Third World counterparts, they were not created for the classic purposes of NGOs. Thus, GONGOS can be treated as only tangential to our examination.

The second special type of NGO is QUANGOS (quasi-nongovernmental organisations). For example, many Nordic and Canadian NGOs, a handful of US ones, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) receive the bulk of their resources from public coffers. The staffs of such organisations usually assert that as long as their financial support is without strings attached and their own priorities rather than those of donor governments dominate, there is no genuine problem. This is clearly a subjective judgment, but most of these NGOs are relevant for our discussion. Their services aim at internationally-endorsed objectives and their operations are distinct from those of governments, even if their funding is public.

We are at an early stage in understanding how NGOs adapt to changing external and internal environments. In examining recent trends at the domestic level in the USA and Britain, one analyst has gone so far as to call into question voluntary agencies as a 'shadow state'.¹⁰ With more governmental and intergovernmental resources being channelled through international NGOs, the issue of independence—or a willingness to bite the hand that feeds in order to make autonomous programmatic decisions in spite of donor pressures—assumes greater salience. 'One of the real issues for NGOs is how much money can they take from the government while still carrying out advocacy activities that may involve criticizing the source of those funds'.¹¹

The third mutant type—the donor-organised NGO (DONGO)—is also distinguished by its source of funds. 'As donors become more interested in NGOs, they also find themselves tempted to create NGOs suited to their perceived needs'.¹² Both governments and the UN system have 'their' NGOs for particular operations and purposes. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has been involved in fostering their growth for a decade. The UN itself created local NGOs that contributed to mobilising the population for elections in Cambodia¹³ and to de-mining in Afghanistan.¹⁴

QUANGOS and DONGOS fit well enough in the general definition to warrant inclusion in this study. They aim at internationally-endorsed purposes and have a private status, even if their funding is public. They offer services that clearly fall within the usual range of NGO operations.

Relationship to the UN

A conventional, legally-based way of describing NGOs and their relationship to the United Nations begins with the formal structure that derives from UN Charter article 71.¹⁵ It empowers the Economic and Social Council (ESOSOC) to 'make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence'. It is the only mention of NGOs in the Charter, largely an afterthought stimulated by the Soviet

Union's attempt to put a GONGO on a par with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), another IGO dating to the formation of the League of Nations that constitutionally included representation of labour and management in its governing structure.¹⁶ Early attempts to give meaning to article 71 were heavily coloured by cold-war manoeuvres, but a growing list of organisations with consultative status developed around fairly restricted practices laid down by ESOSOC.¹⁷ Historically speaking, the UN Charter formalises the relationship between NGOs and the world organisation in a significantly different way from the previous experience with international organisation. For example, NGOs were completely excluded from the Hague Conferences in 1899 and 1907. At the League of Nations, NGOs achieved only an informal consultative arrangement that had some effect, however, on proceedings there.¹⁸

The present legal framework dates from 1968 in the form of the elaborate ESOSOC Resolution 1296 (XLIV). It is now undergoing reexamination in a stately process whose diplomatic tone is heavily coloured by NGO participation. Resolution 1296 retains but refines the earlier UN principle that any international organisation not established by intergovernmental agreement falls into the NGO category. In 11 paragraphs of principles, the text emphasises that NGOs that seek consultative status must have goals within the UN economic and social ambit. These NGOs must also have a representative and international character, and authorisation to speak for members who are supposed to participate in a democratic fashion. The text requires submission of data from organisations on their budgets and the sources of their financing. It also promotes a vague hierarchy by encouraging the formation of umbrella organisations composed of organisations with similar purposes that pool their advice to the council and transmit results of consultations from national organisations. The process of admission to consultative status is supervised by the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, elected each year by ESOSOC from among its member governments, 19 of which provide the actual personnel.

Consultations remain largely under ESOSOC control, in contrast to the fuller rights of participation available to IGOs in the UN system. NGOs can be granted status in one of three categories, designated as 'I', 'II', and 'the roster'. Those in category I are supposed to have broad economic and social interests and geographical scope; those in category II have more specialised interests. The remainder of accepted applicants are listed in a roster for organisations that may make occasional contributions. Category I organisations have the broadest access to the council. They may propose ESOSOC agenda items to the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, which in turn can ask the secretary-general to include their suggestions on the provisional list. This is far from a right to submit agenda items. Like category II NGOs, category I organisations may send observers to all meetings and may submit brief written statements on their subject matter. The council has the right to ask for written statements from any of the consultative NGOs, and it may invite category I and II organisations to hearings, which, in fact, are rare. Other rules set out limitations on NGOs in dealing with ESOSOC subsidiaries and international conferences summoned by it.

The UN Department of Public Information simultaneously developed a

parallel set of relationships with NGOs under its own legislative authority.¹⁹ This emphasises the information-disseminating function of NGOs, rather than any input in policy formation. It includes briefings, mailings, access to documentation and an NGO Resources Center in New York.²⁰

Both of these consultative arrangements gave birth to meta-organisations representing NGOs. Some of those in contact with ESOSOC soon formed a Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status, which adopted the acronym CONGO. It takes no substantive positions, but concentrates on procedural matters and the promotion of better understanding of the ESOSOC agenda. For the organisations in the public information orbit, an NGO/Department of Public Information (DPI) Executive Committee serves as liaison.²¹

These consultative arrangements signal the presence of two trends. One of them indicates the almost unprecedented establishment of 'formal relations between "interest" groups and an intergovernmental body'.²² Even though this relationship was conditioned by the Cold War, both in the formation of the list of accredited organisations and the attention given them by the largely diplomatic ESOSOC, it offered some access to the UN system by NGOs. The fact that this access was seen as worthwhile by NGOs may be inferred from the growth in category I listings from seven in 1948 to 41 in 1991, and in category II organisations from 32 to 354 during the same period, while an even faster expansion took place on the roster.²³

The other trend looks towards the vast broadening of scope and reach of the programmes reviewed in ESOSOC. Although this organ by itself has never achieved the influence implied by its place in the UN Charter,²⁴ reports submitted from elsewhere in the system make it a central source of documentation and information. Senior officers of other IGOs also appear as authors, and those related to ESOSOC in the UN system make statements. The subject matter covers not only old-style international cooperation, but also takes in new subjects such as the environment, an enlarged operation to succour refugees and disaster victims, and a variegated web of economic and social development projects.²⁵

Furthermore, the ESOSOC machinery and the international secretariats that serve it are intimately involved in the organisation of large-scale international conferences on special themes, such as population, the status of women and the environment. Such gatherings, in which governments are represented by senior officials, attract heavy NGO interest. The UN Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, for example, registered 1 400 NGO representatives who formally participated in a Global Forum and informally did their best as lobbyists. Only a minority of these NGOs had official consultative status with ESOSOC.

Consequently, over the years ever more officials and members of NGOs have come into contact with UN affairs or see some reason to seek such connections. In addition, the formation of NGO alliances and coalitions among them—the UN has picked up social science jargon and calls them 'networks'—has become a routine response to activities in the UN system.²⁶

A salient phenomenon

Evidence of an NGO presence around the IGOs of the UN system alone hardly demonstrates what the Club of Rome has called 'the barefoot revolution' and the Worldwatch Institute has called 'people power'.²⁷ Instead, both external and internal factors can be cited in what has become a salient phenomenon in international policy making and execution.

End of the Cold War

The first and perhaps most important explanation of NGO expansion is the end of the Cold War. With the breakdown of ideological and social orthodoxy, the reluctance of many, perhaps most, diplomats and UN practitioners to interact with nongovernmental staff evaporated. This has opened new possibilities of communication and cooperation within decision-making processes. With the waning of East–West tensions, the United Nations has become a better forum for the reconciliation of views among governments on the old geopolitical compass of North–South–East–West. The UN also has become an obvious forum for discussions between governments and NGOs. 'Before it was not possible to have any contact with nongovernmental organizations in the Soviet Union, for example, because this would be seen as neo-imperialist intervention', said UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. 'On the other side, it was called communist intervention'.²⁸

The explanation goes beyond procedures. Issues recognised in the revealing light of the post-Cold War world as extending beyond and below state borders also needed and demanded the strengths of NGOs. As part of a major reappraisal of the role of the state and of alternative ways to solve problems, NGOs are emerging as a special set of organisations that are private in their form but public in their purpose.²⁹ The environment, grassroots development, more equitable trade relations, human rights and women's issues had been on NGO agendas throughout the last two or three decades. But now they have assumed new vitality. Additional pressures for NGO involvement grew around such new issues as investment needs of the erstwhile socialist bloc and ethnonationalism, with its accompanying flood of refugees and internally displaced persons. These issues simply could not be addressed solely through intergovernmental operations and recommendations characteristic of the United Nations.³⁰

Moreover, when high politics and security, particularly over nuclear issues, dominated the international agenda, NGOs were at a comparative disadvantage. They obviously had no weapons and only limited access to people wielding decision-making power. As low politics rose on the international agenda, NGOs that had promoted relevant policies and actions energetically exploited or expanded direct access to policymakers. For example, NGOs not only have a capacity for direct action but they may also bring advanced knowledge to bear on such issues as gender, the environment, AIDS, relief assistance, human rights and community development.

Technological developments

Technological developments represent a second explanation for the increasing salience of NGOs in UN activity. '[New] technologies increasingly render information barriers either ineffective or economically infeasible'.³¹ Governments that are hostile to NGOs fail in their sometimes zealous efforts to prevent information flows, interaction and networking through the Internet and fax communications. Electronic means have literally made it possible to ignore borders and to create the kinds of communities based on common values and objectives that were once almost the exclusive prerogative of nationalism.³²

Modern communications technology is independent of territory. 'By providing institutional homes in the same way that states have accommodated nationalism', one observer suggests, 'NGOs are the inevitable beneficiaries of the emergence of the new global communities'.³³ Consequently, global social change organisations (GSCOs), another study claims, 'may represent a unique social invention of the postmodern, postindustrial, ie information-rich and service-focused, globally-linked world system'.³⁴

Growing resources

A third explanatory factor can be found in the growing resources and professionalism of NGOs. Both indigenous and transnational NGOs have recently attracted additional resources from individual donors, governments and the UN system. In 1994 over 10% of public development aid (\$8 billion) was channelled through NGOs, surpassing the volume of the combined UN system (\$6 billion) without the Washington-based financial institutions. About 25% of US assistance is channelled through NGOs; at the Social Summit in Copenhagen, Vice-President Al Gore committed Washington to increasing this figure to 50% by the turn of the century.³⁵ Western governments have increasingly turned towards NGO projects on the basis of a reputation for cost-effectiveness.

This trend fits well with the progressively declining funds for foreign assistance and generally with domestic pressures in donor countries to cut back on overseas commitments. In fact, two prominent analysts have recently written: 'The increase of donor-funded NGO relief operations and Western disengagement from poor countries are two sides of the same coin'.³⁶

Interorganisational relations in the NGO realm

Networking is perhaps a cliché in the lexicon of transnational organisation, but it aptly points to a key function of many NGOs: the process of creating bonds, sometimes formal but primarily informal, among like-minded individuals and groups across state boundaries. New communications technologies are helping to foster the kinds of interaction and relationships that were once unthinkable except through expensive air travel. Scaling up certain kinds of transnational efforts from neighbourhoods and regions to the global level and scaling down to involve grassroots organisations are no longer logistic impossibilities, but may be treated as institutional imperatives.

Claims about NGOs' eclipsing the role of the state are exaggerated, but significant change is nonetheless taking place regarding their weight in world politics. NGOs may 'create conditions that facilitate the formation of international institutions' and 'reinforce the norms promoted by these institutions through public education as well as through organized attempts to hold states accountable to these, and enhance institutional effectiveness by reducing the implementation costs associated with international institutions'. Moreover, the potential for enhanced networking increases the 'capacity to monitor states' compliance with international agreements, promote institutional adaptation and innovation, and challenge failed institutions'.³⁷

NGOs that have relations with IGOs go far beyond the officially-sanctioned diplomatic networks and the narrowly-defined contacts implied by a legalistic approach. NGOs are based upon interpersonal ties and relationships among people with similar convictions, goals and interests. The result is a web of personal connections that do not fit within a formal, legal framework.

NGOs employ a variety of devices to increase the persuasiveness and efficiency of their work in conjunction with IGOs. Some of these have formal structures, while others rely primarily on interpersonal relationships. Some are constructed for service with only one UN organisation, while others have a more general scope across the UN system. Four types of interorganisational devices that involve NGOs—formal bridging groups, federations, UN coordinating bureaus and connections to governments—can be identified. Aside from these fairly defined structures, many NGOs coordinate their activities with others for a specific issue or within a particular geographical area. These occurrences may be formal but are probably usually informal and may last only briefly. There is a variety of mechanisms for NGOs to relate collectively to the UN system. Probably the best known coordination mechanisms are represented by the World Bank within its own investment or aid projects, or by the United Nations Development Program within a country-wide framework. Many NGOs coordinate their own activities for a specific issue or within a particular geographical area through formal coalitions and these, too, should be considered in understanding NGOs and the United Nations.

Some NGOs have a long institutional history or are part of federations of the organisations that they represent. Others get together only for particular issues for short periods. In either form, NGO coalitions seek to represent the views of their constituent members and to pursue shared goals. Examples would be the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) in Geneva, originally for European NGOs but now composed primarily of Third World ones; Inter-Action in Washington, DC for US-based NGOs; or a gathering of the various Oxfams or country chapters of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). Within a recipient country where UN organisations operate, there sometimes exist umbrella groups for indigenous NGOs—for example, Coordinación in Guatemala facilitates contacts between external donors and local groups working with uprooted populations. Within a region there can also exist a similar pooling of efforts—for example, Concertación links development NGOs in five Central American countries.

Formal coalitions of NGOs

A main function of formal coalitions of NGOs is to develop as far as possible or to harmonise common positions for issues. Some examples are the lobbying efforts within the United States for the extension of Public Law 480, the source of foodstuffs for relief and development; or the search for a common stance by women's groups for international conferences on human rights in Vienna and on population in Cairo. Concrete examples include an invitation to ICVA to address the Executive Committee of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and a request to EarthAction (one of the largest global NGO networks with over 700 member associations in about 125 countries) to put forward views to the Commission on Global Governance.

These formal coalitions may attempt headquarters-level coordination of activities within a certain region or in relationship to a specific crisis, as for example, Somalia and Rwanda. Member NGOs of formal groups are not, however, bound by organisational decisions, and dissenters are free to follow their own counsel or take individual positions on policies of IGOS.

'Bridging organisations', created for service in developing countries, seek on one hand to create both horizontal links across economic and social sectors and vertical links between grassroots organisations and governments. On the other hand, they try to form similar links to external donors, whether governmental, intergovernmental or nongovernmental.

Constituent NGOs working in different sectors can interact in these bridging organisations that furnish what otherwise would be absent—a forum for discussion and cooperation. As a consequence, grassroots groups get a voice and attempt to influence policy-making. Bridging organisations function as a conduit for ideas and innovations, a source of information, a broker of resources, a negotiator of deals, a conceptualiser of strategies and a mediator of conflicts. Such organisation, it is argued, helps lead to sustainable development.³⁸ Examples of such bridging organisations include the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC Asia), the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), Savings Development Movement (SDM, Zimbabwe), and the Urban Popular Movement and the Coalition of Earthquake Victims (MUP and CUD, Mexico City).

Relief operations, and to a lesser extent development efforts, have drawn together in-country consortia of local and international NGOs with the support of donors. These groupings are often shaped to accommodate a division of labour for a geographical region or for a function like transport.³⁹ The Khartoum-based Emergency Relief Desk, for example, was backed by a number of European religious NGOs and then reorganised and adapted to help crossborder operations into Eritrea and Tigray.⁴⁰ In the southern Sudan, the combined Agency Relief Team was established in the mid-1980s as a relief transport consortium.⁴¹

Transnational federations of NGOs

Save the Children, Oxfam, Amnesty International, MSF, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and CARE are examples of

large NGOs with a global scope and autonomous chapters in individual countries. Organisational members of a federation share an overall image and ideology. For example, Oxfam's ideology sets out a grassroots development orientation that all its national affiliates employ. But the national groups are responsible for their own fundraising and projects. Although members of such federations meet periodically at both the management and working levels to discuss common problems, each national member maintains autonomy.

Federations of NGOs try to, and frequently do, present a united front on the policies that they advocate in IGOs and in their field operations. Yet this is not always possible because of differences in view and leadership styles, and the needs in respective country branch offices and headquarters. Federations differ in how much control they can exert over their branches and how much branch activity can be coordinated with worldwide partners as well as how they finance administrative costs for common activities.

For example, Save the Children US has limited coordination with its European partners, and there is little consensus about how to address this rift. Save the Children UK does not necessarily wish to increase coordination, but the US headquarters seeks to increase interaction to improve cost-effectiveness. Also, some Save the Children branches and projects have different emphases and agendas. For example, Save the Children Sweden acts as a sort of amnesty international for children, focusing on child abuse and child advocacy to a greater extent than other chapters do.

Large federations with headquarters and many branches face the tension of accountability versus autonomy and independent action by their many satellites. Friction rises when branch offices stray from a supposedly common vision of a federation or engage in controversial or unprofessional activities. These could have negative repercussions for other chapters. At the same time, imposing constraints on branch offices may be impossible and may risk sacrificing independent and innovative thinking and acting.

UN coordination of NGOs

In contrast to the conventional Roman wisdom of divide and conquer, UN officials concerned about the proliferation of nongovernmental entities have responded with the attitude: 'If you can't beat 'em, organize 'em'. The efforts by the World Bank, UNHCR and the UNDP to structure project relationships are probably the best known.⁴² UN organisations vary not only in how they coordinate their activities with NGOs but also in the extent to which they work with NGOs in the first place. When no formal structures for coordination exist, cooperation often proceeds on a case-by-case basis. Even with the existence of formal mechanisms, coordination is often *ad hoc*, based on individual relationships. Especially in crises, coordination may occur spontaneously. Nevertheless, NGOs are notorious for their independence; coordinating NGOs is 'like herding cats', according to one UN official.

Cooperation is not cost-free for NGOs. From a logical management perspective, for example, the current systems for development cooperation or humanitarian action have too many moving parts.⁴³ Greater collaboration among the various

agencies would appear at first glance to be helpful in limiting random activity, overlap and duplication. Yet, assuming it could be arranged, even improved coordination may involve significant opportunity costs for NGOs in terms of use of personnel, resources or even diminished credibility because of their association with the United Nations. There is no guarantee of greater effectiveness or savings. As James Ingram, the former executive director of the World Food Programme (WFP), has written: 'The appearance of improved coordination at the center is not necessarily a factor in more effective and timely interventions in the field'.⁴⁴ Hence, formal UN-led efforts at coordination, comprehensive or not, are not viewed by NGO leaders as always desirable.

Such coordinating bodies in fact have a mixed record for viability and effectiveness. They have often struggled to find funding, a task that is more than a mere forum for endless NGO meetings.⁴⁵ If the main concern is effectiveness, then both formal and informal coordinating should be able to increase contact and collaboration among NGOs (exchange ideas and information); provide genuine services to members; improve liaison with governments and the UN system; and increase resources available for NGOs.

An intriguing question arises as to why certain operational IGOs—observers point to UNICEF and UNHCR—cooperate easily with NGOs while others experience considerably more difficulty. The structures, charters and goals of these UN organisations play a part, but more intangible elements such as organisational culture are among the plausible explanations.

A significant number of staff in both UNICEF and UNHCR have themselves worked in NGOs and appreciate their strengths and weaknesses. The rough-and-ready, roll-up-the-sleeves approach to disasters also makes cooperation seem more necessary and sensible than in other contexts, where the lack of an emergency permits more time and leisure for turf battles.

On a more political level, one possible explanation for easy cooperation is complementary tasks. For example, in election monitoring within UN-orchestrated operations in El Salvador and Cambodia, NGOs could more easily make public pronouncements about irregularities than could the civilian or military staff of the UN Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) and the UN Transition Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). In such circumstances, rather than rivalry, a sensible division of labour appeared between NGOs and IGOs. For some of the same reasons, discernible complementarity has developed between Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch and the United Nations. Because NGOs can push harder and more openly for more drastic changes, which can then be codified over time by the UN, a 'symbiotic' relationship has developed in the context of establishing new human rights standards and implementing existing ones.⁴⁶

Some participants view the coordination effort launched in the early 1990s by UNHCR and ICVA as promising. It is titled PAR in AC (Partners in Action) and is intended to 'enhance dialogue and understanding between UNHCR; to facilitate closer collaboration and increase the combined capacity to respond to the global refugee problem and ... the problem of internal displacement'. PAR in AC aims to 'enhance and improve future NGO/UNHCR collaboration', and is motivated by UNHCR's belief that NGOs have a 'community-based approach [that] is an asset in

bridging the gap between relief and development'.⁴⁷ Behind the official language lies the intense field experience of Bosnia and elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia and northern Iraq as well as the belief among some leading participants that earlier contact mechanisms delivered less than was hoped.

NGOs and governments

The relationships between governments and NGOs take several forms. Some of these are adversarial, as certain NGOs criticise and hope to change governmental policies. Other relationships are cooperative and businesslike. Host governments regulate activities by NGOs through domestic legislation and activities of international NGOs by administrative procedures (for example, visas and foreign exchange procedures). Donor governments hire NGOs to implement projects and sign contracts subject to national legislation. NGOs may lobby governments for altruistic reasons, such as new international agreements and policies, and for more self-serving reasons, such as increased budgetary allocations for their own work. In the process, they must abide by national regulations governing such activity. In some extraordinary situations, NGOs have provided services to citizens that are normally expected from governments. For example, the primary education system in the north of Sri Lanka was coordinated largely by NGOs after the government system collapsed following the onset of civil war in 1987; and the Bangladesh Rural Action Committee (BRAC) is responsible for 35 000 schools.

In general, throughout much of the Third and former Second World, the decline of oppressive regimes and the rise of democracy mainly since the end of the Cold War has tempered the former automatic hostility by governments toward the activities of local and international NGOs. Previously, NGO–government relationships were often ones of benign neglect at best, or of suspicion and outright hostility at worst.

A significant experiment

One noteworthy international experiment in combining intergovernmental and nongovernmental action in a coordinated policy and resource mobilisation for refugees and internally displaced populations took place in the early 1990s when the International Conference on Refugees in Central America (CIREFCA) brought together UN organisations and the NGO community.⁴⁸ With UNHCR in the lead, such organisations as UNDP and WFP were brought into greater contact with external and local NGOs.

Actual and potential beneficiaries were involved from the outset in project design, implementation, and monitoring. The process induced governmental, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organisations to forge new relationships with one another as well as with dissident and insurgent groups outside internationally recognised governments. This wider orchestration also took into consideration the activities of the various UN peacekeeping and peacemaking operations.

Finances, size and independence

The relationship between governments and NGOs includes many complexities and rapid changes that sometimes run parallel to the pluralism permitted by governments. Most governments that decide to do so have little difficulty in crippling NGO activities or favouring those that increase governmental capacity either to do harm or to provide popular benefits. Foreign-based NGOs may be particularly vulnerable to host government pressure since they need permission to bring in personnel and goods, such as automobiles and communications equipment. Relief NGOs that must import large quantities of supplies, as was repeatedly demonstrated in the Horn of Africa during the two decades beginning in the 1970s, can encounter direct limitations emanating from political authorities, either in the host government or in insurgent territory.

At the same time, some NGOs operating outside of their base countries have reached formidable proportions. Agencies such as CARE or Oxfam have enough prestige not to be easily or silently dismissed with the wave of an authoritative hand. Some have programmes that, once begun, burrow deep into the social fabric. To liquidate such activities can cost a government popularity and even stimulate resistance. Moreover, development NGOs may have close working relationships and direct support from IGOS, thereby raising the potential that a local incident of interference can become a matter of unpleasant discussion in an international forum. In addition, other NGOs have impressive bases of popular support. Repressive governments, for instance, intensely dislike the activities of human rights monitoring groups and try to inhibit them. Yet such interference is also restrained by the sure knowledge that these groups have developed the ability to persuade powerful governments in Western countries. Thus, a government or an insurgent group that acts in an unrestrained manner against human rights monitors may soon be faced with formal protests and action through bilateral or intergovernmental channels.

The vigour of NGO activities may ultimately be determined by the levels and sources of their finances. Some of the largest NGOs, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and CARE, rely on contributions from governments of rich countries for most of their operating funds. As much as 90% of financing emanates from governments. The World Bank has entered into numerous partnerships with DONGOS that execute projects financed by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). In 1993, for example, 30% of Bank projects had provisions for NGO participation.⁴⁹ The UNDP has changed policy over the last decade so that local NGOs are receiving allocations in the Indicative Planning Figures (IPFs) that used to be exclusively reserved for governments. The depth of such relationships, however, may vary from formal to close collaboration in phases from planning to execution.

Many organisations of the UN system routinely rely upon both international and indigenous NGOs for the delivery of relief and development assistance. For instance, in northern Iraq since the April 1991 Kurdish crisis, NGOs (including the Red Cross) have been responsible for 40% of refugees, whereas the UN system has been responsible for about 30%.⁵⁰

Putting an exact dollar value on these resources is not easy. It would be hard

to prove the contention that '[i]n net terms, NGOs now collectively transfer more resources to the South than the World Bank'.⁵¹ Over time, however, shifts of a significant magnitude have taken place. During the last two decades, private grants from the 21 Western countries of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) to DAC-country NGOs for use in developing countries have grown dramatically. NGO activities represent well over 10% (perhaps even 13%) of official development assistance (ODA) in comparison with only 0.2% in 1970.⁵² Particularly over the last decade, when ODA has stagnated, NGOs have positioned themselves for a greater proportional share of total resources. Moreover, the visibility and credibility of such efforts have increased dramatically.

From another direction, private foundations have increasingly stimulated the growth of NGOs and added to the knowledge base for their work.⁵³ Favourable tax laws and a tradition of voluntarism have made this influence particularly important in the USA, where the family names of Ford, Rockefeller, MacArthur and Pew are familiar philanthropic entities. In fact, 5500 independent foundations, not including those from corporations, have assets in excess of \$2 million or give grants of at least \$200 000 per year.⁵⁴ Such institutions as the Volkswagen Foundation attest to the significance of this type of source in other parts of the Western world as well. Although the exact numbers are difficult to gauge, many directly finance operational activities, institution-building and research by NGOs at home and in connection with partners in other countries.

All NGOs and foundation donors operate under some governmental, donor-imposed or doctrinal restrictions. Especially in the USA, foundations owe their prosperity to provisions of tax laws that could be changed. They are also forbidden to act in electoral and other political spheres, and may not lobby in the way that special interest groups do. As for NGOs receiving outside governmental or IGO financing, these set out in programme proposals their plans for using funds. Proposals for programmes that ran counter to donor policies would hardly be likely to succeed.

Conversely, NGOs dispose of some persuasiveness in relations with donors, whether official or private. No donor would wish to invest in a programme that was foredoomed to failure. NGOs can thus signal their estimate of the practicality of policies. Moreover, once embarked on the execution of an agreed project, the NGO is in a good position to suggest policy and methodological changes, if only because the donors prefer their funds to be used in ways that can be defended against criticism.

Theories of international cooperation

Despite the rapidly rising curve of NGO numbers and activity in the context of the UN system, a firm consensus about their nature and function remains elusive. Consequently, some generalising about NGOs that operate in the international environment is necessary for a better understanding of NGO roles, but it is larded with uncertainty. The rest of this essay takes up some of the theoretical approaches that pertain to NGOs and sets out a set of dimensions that may be useful in drawing conclusions.

In general, theoretical approaches to explain international cooperation provide

little specific insight into the nature and function of NGOs. Most are based on the state as the only noteworthy entity in international cooperation, and provide no category for considering the possibility that NGOs are significant actors in their own right.

States as actors

The dominant approaches employed by governmental representatives, international officials and academic scholars to transnational cooperation emphasise states as the basic units of analysis.⁵⁵ Officials usually leave this assumption in implicit form, although international civil servants constantly underline the role of member states in their organisations. Academic scholars of this persuasion quite explicitly use the state as the basic counter, although biodiversity is increasingly obvious for a category that cannot be captured by narrow nations.⁵⁶

Since the state stands by definition, not to speak of ideology, as an autonomous organisation in a universe where only consensual limits to action are accepted as binding, an explanation is needed as to why they sometimes cooperate. Two main possibilities, both based on promotion of national interest, emerge.

The first is that cooperation among states is actually induced by the use of persuasion or coercion by one state over another.⁵⁷ This line of argument accords with analyses that set out mainly military power as the final arbiter of international relations. No state finds it in its interest to be expunged or defeated militarily, and therefore it eventually bows to superior force, whether it is latent or applied. Thus, a hierarchy based on military calculation in fact reigns among nominally equal states. This approach, incidentally, accords with much of the rhetoric of diplomats and foreign policy specialists.

The second explanation relies implicitly or explicitly on a market rather than a military calculation.⁵⁸ States cooperate in the search for material advantages. Thus, they reckon whether there is more to gain from cooperation than from withdrawal or conflict. If they do not cooperate, in all but a few instances coercion to do so is absent.

This line of reasoning is the basis for the extensive academic theorising about international regimes.⁵⁹ These institutions for international governance, based on the voluntary acceptance of rules of state conduct in regard to specific issues, do not require explicit international organisations or even formal international accords, but they continue over extended periods of time as the actual guides to state policy. Thus, international regimes do not necessarily always have much relationship to the organisations of the UN system, even though their concerns may overlap.

Paralleling these approaches is the conventional legal approach to NGOs.⁶⁰ This depends on the exercise of authority by states, on the consent of states as the basis of application of rules, and on the notion of some type of self-interest as the underlying reason for acceding to cooperative arrangements. International organisations are treated ultimately as creatures of national self-interest, however and by whomever that is defined. NGOs fit into this scheme of thinking as entities

whose activities have to be regulated to conform to the broader undertakings of states.

Even if it is accepted that the state is the primary unit of international relations, the political and legal explanations based on self-interest leave little room for autonomous NGO activity. If such theoretical approaches are made more sophisticated by incorporating considerations of domestic political processes as the determinant of national interest, a focus on transnational NGO activity in shaping decisions is usually left distant or obscured. Moreover, the national self-interest approaches imply a crisp consensus within governments as to the degree of international cooperation and its desired outcome. Whether this can be demonstrated empirically is subject to doubt. Finally, the implicit emphasis of rational decision making on the basis of national interest draws attention away from the social bases of the state. The state is an abstraction. Governments, not states, actually make decisions to cooperate or not. Governments consist of people, a point that NGOs obviously do not neglect.

Social approach

A different and less widely accepted approach to international cooperation emphasises the social bases of politics.⁶¹ It begins with the proposition that governments are social organs made up of people who have complex relationships with other parts of their own and other societies. It is presumed that these relationships may have a bearing on the decisions taken by governments as the vital representation of states to involve themselves in international cooperation.

Among such approaches, organisation theory has general application but has been infrequently used as the basis for research on international cooperation.⁶² This theory abandons the traditional view of organisations as formal and self-contained units. It is concerned with relations between formally autonomous organisations with diffuse accountability and division of responsibility, whether in the national or international arenas. Such relations typically involve inter-organisational bargaining where informal organisation is of the essence.

Organisation theory posits that organisations are made up of people who work together to produce a particular product by means of a relevant technique. From this base, propositions can be developed to analyse at least subgovernmental units, if not governments as a whole, as well as international agencies and NGOs. It asks what people are involved, what joint work they perform, what methods they use, and what emerges from their work. Such analyses can also trace changes taking place in organisations and their products.

Organisations, moreover, can be bound together to form new organisations, or what could be termed meta-organisations. International organisations such as the UN system, for instance, can be viewed as such meta-organisations, as can federations of NGOs. This notion necessarily involves interorganisational relationships that have great importance at the international level and in particular in connection with NGOs. But these relationships are carried on by people, rather than by abstractions, just as is the case within organisations made up only of individuals.

A commonplace of organisational analysis holds that informal links among

organisational participants congeal alongside formal structures. This is a phenomenon that every diplomat and political leader acknowledges by seeking personal contacts with people who have ability to persuade within their own circles. Informal links often prove to be essential to organisational work, adaptation to changing conditions and continued existence. In transnational organisational relationships, which include those formed by NGOs, it is natural that a web of informal links develops to confront issues defined in the formal structures.

This points in the direction of network analysis, which focuses on the links between interdependent actors. Formal organisations—private and public, national and international—form the foundation of transnational networks. However, participants in networks are not organisations in their entirety but certain individuals in the constituent organisations. The interface between organisations consists primarily of boundary-role occupants. As ‘activist brokers’ between their organisation and its environment, boundary-role occupants must represent the organisation to its environment, and also represent the environment to their constituents.⁶³

Students of networks have pointed to the centrality of so-called linking-pin organisations, which occupy central positions in terms of being reachable from and being able to reach most other organisations in the network. Serving as brokers and communication channels between organisations in the networks, linking-pin organisations are the ‘nodes through which a network is loosely joined’.⁶⁴ One research question is to what extent NGOs have been able to assume linking-pin positions in transnational networks.

The sophisticated conceptual device of the social network has found little use in research on international cooperation. What exactly are the durable sets of relationships among individuals who are in a position to exchange information, resources and prestige? Individuals in this position in interorganisational relationships can usually be described as occupying boundary roles. In that role, they can easily be engaged in the activities characterised as a social network, which affect their own organisations as well. Thus, a transnational social network would depend on persons from different countries and organisations who engage in their relationships over a considerable period. The network, then, is defined by what it does, not by an organisational form, defined structure or material appurtenances.

In brief, networks represent flat or horizontal organisational forms in contrast to vertical ones based on hierarchical authority. Networks, in other words, rest on the coexistence of autonomy and interdependence. Whereas hierarchy is the natural organising principle of states, and markets are the natural organising principle of business organisations, networks are readily associated with NGOs.⁶⁵ By positioning themselves centrally in informal networks, NGOs can exert an influence above and beyond their weak formal status. In the international arena, these possibilities are enhanced because effective cooperation among states operating in an anarchic environment often implies precisely the kind of informality and network-building that work well for NGOs. Although network analysis requires the assembly of detailed data and sometimes lengthy observa-

tion, it would seem a most promising technique for analysing the function of transnational NGOs.

Another socially-oriented analytical concept that has been applied to international cooperation is that of the epistemic community.⁶⁶ This notion seeks to explain changes in the programs and doctrines of international organisations through the operation of transnational sets of experts. Their common vision on the proper outlook on a set of issues—protection of the environment has featured most prominently—underlies their efforts to capture existing organisations and redirect their work. Their persuasiveness derives from consensual knowledge growing from advanced technological competence. It eventually convinces other leaders and organisational managers. This concept, too, would appear to be relevant to a better understanding of NGOs, although its emphasis on technological expertness may limit its appropriateness to a narrow range of issues.

An even less formally organized type of participant in international policy and administrative processes is composed of prominent persons who, by dint of expertise, experience, office or other distinguishing characteristic, earn deference. They may be asked to serve on honorific official commissions and as highly expert technical consultants on defined issues. Many have high visibility and credibility from their previous tenure in senior positions in governments and parliaments, or from their reputations as insightful intellectuals. Some work on their own accounts, others for governments, corporations, universities and specialist firms. Some of the assignments are ongoing, some are for a fixed period. Their tasks are sometimes performed for immediate consumption by UN organisations but also with an eye on other consumers in a broader public. Examples are the members of the UN Advisory Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy (appointed by Dag Hammarskjöld) or Max van der Stoep, former foreign minister of the Netherlands, who was appointed by the Commission on Human Rights as Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iraq. Such 'influentials', with or without official appointments, are often consulted informally by opinion leaders and national and international officials.

An increasingly common practice has been to ask such prominent individuals to serve as members of high-visibility *ad hoc* commissions—those headed by Willy Brandt, Olaf Palme, Gro Harlem-Brundtland, Sadruddin Aga Khan, Julius Nyerere and, most recently, by Ingmar Carlsson and Sonny Ramphal are perhaps the best known.⁶⁷ They constitute visible groups that come together for short-term specialised advisory assignments. Their work has much in common with the efforts of educational NGOs. Other groups of less prominent professionals—not just Médecins Sans Frontières but also, for instance, architects and physicists without borders—attempt to make their collective views known in international policy circles and among broader publics. Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) is one such pooling of politicians who have a primary interest in global problem-solving and in the United Nations.

Broad roles for NGOs

These theoretical approaches to international cooperation could aid in analysing NGO activity and in reaching conclusions, but none of them appears fully apt for

an investigation that emphasises concrete activities and observation born of participation. Rather, it might be better to base such an examination on a close scrutiny of goals, relationships among various organisations and operating methods. This may eventually lead to more general conclusions about the weight and scope of NGO participation in international cooperation. An initial sorting, suggested to the authors of the case studies that follow in this issue, sets out two general roles that reflect both goals and operating methods. Few if any NGOs are likely at all times to set out goals and use methods that are confined exclusively to these discrete categories, but this broad typology can help point out their main thrust.

Operational roles

At least part of the activities of most NGOs falls into the category of operations. Operational NGOs are the most numerous and have the easiest fundraising task. They are more and more central to international responses in the post-cold war world. Most NGOs provide some services, if only to their members, while others concentrate on providing them to other organisations and individuals. The delivery of services is the mainstay of most NGO budgets and the basis for enthusiastic support from a wide range of donors. Such services include intangible technical advice as well as more tangible resources for relief, development and other purposes. Many NGOs operate development programmes; they have become increasingly active in migration and disaster relief, which may now be their most important operational or advisory activities in total financial terms.

Bilateral and multilateral government organisations are relying upon NGOs more and more as project subcontractors. Some of these contractors, known as DONGOS, could be dedicated organisations and even disappear after the conclusion of a project. Others have long histories as contractors. NGOs recover their staff costs and overheads in addition to the direct costs of the products that they deliver but, unlike private contractors, they do not make a profit to redistribute since there are no shareholders. Some NGO managers are delighted with this trend since it expands the scope of their activities with increased resources. Others, however, are troubled about being exploited by governments or intergovernmental organisations rather than remaining institutions with their own unique purposes and independent wherewithal.

Such contractual relationships on the one hand offer opportunities to NGOs to persuade donors to adopt their approaches; but on the other hand they include powerful incentives in the form of financial support to accede to the views of donor organisations. The key to operational integrity is being a partner and not simply a contractor. The former term connotes authentic collaboration and mutual respect, and it accepts the autonomy and pluralism of NGOs. Such relationships are rare, more an aspiration than a reality.⁶⁸ It is difficult to imagine NGOs enjoying authentic collaboration and genuine partnership with large and powerful agencies. However, in certain circumstances and as mentioned earlier, there seems to be a greater possibility with more sympathetic funders like UNICEF and UNHCR.⁶⁹

Educational and advocacy roles

The targets of operational NGOs are beneficiaries (or victims in emergencies), whereas those for educational and advocacy NGOs are their own contributors, the public and decision makers. Educational NGOs seek primarily to influence citizens, whose voices are then registered through public opinion and bear fruit in the form of additional resources for their activities as well as new policies, better decisions and enhanced international regimes. They often play a leading role in promoting the various dedication of 'days', 'years', and 'decades' that the UN system regularly proclaims. NGOs can help to reinforce various norms promoted by intergovernmental organisations through public education campaigns. This heightened awareness among public audiences can then help hold states accountable for their international commitments.⁷⁰

Western operational NGOs are under growing pressure from their Third World partners to educate contributors and Western publics about the root causes of poverty and violence. This logic is driving some organisations to adapt to such harsh criticism as the following: 'Conventional NGO project activities are manifestly "finger-in-the-dike" responses to problems that require nothing short of worldwide and whole-hearted governmental commitment to combat'.⁷¹ Hand-in-hand with operational activities is the need to educate populations and mobilise public opinion about the requirements for fundamental alterations in the global order.

Educational NGOs direct activities towards a broad public or towards specifically differentiated publics in order to persuade them to voice opinions on governmental policies in international organisations. The primary tool of the educational and advocacy NGO is collecting and disseminating information, which sometimes incorporates a high degree of expertise and sometimes consists of mainly emotional appeals.

Educational as well as other varieties of NGOs can be distinguished from social movements,⁷² even if the aims and methods are sometimes similar. The former are organisations with visible structures, are generally tolerated as parts of the polity and can make sure that their interests are represented in decision processes. Social movements, in contrast, have loose or skimpy structures to give effect to a rather spontaneous coming together of people who seek to achieve a social goal that may include changing or preserving aspects of society. One or more NGOs may be associated with social movements but do not define or direct them.

Linked to education are the related concerns of NGOs working primarily in the corridors of governments and intergovernmental organisations. Using a distinctive venue for advocacy, these organisations aim at contributing to international agenda-setting, the design of programmes and overall supervision of international organisation activities. They do so by seeking discussions with national delegates and staff members of international secretariats. Under some circumstances they can make formal statements before UN deliberative organs, and they frequently submit documentation for use by government representatives. In the corridors of UN organisations, they offer expertise, research, drafting and even mediation to governmental representatives and organisational staff. In

doing so, the NGO representatives hope to promote acceptance of their positions, which involve adjustment or change of policies.

These advocates pursue discussions with national delegates and staff members of international secretariats in order to influence international public policy. Calling this activity 'lobbying' is perhaps an accurate image but an inaccurate description according to dictionary definitions. In seeking to alter the policies of governments as well as of governmental, intergovernmental and nongovernmental agencies, these NGOs seek to influence all policy makers, not only legislators.

Rather than aiming at beneficiaries or the general public, as is the case for the operational and educational types, advocacy NGOs target key decision makers in parliaments as well as in governments and intergovernmental secretariats. Because they have a direct impact on international responses, advocacy NGOs have the most difficulty raising funds.

NGO advocacy may be generally described as unofficial participation by internal and external modes.⁷³ Internal modes can be observed in capitals and domestic arenas. They include such things as pressure on a government to participate in a treaty-making effort; formation of domestic coalitions and the mobilisation of public opinion to influence the positions a state takes during treaty negotiations; public pressure on a government to sign a treaty; and using the strengths and weaknesses of a country's domestic system to challenge governments, companies and others to comply.

External modes consist of urging the United Nations or one of its associated agencies to add an issue to the agenda; gathering data to help frame or define a problem or a threat in ways that influence the work of official UN-sanctioned conferences; and contributing to the implementation of treaties by assisting countries without expertise to meet their obligations. Through formal statements in UN forums and through informal negotiations with international civil servants and members of national delegations, advocacy NGOs seek to ensure that their positions, and those of their constituencies, find their way into international texts and decisions. They sometimes offer their research and drafting skills, and they provide scientific or polling data to support their positions.⁷⁴ Also, first-hand reports and testimony from field staff can be powerful tools before parliamentary committees.

External functions generally require mobilisation across state boundaries. Independent researchers and scholars, usually as part of transnational networks, contribute theoretical arguments or empirical evidence in favour of a particular response. This information is used by NGOs and helps build coalitions of individuals and groups that otherwise would not join forces.

A great deal of past NGO advocacy has been directed against government and UN policy. An important evolution is that a growing number of NGOs are eager to institutionalise a 'full-fledged partnership with the governmental members of the United Nations'.⁷⁵ Historically NGOs have had some responsibility for treaty implementation, but they may aspire to a more direct involvement in treaty-making. Some NGOs have contributed substantially to international agenda-setting, as at the San Francisco Conference in April 1945, where NGOs played a pivotal role in securing the inclusion of human rights language in the final draft of the UN

Charter. In fact, they have spurred action since the middle of the 19th century at each stage in the evolution of international protection for human rights.⁷⁶

As with the venerable debate over the impact of the media on foreign policy, there is disagreement about NGO influence on governmental responses. However, NGOs that seek government policy change can be crucial for the timing and nature of international responses, even in such controversial arenas as civil wars. NGOs in the USA, for example, failed to get the Clinton Administration to acknowledge genocide and to take action in Rwanda in April and May 1994, but eventually they were more successful in getting the Pentagon to help in Zaire and Tanzania. For three years, many US NGOs encouraged a robust enough military invasion to restore the elected government of the Rev Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti. In France, NGOs have been successful in launching and sustaining an activist humanitarian policy, *le droit d'ingérence*, which became the official policy of the Mitterrand government and its visible Minister Bernard Kouchner, and which survives both of their departures.⁷⁷

NGOs that focus exclusively on education or advocacy in their own countries without overseas activities are not numerous, but they exist. For example, the Refugee Policy Group, Refugees International, and the US Committee for Refugees all focus on research with a view towards informing the public and altering public policy on people displaced by war. However, many of the most effective educators and advocates are those with the credibility, knowledge and convictions resulting from substantial operational activities.

Many NGOs that started their work at a project level mitigating the symptoms of problems have moved into attacking the structural roots of those problems. As such, they draw away from an exclusive concern with projects and move towards preventing the need for the assistance in the first place. Projects alone cannot promote structural change and prevention. The logic of the shift towards educating the public about the necessity for systemic change moves away from a preoccupation with relief, and is summed up by two observers: 'Many of the causes of underdevelopment lie in the political and economic structures of an unequal world ... and in the misguided policies of governments and the multilateral institutions (such as the World Bank and IMF) which they control. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to address these issues in the context of the traditional NGO project.'⁷⁸ In these efforts to target officials within governmental and intergovernmental institutions, NGOs can be loud and theatrical, like Médecins Sans Frontières and Greenpeace, or discreet and more subtle, like the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Advocacy is an essential and growing activity. As such, the debate about possible modifications of consultative status in UN forums is important at least for some NGOs. Consultative status provides additional access to and enhanced authority in the eyes of many governments and UN officials.

Political levels and constraints

A complementary or alternative approach to NGO roles depends on identifying relationships among them and their governmental levels of activity.⁷⁹ Primary associations are those serving members at the community level; these may be

called people's organisations. As their base, scope of operations and methods are circumscribed, they can be excluded from the group of transnational NGOs with direct relevance to the UN system. Secondary organisations include public-serving groups that operate at the community level as well as federations of member-serving primary associations. Tertiary organisations are those that do not operate at the community level and also comprise federations of secondary organisations. Thus, only public-serving organisations and meta-organisations that they form may be considered as NGOs with transnational significance.

Further distinctions can be drawn between organisations that work at the community level and those that do not. National NGOs that work only within the boundaries of one developing country can be distinguished from international NGOs that are based in developed countries. Refining classificatory factors include constituency, primary functions and activities, ideology/philosophy, scale and coverage or organisational structure.

NGO interactions may be constrained or facilitated according to the consensus surrounding the issues that they address. Environmental NGOs, for instance, work within an overall and seemingly expanding agreement about protecting the biosphere. Development NGOs, in contrast, are partly sustained by a consensus about the necessity for growth, even though they often encounter significant discord when they begin to threaten elites. Human rights NGOs, however, pursue agendas in which governments, intergovernmental organisations and NGOs disagree profoundly about goals, ideas, the nature of violations and appropriate forms of redress. Therefore, NGOs working on the front lines where ethnic cleansing takes place, lobbying for human rights changes, or doing education and advocacy work face different constraints from NGOs struggling to save rain forests or to advance development.

Separate microsystems of issues have their own attributes and exigencies that condition the existence of NGOs. Within each microsystem, the potential for collaboration or conflict by NGOs and the UN is distinct.⁸⁰ Moreover, the varied aims and methods of NGOs range from constructive dialogue, that is incrementalism or reform from within, to shouting from the sidelines for revolution, rejection and nihilism.

Dimensions for analysing NGOs

A search for identities within the explorations in the specific case studies in this volume offer data on which further research could be based and would provide tests of the appropriateness of typologies and theoretical approaches. Accordingly, four sets of dimensions—organisation, governance, strategies and output—were suggested to the authors of subsequent essays. These dimensions are displayed in Table 1 and discussed in the succeeding paragraphs; they also provide a structure for the concluding essay.

The dimensions are divided into four categories. The first two, organisation and governance, have special relevance to locating the site of activities within governing structures and understanding the structures and aims of NGOs. The second two, strategic and output, have to do with the techniques and products of NGOs.

TABLE 1
NGO dimensions

<i>Organisational dimensions</i>	<i>Governance dimensions</i>	<i>Strategic dimensions</i>	<i>Output dimensions</i>
<i>Geographic range</i>	<i>Governmental contact</i>	<i>Goal definition</i>	Information
Community	Intergovernmental	Single issue	Expert advice
Subnational	International conferences	Multisectoral	Financing
National	Regional	Broad social	Material goods and services
Regional	National	Church related	Support for policies
Transnational	Subnational	Social ideology	Mobilisation of opinion
	Community	Revolutionary/rejectionist	(leaders and followers)
	Informal transnational		Maintenance of
<i>Support base</i>		<i>Tactical modes</i>	interorganisational relations
Personal memberships		Monitoring	Political feedback among
Other organisations	<i>Range of concern</i>	Advocacy/lobbying	governmental units
Quasi-governmental	Norm setting	Mass propaganda	Encouragement of networks
Mixture of above	Policy setting	Mass demonstration	Education of specific publics
	Policy execution		
<i>Personnel</i>	Contractor		
Managerial	Mediation between levels		
Basic research			
Expert and professional (applied)			
Undifferentiated			
(popular, voluntary)			
<i>Financing</i>			
Membership dues			
Contributions			
Endowment income			
Compensation			
<i>Legal relationships</i>			
General rules			
Regulations			
<i>Ad hoc guidelines</i>			

Organisational dimensions

These dimensions are intended to make clear two aspects of NGO existence and operation. The first is where they fit in an organisational framework that extends from the village to the globe, and who supports them. The second aspect concerns their internal arrangements and participation, their resource bases, and their legal status. Membership and financial information make possible comparisons relating to the size of NGOs. Since the legal dimensions of NGOs have had a great deal of attention, they are touched on only briefly in the case studies.

Governance dimensions

These dimensions comprise information about the instruments of governmental policy and programme administration with which NGOs come into contact. The subcategory, 'Range of Concern', helps distinguish among the characters of the arrangements for governance in which NGOs may participate. For example, a substantial difference in governance may be presumed between a situation in which an NGO simply works as a contractor for a regional intergovernmental agency from one that is involved in the discussion of a new global law-making treaty.

Strategic dimensions

These dimensions set out what NGOs hope to achieve within the organisational and governance dimensions. The emphasis here is on relationships directed inwards, ie, how NGOs choose to relate to IGOs and governments on policy issues and design of projects. They include both the normative basis for action and, under tactical modes, the methods employed for reaching the goals. A wide range of data can be expected by searching out the effects of these dimensions. Along their lines, NGOs differentiate themselves from each other and reinforce their support bases. The tactical modes, however, have primary significance in the relation to the UN system.

Output dimensions

These dimensions are framed to make evident the results of NGO activity within the framework of the UN system. They are highly significant in determining whether NGOs can reach their goals. They include a set of products of organisational work that bear on how the UN system reacts and also on how NGOs maintain relationships with one other in reaching their goals. The outputs relate to services delivered to organisational membership as well as to external persons and organisations.

Conclusion

NGOs are omnipresent in the policy and administrative process of UN organisations; the extent of their participation has progressively deepened. The turbulent

pluralism of the NGO realm has clearly brought new and unanticipated groups into the process. Without attributing either a positive or negative value to NGO activity, it can nevertheless be recognised as a factor in global governance. Yet this phenomenon, contrary to the conventional assumptions about the virtually exclusive role of governments in international politics, has not been fully described nor adequately encompassed in theoretical approaches.

Defining categories of NGO tasks, their transnational relationships and the impact of their efforts marks an initial step towards understanding the variety of nongovernmental interactions with the UN system. They form part of a larger set of analytical challenges as the international community gropes and copes with changing world politics and trends towards the decentralisation and democratisation of global governance. These include a vast variety of cooperative structures and practices that have emerged in and around the United Nations and its associated organisations.

There is an obvious hypothesis: NGOs have been essential in this evolution. Because NGOs, both local and international, increasingly affect world politics, theoretical and practical understandings of NGO activities are intrinsically important. Moreover, they are crucial for comprehending the problems and prospects of the UN system more generally. It is to an examination of cases of NGOs in action that this volume now turns.

Notes

The authors acknowledge the assistance of Carrie Murphy and Minh Vo in the preparation of this article.

¹ *Yearbook of International Associations*, Brussels: Union of International Associations, 1993/94. The actual figure is 16 142 but it is increasing constantly. In fact, the figure more than doubled from 1991. The *OECD Directory of NGOs* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1991) estimates some 2500 NGOs in OECD countries in 1990, up from 1600 a decade earlier. They also estimate some 20 000 local NGOs in developing countries, although the UNDP's *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) estimates that the number is considerably higher, at about 50 000.

² Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p 254.

³ John Clark, *Democratizing Development: The Role of Voluntary Organizations*, Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1991, p 3.

⁴ Marc Nerfin, 'Neither prince nor merchant: citizen—an introduction to the third system', *IFDA Dossier*, 56, November/December 1986, pp 3–29. See also David C Korten, *Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and The Global Agenda*, Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1990, pp 95–112.

⁵ Kathleen D McCarthy, Virginia Hodgkinson, Russy Sumariwalla *et al.*, *The Nonprofit Sector in the United States*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1992, p 3.

⁶ Thomas Princen & Matthias Finger, *Environmental NGOs in World Politics*, London: Routledge, 1994.

⁷ James N Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Continuity and Change*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990 and *The United Nations in a Turbulent World*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1992.

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¹¹ Brad Smith, President of the Inter-American Foundation, quoted by Mary Morgan, 'Stretching the development dollar: the potential for scaling-up', *Grassroots Development*, 14 (1), 1990, p 7.

¹² David L Brown & David Korten, *Understanding Voluntary Organizations: Guidelines for Donors*, Working Papers No 258 (Washington, DC: Country Economics Department, World Bank, September 1989), p 22.

¹³ *UNIFEM Annual Report 1993*, New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women, 1993, p 9. See also

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- ¹⁴ Antonio Donini, 'Missions impossibles', *Le monde des débats*, July–August 1994, p 4.
- ¹⁵ For a useful discussion of the literature about NGOs in the context of teaching international relations, international law and international organisation, see Lawrence T Woods, 'Nongovernmental organizations and the United Nations system: reflecting upon the Earth Summit experience', *Research Note*, 18 (1), 1993, pp 9–15.
- ¹⁶ Leland M Goodrich, Edvard Hambro & Anne Patricia Simons, *Charter of the United Nations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1969, pp 443–446.
- ¹⁷ See United Nations, Economic and Social Council Resolutions 3 (II) (1946) and 288 B (X) (1950).
- ¹⁸ Chiang Pei-Heng, *Non-Governmental Organizations at the United Nations: Identity, Role and Function*, New York: Praeger, 1981, pp 19–57. For historical discussions, see also J Joseph Lador-Lederer, *International Non-governmental Organizations and Economic Entities: A Study in Autonomous Organization and Ius Gentium*, Leiden: Sythoff, 1963; Borko Stosic, *Les Organisations non Gouvernementales et les Nations Unies*, Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1964; and Lyman C White, *International Non-Governmental Organizations: Their Purposes, Methods, and Accomplishments*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1951.
- ¹⁹ UN, General Assembly Resolution 13 (1), Annex I (1946); and ECOSOC Resolution 1297 (XLIV).
- ²⁰ UN, Economic and Social Council, Open-Ended Group on the Review of Arrangements for Consultations with Non-Governmental Organizations, 'General review of arrangements for consultations with non-governmental organizations', UN Doc. E/AC.70/1994/5 (26 May 1994), p 18. Hereafter cited by document number. The ILO tri-partite structure was an earlier precedent.
- ²¹ Ibid, pp 17–18.
- ²² Ibid, p 11.
- ²³ Ibid, p 17.
- ²⁴ Johan Kaufmann & Nico Schrijver, *Changing Global Needs: Expanding Roles of the United Nations System*, Hanover, NH: Academic Council on the United Nations System, 1990, pp 40–45.
- ²⁵ See Francesco Mezzalana & Siegfried Schumm, *Working with NGOs: Operational Activities of the United Nations System with Non-governmental Organizations and Governments at the Grassroots and National Levels*, Geneva: Joint Inspection Unit, 1993, document Jiu/REP/93/1.
- ²⁶ UN Doc. E/AC.70/1994/5, p 8.
- ²⁷ Bertrand Schneider, *The Barefoot Revolution*, London: IT Publishers, 1988; and Alan Durning, 'People power and development', *Foreign Policy*, 76, Fall 1989, pp 66–82.
- ²⁸ Barbara Crossette, 'UN Leader to Call for Changes in Peacekeeping', *New York Times*, 3 January 1995, A3.
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- ³¹ Maria Garner, 'Transnational alignment of nongovernmental organizations for global environmental action', *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*, 23 (5), 1991, p 1077.
- ³² See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991.
- ³³ Peter Spiro, 'New global communities: nongovernmental organizations in international decision making institutions', *Washington Quarterly*, 18 (1) 1995, p 48.
- ³⁴ David Cooperrider & William Pasmore, 'The organization dimension of global change', *Human Relations*, 44, (8), 1991, p 764.
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- ³⁶ Rakiya Omaar & Alex de Waal, *Humanitarianism Unbound?* Discussion Paper No 5, London: African Rights, November 1994, p 6.
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- ⁴⁰ Barbara Hendrie, 'Cross border operations in Eritrea and Tigray', *Disasters*, 13 (4), 1990, pp 351–360.
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⁴⁴ James O Ingram, 'The future architecture for international humanitarian assistance', in Thomas G Weiss & Larry Minear (eds), *Humanitarianism Across Borders: Sustaining Civilians in Times of War*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1993, p 181.

⁴⁵ Carolyn Strelau, 'NGO coordinating bodies in Africa, Asia and Latin America', *World Development*, 15, Supplement, 1987, pp 213–225.

⁴⁶ Ramesh Thakur, 'Human rights: Amnesty International and the United Nations', *Journal of Peace Research*, 31 (2), 1994, pp 143–160.

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⁵¹ Mark Duffield, 'NGOs, disaster relief and asset transfer in the Horn: political survival in a permanent emergency', *Development and Change*, 24, 1993, p 140.

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⁵⁴ Margaret M Feczko (ed), *The Foundation Directory*, New York: The Foundation Center, 1984, p vii.

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⁵⁸ See for example, Joseph S Nye, Jr, *Bound To Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, New York: Basic Books, 1990, which makes a case for the validity of 'soft power'. See also Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Stephen D Krasner (ed), *International Regimes*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983; and Robert O Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.

⁶⁰ See Henry G Schermers, *International Institutional Law*, Alphen aan den Rijn, Netherlands: Sijthoff & Noordhoff, 1980, pp 15–18, 164–75. Much legal commentary relates to specific subject matter, eg the UN Conventions on Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees and a host of other legal documents in force or in the developmental stage.

⁶¹ An overview of this approach is found in Leon Gordenker, Christer Jönsson, Roger A Coate & Peter Söderholm, *International Responses to AIDS*, London: Pinter, forthcoming 1995.

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⁶⁶ Ernst B Haas, *When Knowledge Is Power: Three Models of Change in International Organizations*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990; and Peter M Haas, 'Introduction: epistemic communities and international policy coordination', *International Organization*, 46 (1), 1992, pp 1–35, and 'Do regimes matter? Epistemic communities and Mediterranean pollution control', *International Organization*, 43 (3), 1989, pp 377–403.

⁶⁷ Independent Commission on International Development Issues, *North–South: A Programme for Survival*,

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⁶⁸ See International Council of Voluntary Agencies, NGO Working Group on the World Bank, 'Brief history of the NGO Working Group on the World Bank', informal document dated December 1993.

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⁷⁷ See Bernard Kouchner & Mario Bettati, *Le devoir d'ingérence*, Paris: Denoël, 1987; Bernard Kouchner, *Le malheur des autres*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1991; and Mario Bettati, 'Intervention, ingérence ou assistance?', *Revue Trimestrielle des Droits de l'Homme*, 19 July 1994, pp 308–358.

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⁷⁹ The authors are grateful to Marty Chen for suggesting these categories.

⁸⁰ The authors are grateful to Charles McCormack for having helped develop ideas along these lines during the July 1994 summer workshop organised by the Academic Council on the United Nations System.

