

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

To What Extent Is The Relationship Between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs Based On Partnership and Free From Local and International Agendas?

<https://www.e-ir.info/2008/12/12/to-what-extent-is-the-relationship-between-northern-ngos-and-southern-ngos-based-on-partnership-and-free-from-local-and-international-agendas/>

RAJPAL SINGH GHATAOURA, DEC 12 2008

It is feasible to argue, that an apparent trend which characterised the 1980s and 1990s was the upsurge, in the number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and grassroots organisations (GROs), involved in relief and development. This trend can be highlighted by the number of government registered NGOs. In the OECD countries of the industrialised North the number has grown from, "1,600 in 1980 to 2,970 in 1993" (Edwards & Hulme, 1995, p.3), while in the South countries like Bolivia, have seen the number of NGOs increase from, "100 in 1980 to 530 in 1992" (Arellano-Lopez & Petras, 1994, p562). Alongside this rise there has been the emergence of the notion, that if the objective of reducing the number of people in absolute poverty is to be achieved, then there is a need to have improved relations between those NGOs residing in the North and South. Quintessentially there were growing calls for strengthening the coordination and policy coherence, among all stakeholders in the development community. This new relationship manifested itself through the term 'partnership,' which provided a framework for NGOs involved in development in the North and South to influence economic, political and social policy. This was because partnership was seen to be the most viable form of relationship, in which it was possible to combine the resources of both Northern NGOs (NNGOs) and Southern NGOs (SNGOs), into alleviating poverty. Yet before evaluating its significance, it is necessary to define what partnership actually means. Here the paper turns to the work of Alan Fowler who describes authentic partnership as, "understood and mutually enabling, independent interaction with shared intentions" (Fowler, 1997, p.117). He therefore views partnership as an important tool in the enhancement of social capital, which brings about a more functional civil society better able to deal with the states and markets at all levels of operation. (Cornwall, Lucas & Pasteur, 2000). However the distinctive feature of Fowler's definition of partnership is that it involves sharing, with a sense of mutuality and equality for all parties involved. Therefore in essence partnership implies that, power should be shared equally among all stakeholders and more importantly, these conditions should be met before any relationship can be defined as a partnership. It is the intention of this paper to ascertain to what extent the relationship between, NNGOs and SNGOs is based on partnership – as defined by Fowler – and free from local and international agendas. Through its evaluation supported by case studies, this paper will argue that to an extent the relationship between the two sets of NGOs is based upon partnership. However it will go on to argue that to a greater extent, the relationship between NNGOs and SNGOs is not free from local and international agendas and as a result, the power sharing context of partnership disproportionately favours the NNGOs.

The Relationship Between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs is Based On Partnership

To What Extent Is The Relationship Between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs Based On Partnership?

Written by Rajpal Singh Ghataoura

This paper will now argue that to an extent the relationship between NNGOs and SNGOs is one based on partnership and free from local and international agendas. As a result of the unprecedented effects of the globalization phenomenon, there has been growing opportunities for NNGOs and SNGOs to work across institutional boundaries in order to influence those forces, which underpin poverty and discrimination. Quintessentially through entrenched partnerships, NNGOs and SNGOs have the capacity to mould a strong civil society, as well as a society that is just and civil. The NGOs are able to fulfil this function, by operating at the three different levels of partnership, at any given instance. The first of which is the strategic component, which consists of improving the perceptions and understanding of problems and issues, therefore allowing coherent policy suggestions. The second is the tactical component, which consists of establishing bodies or communities to carry out the defined policy suggestions. Finally there is the operational component, which is the action orientated aspect of partnership as it consists of activities such as, implementation and monitoring (Gibbon, 2000). Though in a general context, these three different levels of partnership exist in a capacity to combine resources in order to alleviate poverty, the most prevailing examples of partnerships arise, when they address specific issues. Here the paper turns to the work of John Gaventa (2004), in conjunction with his experience at the Highlander Research and Education Centre, based in Tennessee, USA. A distinctive feature of Gaventa's work is the emphasis placed upon the embedded geographical divide, in development. While it is feasible to argue that globalisation has to an extent converged the North and South, what Gaventa really highlights is that while many NNGOs are working in the South on issues such as poverty, community regeneration, and strengthening civil society, they have very little contact with those communities in their own countries, who live in similar conditions as those living in the South (Gaventa, 2004). In essence while it is true that the North can be characterised as an area of relative wealth, it also contains within it increasing inequality, large scale poverty and highly uneven development, more associated with the South. Gaventa takes this line of analysis further by redefining the traditional distinctions by arguing that there are, "South's with the North [and] North's with the South" (Gaventa, 2004, p.257). As a result of this re-examination, Simon Maxwell (1997) advocates that it is now possible to draw comparisons between the North and South. Though poverty may be of a different scale between the two terms, there are corresponding issues such as literacy, land reform, health care, and rural development, which effect both societies. By this way of recognition, Gaventa argues that NGOs, who work in areas of both the North and South, have a lot to learn from each other. Furthermore it is by understanding that NNGOs and SNGOs could learn a lot from each other, through parallel methods of working, that partnerships can and have been formed. This is illustrated by the following cases studies that Gaventa worked on, in conjunction with the Highlander Research and Education Centre, based in Tennessee, USA.

Case Study 1: Learning About Methods: Strengthening Grassroots Voices Through Participatory Forms of Evaluation and Research

This case study illustrates NNGO and SNGO partnership through the development and practice of participatory research (PR). The use of the term PR was first coined by Paulo Freire, in a conference in Tanzania during the mid-1970's and it referred to approaches which involved grassroots people as researchers themselves, rather than as the object of someone else's research. The intellectual exchange of methods and approaches manifested itself under the auspices of the International Council of Adult Education, during the 1970s and 1980s, allowing for the rapid spread of the notion from the South to the North. PR in this context was used to promote adult non-formal education, as a basis for leadership development and capacity building. Through these exchanges it was possible to strengthen, both conceptually and practically, similar work conducted in the North. For example at Highlander, though similar approaches were being used in their work with poor communities in the Appalachian region, they were able to gain a name, conceptual and methodological understanding, and peer support from links with their Southern partners,

To What Extent Is The Relationship Between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs Based On Partnership?

Written by Rajpal Singh Ghataoura

through conferences, newsletters, and exchanges.

This exchange of methods transgressing hemispheres continued into the 1990s, as illustrated by the spread of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and participatory learning and action (PLA). The method was first employed in India and East Africa during the mid-1980s, but has now spread to over 70 countries including those in the North. For example PRA networks have developed in Scotland and UK for local planning projects. Once again SNGOs and NNGOs have developed a partnership, which has allowed the spread of methods from the South to the North. (This case study draws heavily on Gaventa, 2004, pp. 262-3).

Case Study 2: Linking Common Issues in Occupations and Environmental Health

The first case study illustrated how partnerships had been formed between NNGOs and SNGOs, in relation to the exchange of methods and approaches concerning participatory education and research. However the second case looks at the exchanges between groups, who face common problems and how they responded together. The specific issue which this case study deals with involves occupational and environmental health, with particular reference to those which arise from the movement of wastes and toxic produced across the globe. The Appalachia region has had a long experience with this particular problem, as a result of the weak enforcement of laws, a relatively low wage structure, and a low literacy rate in the community. It made an ideal area in which to develop dangerous industries with little inference, from the law as well as the local community. However with the more stringent environmental and occupational regulation in the North these industries began to expand their outlets to the South where production costs were far lower. Gaventa was invited in 1994 by the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), to come to India and share the experiences Highlander had encountered through, their work on participatory education and research with Appalachia communities, on environmental and occupational health. Through workshops attended by representatives from SNGOs, common problems were highlighted e.g. 'brown lung' and methods and approaches were shared. In essence a partnership was created by Highlander with its NGO counterparts from the South, where mutual learning took place as equals.

The unassailability of this partnership was tested after the Bhopal disaster occurred in 1984, where a gas leak from the Union Carbide chemical factory killed an estimated 10,000 people. The chemical factory had been modelled on the one, which had been built in the Appalachia community of Charleston, West Virginia, USA. The links which had been established between Highlander and PRIA during the previous workshops, allowed the two NGOs to respond quickly on a number of initiatives and share knowledge on this issue. Through a joint research project *No Place to Run*, they were able to highlight the track record of Union Carbide in the US and India. As a result of this project health workers activists came to the US to learn from those communities who have suffered, as well as from those NNGOs who dealt with occupational and environmental health issues. (This case study draws heavily on Gaventa, 2004, pp. 264).

What these case studies illustrate is a change in the traditional partnership between NNGOs and SNGOs. In essence there has been a shift away from a somewhat vertical relationship, which views NNGOs as donors and advisers while SNGOs are mainly seen as recipients and local partners. Instead there now exists a more horizontal partnership, where power is equally shared and the learning and exchange of methods and approaches, is a mutual process. (Gaventa, 2004) Therefore it is feasible to argue that the relationship between NNGOs and SNGOs, is based on partnership as defined by Fowler.

To What Extent Is The Relationship Between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs Based On Partnership

Written by Rajpal Singh Ghataoura

The Relationship Between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs is Not Based On Partnership and is Not Free From Local and International Agendas

This paper will now argue that to a greater extent the relationship between NNGOs and SNGOs, is not based on partnership and is not free from local and international agendas. When arguing that the relationship between NNGOs and SNGOs is not based on partnership, this paper returns to Fowler's definition, which calls for the established conditions of the partnership to be mutually met by both parties. Instead this paper will argue that this is not the case, because the relationship between NNGOs and SNGOs is influenced by local and international agendas, which tilts the relationship in favour towards the NNGOs. The paper will evaluate this unfavourable but realistic partnership, through the issues of funding and legitimacy.

Funding

NGOs in both the 'North' and 'South' have become the favoured child of Western Donor Agencies since the end of the Cold War (Edwards & Hulme, 1995). The growth and influence of NGOs is no coincidence, but a result of the emergence in the international arena of a New Policy Agenda. This shift in agenda can be characterised by its attempt to combine economic liberalism and Western political theory, in transforming the responsibilities and relationships between states, markets and the third sector (Robinson, 1993; Whitehead, 1993). On the market side of the agenda, NGOs are seen to be the ideal institutions to replace the state in the provision of social welfare services to the poor, at a lower cost but still at a high standard. On the political side of the agenda, NGOs were deemed best placed to fulfil the democratization conditionality placed upon recipients by Western donor agencies. As a result NGOs became central components of civil society and were supposed to compensate the reduced role of the state, in championing the participation of marginalized groups. Therefore the comparative advantages of NGOs in both the economic and political sphere, has lead to the channelling of increasing amounts of official aid to and through them. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) found that, "the proportion of total aid from member countries channelled through NGOs rose from 0.7% in 1975 to 5.0% in 1993/94, which amounts to roughly US\$2.3 billion in absolute terms" (Hudock, 2000.p.15). However it is important to assert, that the aid which is being channelled through to the NGOs is not evenly distributed. Quintessentially the donor agencies are using the NNGOs, as a conduit to channel aid into Third World development. The reason for this is that the donor agencies perceive the SNGOs to lack the institutional capacity, to achieve the set project objectives. Consequently donor agencies rely on the established technical know-how of NNGOs, to achieve their projects and as a result aid is channelled through them, to be then further distributed to selected SNGOs. This has sweeping consequences on the power relationships, which form the basis of a partnership, between NNGOs and SNGOs. The reason for this is that because SNGOs have been given the role of donor recipients in the partnership relationship, they have to lobby NNGOs for funding. Furthermore even though some NNGOs continue to be operational on the ground in conjunction with their local partners, they still dictate the scope and pace of the projects, through their control over funding and procedures. Added to this donor requirements drive many of the changes that take place in the international system; as a result the shifting procedures are passed down the aid chain from NNGOs to SNGOs. An example of this has been the shift away from "development-as-delivery to development-as-leverage" (Edwards, Hulme & Wallace, 1999, p.117), which has culminated in the dominance of the project system (Smillie & Helmich, 1999). This sees development assistance being organised as projects, with the implementation of quantifiable results, which can be evaluated within a designated period of time. Additionally as there are fewer donors' agency staff in the field, donors try and do more with fewer resources and as a result this creates a culture of management for results, which favours contracts over grants, since the donor agency is more able to control the direction of the project and the activities

To What Extent Is The Relationship Between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs Based On Partnership?

Written by Rajpal Singh Ghataoura

carried out by the NGOs implementing it. Yonekura Yukiko (2000) suggests that the above reality can be epitomised by the view Oxfam GB takes on partnership. Though Oxfam GB takes a non-operational approach, it still holds a key role in projects with its SNGO affiliates, due to the power it has as a donor. In terms of selecting those SNGOs whom to work with, Oxfam appraises them in terms of mutual, "values and beliefs, their accountability to the poor, and their strengths and weaknesses in management and administration" (Yukiko, 2000, p.40). Thus by sharing values, beliefs and approaches which are endorsed by Oxfam GB, does an SNGO have the potential of becoming a partner. However this clearly illustrates the imbalance of power within the partnership, as in order to receive funding from Oxfam GB, the SNGO in question has to conform to the attitude of its northern counterpart. Consequently the SNGO loses its strong indigenous identity, and instead begins to reflect the attitude of their Northern counterparts, by buying into their expectations (Fowler, 1997).

What this all illustrates is that SNGOs remain dependent on the aid provided by their northern counterparts, and their roles are therefore pre-determined by donor fashions and needs, to remain as limited deliverers of development according to ideas and designs imposed upon them by NNGOs. Additionally donor agencies are not apolitical and with the allocation of aid come a set of conditions, which have an important impact on the autonomy of NNGOs and SNGOs, as well as the sovereignty of the recipient state. According to Laura MacDonald (1997) this can clearly be seen in Central America, where USAID used US NNGOs to support the USA counterinsurgency strategy in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

It is therefore feasible to argue that the shifts in the international agenda, causes an imbalance in the power relationship between NNGOs and SNGOs in favour of NNGOs, which disagrees with Fowler's definition of mutual accountable partnership.

Direct Funding to SNGOs

More recently there have been growing complaints from the SNGOs of the current aid set up. Generally they argue that when one partner gives funds and another receives them, all the inequalities enter the relationship and as a result the general outcome of the donor funded projects, have been below standard. As a result there has been a change in the international agenda for donor agencies, to bypass the NNGOs and directly fund SNGOs. However though NNGOs are losing their comparative advantage over their southern counterparts, as SNGOs are deemed to be more accountable, better performers, and more effective in strengthening civil society, there seems to be very limited effect of this change on partnerships. Though in the long term NNGOs could find themselves redundant, at the present moment that crisis has been abated as the vast majority of donor agencies, still view SNGOs as weak and lacking the institutional capacity to deliver development projects. Consequently for the foreseeable future, the partnership between NNGOs and SNGOs remains imbalanced in favour of the former.

Legitimacy

The criticisms of the current aid system and its effect in creating an imbalance in the power relationships, between the partnerships of NNGOs and SNGOs has led to local actors of recipient countries to call for changes. One of the issues which they raise, concerns the lack of accountability the local partners have over their northern counterparts. From Zimbabwe Yash Tandon argues that, "foreign NGOs are secretive lot. We do not know much about them...we know little about how their heartbeats in Europe or America or Canada...they work with such secrecy and opaqueness that is right for an African to be suspicious about them" (Tandon, 1999, p.29). To compound the lack of

To What Extent Is The Relationship Between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs Based On Partnership?

Written by Rajpal Singh Ghataoura

accountability even further, Firoze Manji highlights the point in a recent survey of British NGOs it was found that they rarely, "have representatives of their southern counterpart organisations on their Board of Trustees" (Manji, 2000, p.76). This shift in the local agenda has questioned the ability of NNGOs to continue functioning in the South legitimately. Through their civil society responsibilities, they deal with issues in the public domain such as social exclusion and poverty, yet they do so without statutory authority. They can not call upon the strong arm of government or financial capital of business to gain legitimacy. Instead their involvement is entirely voluntary and as a result they, "must continually justify their presence and value to society...by engaging with citizens" (Edwards & Fowler, 2004, p.4) in order to maintain their legitimacy. Moreover having the technical knowledge and resources to transfer to the South does not in itself make a NNGOs involvement in the Third World legitimate. The partnership framework has as a result become an important tool, in rectifying the dilemma of NNGO legitimacy in the South. Without reforming the donor-recipient relationship, NNGOs have come to use partnership with local partners, as a way in which to secure their own legitimacy for their involvement in the Third World. Fowler argues that by, "collaborating with natural partners, it helps confirm the legitimacy of Northern NGOs through the process of like-minded reinforcement" (Fowler, 1991, p.11). What Fowler is implying is that, NNGOs reinforce their legitimacy by illustrating that their natural partners are similar in values and beliefs and therefore their involvement in the country in question, is accountable. Once again though, the values and beliefs of their natural partners are not a reflection of the indigenous NGO, but that of the northern counterpart. This clearly illustrates that the power relationship in the partnership between NNGOs and SNGOs, is still in favour of the NNGOs.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to ascertain to what extent the relationship between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs is based on partnership and free from local and international agendas. Through the work of Gaventa (2004) in conjunction with the Highlander Centre, it is feasible to argue that partnership does occur as defined by Fowler. As a result of a horizontal relationship, between the NNGO and SNGO, a relationship was established which saw the mutual exchange of methods and approaches as equals. Yet this paper moved on to suggest that realistically, the relationship between NNGOs and SNGOs is more vertical, which unavoidably implies the transfer of power from the latter to the former. Though the international and local issues of funding and legitimacy, "partnership is sought between organisations, which are highly unequal in terms of resources, power and institutional strength" (Fowler & James, 1994, p.10.) Consequently SNGOs are dictated by donors, in terms of project conditions and defining the development agenda.

Bibliography

Arellano-Lopez.S & Petras.J, (1994) 'NGOs and Poverty Alleviation in Bolivia' *Development and Change*, Vol.25, No.3.

Cornwall.A, Lucas.H & Pasteur.K, (2000) (eds.), 'Accountability through Participation: Developing Workable Partnership Models in the Health Sector' *IDS Bulletin*, Vol.31, No.1.

Edwards.M & Hulme.D, (1995) 'NGO Performance and Accountability in the Post Cold War World' *Journal of International Development*, Vol.7, No.6.

Edwards.M & Hulme.D, (1996) 'NGO Performance and Accountability: Introduction and Overview' in Edwards.M & Hulme.D

To What Extent Is The Relationship Between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs Based On Par

Written by Rajpal Singh Ghataoura

(eds.), *Non Governmental Organisations – Performance and Accountability: Beyond the Magic Bullet* (London: Earthscan).

Edwards.M, Hulme.D & Wallace.T, (1999) 'NGOs in a Global Future: Marrying Local Delivery to Worldwide Leverage'*Public Administration and Development*, Vol. 19, No.117.

Edwards.M & Fowler.A, (2004) 'Introduction: Changing Challenges for NGDO Management' in Edwards.M & Fowler.A, (eds.) (2004) *The Earthscan Reader on NGO Management* (London, Earthscan).

Fowler.A, (1991) 'Building Partnerships between Northern and Southern development NGOs: Issues for the 1990s' *Development in Practice*, Vol.1, No.1.

Fowler.A & James.R, (1994) *The Role of Southern NGOs in Development Co-operation* (Oxford, INTRAC).

Fowler.A, (1997) *Striking a Balance: A Guide to Enhancing the Effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in International Development* (London: Earthscan).

Gaventa.J, (2004) 'Crossing the Great Divide: Building Links and Learning between NGOs and Community-Based Organisations in the North and South' in Edwards.M and Fowler.A, (eds.), *The Earthscan Reader on NGO Management* (London, Earthscan).

Gibbon.M, (2000) 'Partnership for Health: A Way of Working With Women Groups to Improve Community Health in Rural Nepal' in Cornwall.A, Lucas.H & Pasteur.K, (eds.), (2005) 'Accountability through Participation: Developing Workable Partnership Models in the Health Sector' *IDS Bulletin*, Vol.31, No.1.

Hudock.C.A, (2000), 'NGOs Seat at the Donor Table: Enjoying the Food or Serving the Dinner?' *IDS Bulletin*, Vol.31, No.3.

MacDonald.L, (1997) *Supporting Civil Society: The Political Role of Non-Governmental Organisations in Central America* (London, MacMillan Press LTD).

Manji.F, (2000) 'Collaborations with the South: Agents of Aid OR Solidarity?' in Pearce.J & Eade.D, (eds.) (2000) *Development, NGOs and Civil Society* (Oxford, Oxford Publications).

Maxwell.S, (1997) *Comparisons, Convergence, and Connections: Development Studies in North and South* (Sussex, Institute for Development Studies).

Robinson. M, (1993) 'Governance, Democracy and Conditionality: NGOs and the New Policy Agenda' in Clayton.A, (eds.), (1993) *Governance, Democracy and Conditionality: What Role for NGOs?* (Oxford, INTRAC).

Smillie.I, (1999) 'At Sea in a Sieve? Trends and Issues in the Relationships between Northern NGOs and Northern Governments in Smillie. I & Helmich.H, (eds.), (1999) *Stakeholders: Government –NGO Partnerships for International Development* (London, Earthscan).

Tandon.Y, (1999) in Smillie. I & Helmich.H, (eds.), (1999) *Stakeholders: Government –NGO Partnerships for International*

To What Extent Is The Relationship Between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs Based On Pa

Written by Rajpal Singh Ghataoura

Development (London, Earthscan).

Whitehead.L, (1993) 'Economic Liberalization and Democratization: Explorations of the Linkages' *World Development*, Vol.21, No.8.

Yonekura.Y, (2000) 'Partnership for Whom? Cambodian NGOs' Supporting Schemes' *IDS Bulletin*, Vol.31, No 3.

—

Written by: Rajpal Singh Ghataoura

Written for: Dr Carlos Oya

Written at: School of Oriental and African Science (SOAS)

Date written: 2008