

NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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This entry reviews the role and performance of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that seek to serve as key agents in transmitting development to racially and ethnically marginalized populations. It draws on a wide variety of scholarly literature and finds that there are three sets of interrelated global trends that influence NGO responsibility and performance: increasing democratization, globalization and transnationalism, and rising ethnonationalism. The entry describes the three processes and, simultaneously, examines the successes and challenges of NGOs in addressing the interests of the socially excluded. Nongovernmental organizations have undoubtedly played an important role in creating venues for a more just, equitable, and democratic world. However, sustained NGO effectiveness is found to hinge, at least in part, on their ability and willingness to learn from the effects of their programming on the racial and ethnic relations that permeate the daily lives of their intended beneficiaries.

There are three interrelated trends that persist in shaping the world and that have profound implications for those deprived of rights and privileges because of their race, ethnicity, culture, or social status: growing democratization, increasing globalization and transnationalism, and the increase in ethnonationalism. Each of these trends supports the formation and growth of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) but they do not all move in the same direction and may even contradict one another. For instance, while global economic integration has afforded many people a higher standard of living than they had even a generation ago, there are several segments of population who lack the resources necessary to actively shape these processes and harvest any resulting monetary gains. The ascendancy of democratically elected governments, which gathered momentum during the 1990s, coincided with confidence in the ability of NGOs to serve as key “agents of democratization” (Fowler 1993). In fact, the international donor community expected NGOs and other civil society organizations to seize the opportunity to foster greater community involvement, particularly among the more disadvantaged groups that were long bypassed by public policies. This trend was described as the “global associational revolution” (Salamon 1993).

DEFINING AND DESCRIBING NGOs AS PART OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The concept of civil society, in its broadest sense, represents long-standing debates among thinkers about “the conditions of citizenship and the character of good society” (Foley and Hodgkinson, 2003: vii). It points our attention to a wide breed of organizations and associations that, figuratively, inhabit the space between individuals (and families) and the state. They could thus comprise political parties, trade unions, social movements, business associations, self-help groups, faith-based organizations, or

registered NGOs, to name just a few among a host of formal and informal collectives. Nongovernmental organizations provide the organizational infrastructure of civil society and are addressed using a variety of labels. For instance, “nonprofit organization,” “people’s organization,” “community-based organization,” “charity,” and “volunteer organization” are used either indiscriminately to refer to the same entities or more cautiously to differentiate them based on their particular historical, political, economic, and cultural circumstances. Organizations founded in Northern industrial countries may be labeled “Northern NGOs” or “international NGOs”; some others are becoming multinational in that they carry out simultaneous operations in more than one country; and still others, founded and based in developing nations, are labeled “Southern NGOs.”

This entry uses the term NGO (and Northern NGO and Southern NGO) to refer to organizations that share the following five characteristics (Salamon and Anheier 1996): they are *formal* in that they have office bearers, conduct regular meetings, and have some degree of permanence; they are *privately governed*, even if they receive support from government; they are *nonprofit distributing*, which means that any profits earned are plowed back into advancing the organizations’ mission rather than for self-inurement; they are *self-governing* and hence able to manage and control their own affairs; and, finally, they are *voluntary* to some degree, in the sense that they have a board consisting of volunteers, even if they do not use volunteer staffing.

There are multiple roles and responsibilities ascribed to organizations that share these characteristics but there are three overlapping theories that, perhaps, help to explain the existence of NGOs as key agents for minority groups. The most popular among these is the *government failure theory* or the *heterogeneity theory* (Weisbrod 1975), which describes NGOs as “mediating structures” that emerge in response to the inability and/or unwillingness of governments to satisfy the varied demands of their citizens. Therefore, the theory predicts that the greater the diversity among voters, the higher is the likelihood that NGOs will be needed to satisfy the needs of political minorities. The educational needs of Hispanics in the United States, the legal land rights of indigenous communities in Mexico, and the resettlement rights of tribal groups displaced by large dams in India are, for instance, addressed by NGOs such as the Spanish Education Development Center in Washington, DC, the Centro de Derechos Indígenas (Indigenous Rights Center) in Chiapas, Mexico, and the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement) in India, respectively.

A second well-known theory is the *market failure theory* or *trust theory* (Hansmann 1987), which explains that NGOs exist because a consumer is more likely to trust a good or service provided by an NGO because the NGO does not share the profiteering motives of a business enterprise. A donor of Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) trusts that his/her donation will help provide medical care to all those in the throes of a bitter ethnic conflict, irrespective of their individual political or ethnic affiliation. Its status as an NGO provides its donors with the “proxy-insurance” that signals protection from profiteering.

A third explanation is the *entrepreneurship theory* (Young 1983), which highlights that NGOs are created not just as a response to the diverse, heterogeneous demands of citizens or their distrust in other institutions but also as products of the entrepreneurial spirit of one or more individuals. These individuals seek to create values that may not be easily monetized. The exploitation suffered by impoverished borrowers

in the hands of usurious moneylenders provided Muhammad Yunus with the impetus to create the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. As a leading microloan organization, Grameen Bank seeks to satisfy the economic needs of the poor by harnessing the trust built between groups of women. As a member of one such group, a rural woman in Bangladesh can qualify for credit from the Grameen Bank to purchase a cow whose milk she can sell for a profit. Similarly, a woman prohibited by religious and village law from traveling outside her village can become a member of a group and assemble with others outside her caste, clan, and neighborhood. The bank thus draws on the entrepreneurial spirit of its founder (and a large network of female members) to justify its existence and behavior.

The shortcomings of governments and markets alongside the entrepreneurial spirit of one or more individuals explain the rise of those NGOs that work with and/or are constituted by members of racial and ethnic minorities. As implementers, advocates, and partners, this breed of NGOs seeks to shape the content and direction of an all-embracing society with varying degrees of success, an aspect that will next be addressed in the context of a series of powerful global trends.

GLOBAL TRENDS AND THE ROLE OF NGOs

Democratization

Democracy rests on the principles of majority rule, coupled with individual and minority needs and preferences. Political participation is the mechanism by which those needs and preferences are conveyed to political decision makers and by which pressure is exerted on them to respond. Thus, equality in political participation—embodied in the most obvious principle of equal consideration of citizen preferences, one-person, one-vote—would seem to be a necessary condition for democracy. Of course, in no democracy are all citizens equally politically involved. As some social scientists observe, the barriers to realizing the ideals of democracy do not lie in the lack of citizen abilities but more so in the concentration of power in the hands of a few, in an indifferent bureaucratic state (government failure), or in the inability of the state to correct market failures.

Bringing people from different social backgrounds together on a constant and voluntary basis and thereby mitigating racial and ethnic divisions is a challenging, though crucial, task for NGOs. Since the 1970s, numerous nations have transitioned to democracy. Many more are at various stages of the transition. From thirty-nine countries in 1974, the number of democracies (countries with free, fair, and transparent elections) had more than tripled to 125 in 2014. Increasing democratization makes it possible for Southern NGOs to register locally and to organize without fear of reprisal, and allows Northern NGOs to enter countries where they previously could not work.

People have come together in small and large numbers, voluntarily, through nonelectoral means and have tackled a broad range of issues. Grassroots civic activism can be witnessed in NGOs such as the Highlander Research and Education Center in the United States and the Mazdoor Kisan Shakhti Sanghatan (MKSS; Association for the Empowerment of Workers and Peasants) in India.

However, citizen involvement does not always happen, even when political opportunities and space are created for this purpose. Fostering participation requires

careful planning and implementation, not merely in program delivery but also in how the NGO is organized. Not all grassroots civic activism, for instance, is inherently democratizing. This is a reality that is often overlooked in the rush to associate activism with civic engagement as the mainstays of democracy. Petras (1999, 434) refers to an NGO as a “self-appointed elite” that takes social programs and public debate out of the hands of locals and their legitimately elected leaders and creates dependence on non-elected, overseas officials and its “anointed local officials.” Therefore, the same hierarchical frames can permeate NGOs that struggle to be internally representative and even undermine rather than enable democratic potential in the communities they purport to serve.

Relationships between Northern and Southern NGO partners are the subject of many scholarly and empirical discussions. There is a tendency for Northern NGOs to dictate the agenda and strategy of their Southern NGO grantees, a relationship that is often described as unequal and heavy-handed. International donors and NGOs have, for instance, played a large and important role in many formerly communist states, helping local activists to design and build institutions associated with democracy. But scholars assert that “they have done little as yet to affect how these institutions actually function” (Henderson 2002: 144). Local actors are found to serve the interests of foreign donors more than those of the local population. In Bosnia and Herzogovenia, for instance, Northern NGOs that received funding from the United States Agency for International Development invested their resources in political party building, a strategy that only served to fuel more conflict. If violence along ethnic divisions is caused by internal conflict, Northern NGOs and donors who seek to reduce conflicts or rebuild civil society must take the interests of domestic actors into account.

Similar tensions exist in the new democracies of Latin America, where race and ethnicity coincide. Hooker (2005: 288) observes that “Indians and blacks in Latin America suffer disproportionately from poverty, lack of access to basic social services (such as education and health), unemployment and labor market discrimination,” and are in need of inclusionary policies to redress both racial and ethnic inequities. Northern NGOs have, through ample funding and support from the World Bank and other multilateral institutions, fought hard and long for indigenous (ethnic) rights but have done so at the expense of the collective rights of African Americans (race). Thus, while differences in terms of culture or ethnicity may have received their share of attention, economic and social differences due to race or racism remain poorly addressed.

Globalization and transnationalism

If democratization is a process that sanctions the formation and growth of NGOs, the process of globalization exerts pressures at a scale that is new and challenging to some. In the same way as do creating and sustaining democratic processes, globalization demands careful management. Economists generally define globalization as international economic integration that can be pursued through policies of “openness” and the liberalization of trade, investment, and finance, leading to an “open economy.” “Transnationalism, on the other hand, is a part of the process of globalization and is the medium through which globalization’s many effects are dispersed within and across national boundaries. Scholars therefore use the term “transnationalism” to examine

connections that complement, interact with, and transform societies and the dynamics of human movement, settlement, and adaptation across and within nation-states. It is also used to raise questions about nation-states, their power, and their actions. In this section, it is used to discuss how NGOs respond to globalization and serve as vehicles to affect and be affected by the challenges and opportunities it presents for those that are racially and ethnically disadvantaged.

While globalization has significantly accelerated since the early 1990s, voluntary organizations began work nearly a century prior to humanize the process, soften the blow of its negative consequences, and capitalize on its positives. In 1889, Jane Addams put forth the idea of respecting differences among races and nationalities and was a pioneer in the fight against discrimination in a newly industrializing society that segregated social classes and also immigrants to the United States. The opening of Hull House in the city of Chicago symbolized the beginning of the settlement house movement in the United States, with some referring to it as the foundation of modern social work. By 1980, the number of settlement houses in the United States had ballooned to four hundred, with a majority of them in the large industrial hubs of Boston, Chicago, and New York.

The settlement movement's position on African Americans reveals its limitations vis-à-vis race relations (Lasch-Quinn 1993). Services to African American communities were provided by organizations such as the Women's Missionary Society; the black, segregated "Bethlehem Houses" of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; and the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Baptist Church, the Young Women's Christian Association, and the Urban League. However, the settlement-like divisions of these faith-based organizations were not members of the National Federation of Settlements and hence not recognized as part of the mainstream American settlement movement. While European immigrants were deemed capable of assimilation into middle-class American society, many white settlement reformers considered African Americans as inept. When blacks moved into the neighborhoods of European immigrants, the settlement "houses either shut down, ran segregated activities or separate facilities, or followed their white neighbors to better neighborhoods, but only rarely tried to whole-heartedly integrate" (Lasch-Quinn 1993: 155).

An ocean apart and less than a century later, in the 1980s, South Africa witnessed massive growth in the number of antiapartheid NGOs. In white-ruled South Africa, NGOs had a reputable record, earned through delivery of social services as well as unrelenting opposition to apartheid. "Apartheid," as Lemanski (2004: 102) writes, "literally means 'apartness'; lines were drawn on maps and people re-ordered accordingly." In Cape Town, for instance, blacks lived in urban peripheries and were distanced from whites, who were allocated large central areas of land. A neoliberal macroeconomic policy was sweeping across the globe in the 1980s, and this led to an influx of funds mostly from Scandinavian countries, the European Economic Community, and US foundations. These funds were allocated to South African NGOs, which began to evolve from radical advocates of more integrative housing policies into key implementing partners of government. In 1994, when the democratic government of National Unity led by the African National Congress came to power, a new constitution recognized housing as a human right for all and NGOs and community-based organizations were expected to garner community participation in low-income housing construction and management and thus spatially integrate the city. However, analysis of

low-cost housing projects revealed that community participation in a) design took the form of consultation of pre-established layouts made by NGO-employed architects; b) project management was no more than informing the communities about decisions taken by the NGOs; and, c) construction activities was reduced to a minimal contribution of sweat equity in a few final touches (Lizarralde & Massyn, 2008). A market-driven, neoliberal approach has therefore tested the managerial capacity of housing NGOs and is yet to reflect the diversity among the inhabitants of Cape Town.

While South Africa's housing policy struggled to bridge deep racial chasms, cultural projects were afoot from the early 1990s in Cuba, where scholars and activists denounced the silence over race and racism. Rap musicians, writes historian de la Fuente (2008), played a leading role in this effort and were accompanied by disc jockeys, break dancers, graffiti artists, producers, and cultural promoters. An oft-cited example in the Cuban context is the Queloides exhibit. In 1997 the first exhibit (and many others to follow) embodied an argument forwarded by visual artists that, despite social transformation implemented by the Cuban revolutionary government in the early 1960s, a lot remains to be done toward racial equality and inclusion in Cuba and, certainly, in the rest of the globe. From 2010 to 2012, a version of this Cuban exhibit, organized and curated by de la Fuente, was hosted in New York, in Pittsburgh, and in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Ethnonationalism

The goal—like that depicted by the Queloides exhibit—of a world wherein each person's loyalty is to all of humankind is a worthwhile albeit an ambitious one. Its values are encapsulated in the term “cosmopolitanism,” an ideal that is in constant battle with the powerful forces of nationalism and ethnocentrism. Cosmopolitanism, as Ignatieff (1993) analyses, is indeed a privilege because achieving it depends on the capacity of the nation-state to provide security and civility to its citizens. Ethnonationalism (i.e., the assertion of ethnic distinctiveness) gained momentum across several parts of the globe in the 1990s and threatened the security and stability of nation-states.

Structural adjustment programs caused a reduction in the size of the state in many developing countries and a complete disintegration followed by civil wars in some others. The Somali state, for instance, entirely collapsed and its national and local services came to a standstill. Although an ethnically and linguistically homogenous country, within the single ethnic group of Somalia are many lineage or kin groups. Clan-based armies replaced the national military and police force, creating the equivalent of interethnic hatred. In early 1991, Somalia fell into a civil war that rapidly ascended into a catastrophic famine. International NGOs, nearly forty of them, were critical actors in the early humanitarian response. They worked with wide autonomy but were soon “beset by banditry and extortion from competing warlords” who either halted delivery of assistance to opposing clans or directed supplies to their own groups (Avant 2007: 47). Nongovernmental organizations thus involuntarily fuelled Somalia's war economy and reinforced the problem (Roberts 1993: 439). The increasing violence and diversions meant that, by the summer of 1992, only a handful of Northern NGOs including CARE, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Médecins sans Frontières, Save the Children UK, and World Vision maintained operations in Somalia.

In December 1992, US military troops were deployed to escort Northern NGO relief efforts. These US-led, UN-authorized military officials did not necessarily distinguish their traditional militaristic roles from humanitarian relief work, and Northern INGO personnel were hard to protect for they wanted to maintain close contact with widely distributed local populations. The forces of ethnonationalism thus necessitate that NGOs foster improved capacities of coordination and consolidation and carefully research their host populations to develop sensibilities about how their programs affect relations between different ethnicities. The ethnic conflict in eastern Sri Lanka and the work of local and international NGOs among women there is a case in point. Ruwanpura (2007) finds that local NGOs working in northeast Sri Lanka tend to focus on the ethnic community that is directly affected by the conflict. Female heads of one ethnic community or neighborhood benefit from the micro-loans and any accompanying education, health promotion, and other inputs but neighboring and ethnically segregated villages do not receive those benefits. Just like in the case of NGOs in Somalia, Ruwanpura (2007: 322) reminds NGOs that ethnic groups closely monitor how NGO interventions are distributed and hence comments that “because nationalism is a gendered project, this perpetration of violence by one ethnic community against another is illustrative of the ways in which the hostility and aggression of ethno-nationalism is fought over women’s bodies.”

CONCLUSIONS

The association between financial resources and vulnerability is a relatively easy one to make. In comparison, the manner in which certain physical and social attributes such as race and ethnicity are likely to be associated with limited resources and power, and therefore increased vulnerability, is less well understood. As reviewed in this entry, NGOs have become important vehicles for transmitting development, including development for those who are marginalized on account of their race, class, culture, or ethnic origins. By virtue of their existence as autonomous, self-governing, and voluntary actors, NGOs are widely perceived to pluralize, expand, strengthen, and deepen civil society. More entrepreneurial civic actors means more opportunities for a wider range of actors to have a voice, more organizations to act in an overseer role vis-à-vis governments and corporations, and more prospects for networking and creating dependable relations with communities to press upon governments, businesses, and other NGOs for greater accountability and effectiveness.

However, civil society scholars find that the ability and willingness of NGOs to acknowledge, act on, and learn from the vulnerabilities suffered by the socially excluded are far from fully developed. As the global trends explained above imply, the structural changes across the world will continue to generate poverty, exclusion, conflict, and displacement. These challenges will exert pressure upon NGOs to respond with increasing alacrity and effectiveness. To achieve this, NGOs operating in local, national, and international arenas may have to undergo significant changes in how they are internally organized and managed and how they relate to key stakeholders.

The cases from various regions across the globe show that NGOs need to make a concerted effort to monitor and evaluate the effects of their interventions. Good NGO intentions are far from sufficient in tackling the challenges created by the drive toward

democracy, increasing globalization, and ethnic nationalism. If the context of an NGO's program includes complicated race and ethnic issues, and if the NGO is incapable of detecting these distinctions, its program will not learn about the complexities or be able to act on them. In their effort to provide social services and advocate for rights, NGOs must at a minimum not reproduce the race and ethnic subordination that prompted their engagement in a locality. This may require the help of Northern donors who must themselves learn to look upon their financial and other resources as a vehicle to build NGO capacity for research, program design, monitoring, and evaluation with an eye to developing more inclusive, longer lasting change. Achieving the goals of instituting *democracy*—the well-being of each individual as a distinct and significant item of humanity—requires that NGO and donor practices reflect those very principles.

But no NGO can achieve these more inclusive developmental goals in isolation. The global scale of challenges requires that NGOs harness cooperation from corporations, branches of government, the military, international institutions, and various groups in civil society, and the skills needed to mediate these links. Although autonomy, flexibility, and spontaneity are key distinctive attributes of the NGO sector, globalization and transnationalism have exerted pressure upon NGOs to build North–South and South–South networks for many areas of problem solving including service delivery, fundraising, and advocacy. The review of literature also finds that, in the midst of forging global and transnational links, NGOs need to keep central their focus on local conditions, needs, interests, experiences, understandings, and relations of power, for it is in these locations that individual and group identities around race and ethnicity are used and interpreted.

Maintaining this sensibility toward local realities can be difficult, especially when NGOs working in areas in the midst of complex ethnic conflicts have to rely on the protection provided by actors such as the military, whose mandates may compromise the impartiality and integrity of humanitarian relief. Perhaps a role for NGOs in this regard is to work to prevent ethnic conflicts and to also proactively create systems that support the more expedient interorganizational cooperation needed for emergency response and for longer term social healing processes.

These are significant changes demanded of NGOs. While they have certainly evolved from small local groups into suave multinational organizations, their continued effectiveness requires that they periodically evaluate how their developmental and relief efforts address race and ethnic differences.

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