Local and Global: International Governance and Civil Society

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It is inconceivable that any Northern donor or international NGO could begin to match the diversity of experience and knowledge already extant within the Third World.

In a world increasingly beset by famines, wars, genocide, AIDS, environmental deterioration and continuing population momentum in the poor countries, the failed state has become the Achilles heel of the emerging international community. For every failed state there are many more “weakly institutionalized” governments, which can, curiously, also be described as semi-authoritarian. International governance, if it is not to become Olympian at best and tyrannical at worst, can only be built on what happens at the national level. To be accountable and strong, the national level must intersect, at least indirectly, with the efforts ordinary people make in their own communities. So, in a way, the local and the global are intimately connected, not just because people plant trees or recycle, but because all politics, to paraphrase Tip O’Neill, is ultimately local.

The good news is that in much of the developing world, failed states co-exist with civil societies, which have expanded dramatically since the 1970s. What Salamon et al calls this “global associational revolution” is particularly evident in Asia, Africa and Latin America. By the late 1990s there were an estimated 50,000 intermediary grassroots support organizations (GRSOs) that worked with hundreds of thousands of community-based grassroots organizations (GROs) in the developing world.

Coinciding with the later years of this phenomenon has been an explosion in transnational alliances on everything from human rights to land mines to corruption. Often these two macro trends interact. El Taller, for example, is a practitioner researcher alliance that also provides staff training for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from many countries.

More formal international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have also proliferated in numbers and probably now exceed 25,000. Even though official international organizations, INGOs and international peacekeeping forces are increasingly cooperat-

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ing with each other and with indigenous NGOs these global actors had to contend with more than 40 complex human emergencies in 1998 alone.5

The relationship between civil society and the state may in the long run help determine whether a particular country will contribute to or undermine collective efforts, however inchoate, to enhance stability, democracy and living conditions at the global level. By civil society, however, I do not just mean a collection of NGOs. Indeed, as Perez Diaz defines it, civil society includes “markets, associations and a sphere of public debate.”6

Why markets? Because a significant percentage of non-profit NGOs in the developing world promote for-profit activities, such as micro-enterprises and community-based enterprises. In some countries more traditional business associations are emerging, and some scholars even include businesses in their definitions of civil society, arguing that they form part of the intermediary realm between the citizen and the state.

Why a sphere of public debate or deliberation? Because public talk of all types—in the media or through public meetings or deliberations—can knit together the pieces of civil society and provide citizens with a public voice that can enhance governmental accountability. The Inter-American Democracy Network has trained over 100 NGOs to work with local communities, name and frame their own issues and moderate forums that can assist ordinary people, through deliberative talk, in governing themselves.

Both this broader view of civil society and the inclusion of community-based GROs help counteract the assumption that the growing numbers of intermediary NGOs or GRSOs will, by themselves, somehow enhance democracy, prosperity and stability. Still, even larger NGOs that “behave like governments” may be a step forward in situations of violence and chaos.

While keeping the broader definition of civil society in mind, this paper focuses on NGOs, including GROs, GRSOs and their networks. This discussion begins by focusing on the impact of the varied regional contexts in Latin America, Asia, and Africa on NGOs and then proceeds to a more detailed discussion of the impact of national context, including type of regime, political culture, and state incapacity and instability. This is followed by a discussion of the indirect impact of the political context on NGO proliferation. Although the discussions of context incorporate information about government policies towards NGOs, the next section focuses in more detail on NGO government collaborations. The final section deals with accountability, its relationship to autonomy and the impact of autonomy on government.

**Political Context: Regional Contrasts in Policies Toward NGOs**

Relationships between NGOs and governments in the Third World clearly differ from those in developed countries. In the United States, for example, Salamon points out that voluntary organizations emerged during the 19th century, when charity and paternalism
were predominant social values. It was only later that the U.S. government made the provision of services a right rather than a privilege, and assumed responsibility for some of the groups and problems that charities left out.

In the Third World, the rise of NGOs has strengthened and enlarged the independent sector at a different historical moment, precisely because of government failure to address those issues where governments have historically held a comparative advantage in Europe and the United States. Moreover, GRSOs are being established not by wealthy elites, but by intellectuals and professionals. There are also regional differences among NGO-government relationships in the developing world.

Civil society in Latin America is more consistently autonomous in relation to the state than it is in Africa or Asia. Even before the NGO explosion, Latin American political systems were broad, heterogeneous and buffeted by the demands of the middle class. Even if governments want to control NGOs, the very strength of civil society—including NGOs, private businesses and labor unions—makes it difficult for them to do so.

Growing NGO capacity and the rise of international forces advocating structural adjustment and privatization, have pushed weak states, which are fearful of social unrest, towards partnerships with NGOs. The Bolivian Social Emergency Fund, for example, channeled $14 million through GRSOs between 1986 and 1991, leading to greatly reduced taxes on NGOs and a governmental commitment not to shut them down without three years notice.

Latin American NGOs have been instrumental in helping reshape the political systems in which they operate. Even under the military dictatorships that emerged in Brazil, Chile and Argentina during the 1960s and 1970s, nonpartisan NGOs were carving out “political space” not available to opposition political parties. Indeed, where major parties represent the upper and upper-middle classes, as in Colombia, being partisan negates the commitment of GRSOs to the poor. As one GRSO leader put it, “Parties are nominal national entities, but at the local level do not represent the people.”

Sometimes, of course, NGOs’ ability to act independently may erode, as during the Sandinista period in Nicaragua. Strong countervailing groups may also dilute their impact. Peasant organizations in Honduras, for example, have historically had more impact on agrarian reform policies than in El Salvador, where landowners are politically strong.

Unlike Latin America, NGO-government relationships in Asia are “largely determined by the government and its agencies,” regardless of whether ties to governments are dependent, adversarial, repressive or collaborative. Even when governments ignore NGOs, the withdrawal of recognition and legitimacy can be a powerful policy in itself. This situation is perhaps most extreme in China, where there are only a handful of autonomous NGOs.

In recent years, however, Asian governments have increasingly recognized the advantages of cooperative, if not collaborative, development strategies, and in many coun-
tries registration procedures have become simpler. For example, in Bangladesh government acceptance of NGOs increased because of a child survival program that reached 85,000 villages. Yet this generally rosy Asian picture often conceals co-optation. NGO policies in Asia are more likely to be schizophrenic than policies in Africa or Latin America. Security departments in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal and Singapore consider GRSOs to be a threat, leading many organizations to be wary of advocacy. Even in the Philippines, where the health department achieved credibility by seeking out NGOs with strong community ties, the military has continued to harass health programs run by religious NGOs.

Relationships between governments and NGOs are particularly difficult to assess in sub-Saharan Africa, although African dictatorships generally repress NGOs; single-party states, such as Zimbabwe and Kenya, accept service-provider NGOs but tend to restrain those promoting empowerment, while multiparty democracies have a “sweet and sour” relationship with NGOs. Perhaps the only safe generalization about Africa is that by the late 1990s, most governments were more aware of NGOs than they were ten years earlier. Co-optation has provided governments with positive publicity and allowed GRSOs to work in rural areas while distancing them from advocacy in capital cities. In fact, Fowler argues that tens of thousands of official administrative units throughout Africa provide governments with “camouflaged opportunities to control and manipulate NGO activities in order to ride herd on foreign contacts.”

Although NGOs can gain political independence with foreign financial support, they draw rapid fire if they raise issues of political legitimacy and human rights.

Ironically, by treating African GRSOs as opposition parties, governments have further politicized them, even though they are usually apolitical. Nonetheless, African governments sometimes appreciate GRSO advocacy on issues—female genital mutilation, for example—that they oppose privately but fear to deal with publicly. In Nigeria a group of NGOs and opposition movements even helped bring down the Abacha dictatorship.

Political context may define the initial political boundaries within which governments and NGOs interact. Yet ongoing interactions between governments and NGOs can begin to reshape or expand those boundaries, and what occurs within both the governmental and independent sectors often initiates this interaction. The next section focuses on how national political contexts impact NGOs, which, in turn, can influence government policies.

**The National Political Context: Direct Influence**

The key factors defining the national political context within which policies toward NGOs develop are type of regime, political culture, and degree of state capacity and stability. Political context can also, at least indirectly, affect the proliferation of NGOs.
Type of Regime

Freedom of expression and freedom of association enhance the visible role of NGOs and make it more likely that a government will avoid repressive policies. In the Philippines and in many Latin American countries, democratization has enhanced the national roles of GRSO leaders. On a local level as well, democratic governance can strengthen the role of GROs. In Botswana, where the traditional legotla, or village assembly, operates as a kind of direct democracy, GROs that focus on development extend and fit into existing cultural patterns.

Freely operating opposition parties, however, are not always the allies of NGOs. Concertación, a coalition opposition movement that developed at the end of the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, had little contact with grassroots movements other than trade unions and had trouble understanding the nonmaterial values of GROs. When Concertación organizers explained that community kitchens would no longer be needed once Pinochet was replaced, community organizers replied, “That is up to us to decide.”

Nor is there an automatic connection between the form of government and the treatment of GROs and GRSOs. Security ministries within generally democratic regimes sometimes harass GRSOs, and authoritarian governments do not always repress them. In Burkina Faso, under Presidents Sankara and Compaore, and in Bangladesh, under President Zia, non-democratic governments supported civil society. Sometimes, as in the case of Marxist states with weak civil societies, such as Vietnam, ties to NGOs can improve a government’s image at little risk to the regime.

There can also be islands that are friendly to NGOs within otherwise repressive governments. For example, in Bolivia during the 1970s, when the international cocaine dealers were in power, the Ministry of Education was hiring peasants involved in their own “theater for development” to teach peasants in other areas about their techniques. In fact, with the possible exception of the Guatemalan military regime during the 1980s, there are few, if any, examples of government-wide repression once GRSOs began to proliferate. It is much easier for repressive governments to keep independent organizations from developing in the first place, as in China or North Korea.

As a result of foreign support, GRSOs may fare relatively better under dictatorships than do autonomous GROs and their networks. In Guatemala during the 1980s, even a local health committee was forced to go underground because its activities were seen as subversive. However, authoritarian governments pursuing basic-needs development policies tend to be more positive toward GROs than other authoritarian regimes. For example, both Taiwan and South Korea promoted local institutional development in the 1970s and 1980s, although they sometimes tried to control it. In Mexico, government-sponsored rural development programs have played a key role in weakening local caciques and “shaping what eventually became [an] autonomous smallholder movement,” with a feedback effect on national development policies.
Political Culture

Political culture, defined by Almond and Powell as the “pattern of individual attitudes and orientations toward politics among members of a political system,” is a kind of intricate tapestry, unique to each country, that consistently impacts political behavior, including government policies toward NGOs. For example, human rights NGOs have had less impact in Algeria than in Morocco or Tunisia, because “Algerian political culture offered little by way of support to the practice of democracy.”

The uniqueness of each political culture typically has deep historical roots that condition relationships with NGOs. In South Africa, for example, where NGOs have been increasing in numbers for many years, significant relationships between the state and NGOs could not exist as long as apartheid continued. In a completely different political context in West Bengal, the leaders of GRSOs operating under the Marxist government were frustrated by restrictive corporate and union laws, as well as, a political culture of Communist mobilization that “does not allow for an empowerment orientation.”

Even the pervasive pattern of patron-client relationships in the developing world translates into varied political behaviors. In Thailand, for example, so many people need to be involved in the decision-making process that it is difficult for governments to implement grassroots development policies in cooperation with GROs, such as irrigators associations that have functioned for centuries. Conversely, government behavior may also be a reaction against the predominance of patron-client relationships. In Senegal during the early 1980s, the government began using GRSOs to increase its access to rural areas and reduce the power of the Marabouts, or Islamic brotherhoods. Ironically, because this also threatened NGO autonomy, a GRSO network led a long and complicated legal fight to forestall government intervention, thus creating an NGO-Marabout alliance.

State Incapacity and Instability

A number of observers have contrasted the “soft” or “weakly institutionalized” state with the expertise and flexibility of NGOs. Thus NGOs may influence policy but not be able to ensure policy implementation. Weak states also have difficulty developing consistent, coherent policies toward NGOs, which helps explain why governments are often schizophrenic in their treatment of NGOs. Ironically, this lack of capacity often encourages NGOs to fill the political vacuum at the local level.

Under conditions of civil war or ethnic conflict, governments tend to become increasingly suspicious of NGOs’ relief activities. For example, during the civil war in Ethiopia, the government was hostile to the presence of the Eritrean Relief Association in conflict areas. A change of regime, however, even if not the result of a democratic process, “can rapidly open the political space necessary for human rights NGOs to press their agenda on a national basis.”
**The Political Context: Indirect Impact on NGO Proliferation**

The impact of political context on NGO proliferation can be related to democratization as well as instability, and proliferation can, in turn, impact government policy as civil society becomes stronger. NGOs of all types flourish in democratic countries such as Costa Rica, and also in partially democratic countries such as the Philippines and Senegal. Kandil contends that in the Middle East NGOs tend to proliferate more rapidly in countries undergoing democratization, such as Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco and Yemen. Under conservative, authoritarian Arab regimes, most voluntary organizations are Muslim charities, not NGOs.

GROs tend to proliferate where local implementation capacity is combined with pluralism. GRSO proliferation, in contrast, is often inversely related to a government’s capacity to implement local development. In the 1970s and early 1980s, this applied not only to Marxist regimes but also to Taiwan, South Korea and Tanzania. Even in less rigidly authoritarian contexts, such as Mexico, “the high degree of state social spending and the omnipresent role of the state is one key factor in explaining the relative political underdevelopment of [GRSOs].” Once the Tanzanian government retreated from its heavy socioeconomic role, GRSOs multiplied rapidly.

Not surprisingly, therefore, GRSOs tend to proliferate under both repressive and less repressive regimes that lack local implementation capability. In the most repressive contexts, GRSOs may provide the only safe political space in which to oppose a regime. During the 1970s, GRSOs proliferated rapidly under a traditional dictatorship in Paraguay, a series of military regimes in Bolivia and a strong dictatorship in Indonesia, which was unable to control and implement policy in its far-flung territory.

GRSO organizing also accelerated after the overthrow of dictators in Bolivia, Brazil, Nepal and the Philippines. In Uruguay, half of the 92 GRSOs listed in a national directory were organized between 1984 and 1986, after the military dictatorship fell.

None of this is meant to overshadow the more obvious related factors fueling the rapid proliferation of GRSOs that began in the 1970s: the increased availability of international funding and a high level of unemployment among educated professionals. Other factors such as country size, level of development and religious heterogeneity may also affect the growth of civil society. The dominance of Islam has, for example, inhibited the development of an autonomous civil society in much of the Middle East. But the inability of most regimes to raise living standards in local areas and the continued depletion of productive and natural resources by power elites set the political stage for the increasing numbers of NGOs.
Despite the variations in government policies towards NGOs, de facto piecemeal collaboration between governments and NGOs is becoming increasingly common. Third World NGOs may have many comparative advantages over governments, including lower costs, strong grassroots ties, participatory and managerial experience and technical expertise. Yet, while the comparative advantages of Third World governments are not often actualized, it would be difficult for NGOs to implement land reform or devise intelligent macroeconomic policies.

Unfortunately, with the possible exception of Chile, there are few if any examples of government initiatives that build strategic development plans on previous NGO successes or that try to piece together the comparative advantages of governments and NGOs in local areas. Yet, NGO impact on governments may in the long run lead to the scaling up of successful NGO projects or processes. What happens within civil society therefore has the potential to reshape the political contexts that prevent governments from building on and learning from the creative energies of NGOs.

For their part, governments employ small but growing numbers of people who consciously work with NGOs to increase governmental legitimacy and promote sustainable development. They understand that to accomplish these goals, NGOs must become stronger. Even though these individuals are usually a minority within the public sector, they share similar objectives with the vast majority of those who work in the non-profit sector. Because both groups understand that empowerment is a win-win game, the slow, sometimes frustrating process of reforming government and government policies has already begun in some places. The next section focuses on NGO autonomy as the key variable in understanding the impact of these collaborations. It begins with a discussion of the relationship between autonomy and accountability and then explores the attributes and activities of NGOs that are likely to strengthen autonomy.

Accountability and Autonomy

Accountability has many meanings, including accountability to grassroots constituents, to donors for resource use or “strategic accountability” for the impact NGOs have on the wider environment. It might therefore appear that the more successful NGOs are in achieving multiple accountability, the less autonomous they become. Yet more areas of accountability may also provide them with greater room to maneuver. This is particularly true when NGOs strengthen downward accountability to the grassroots level. Although “most NGOs may be neither advocates of grassroots justice, nor opportunistic pretenders... the absence of accountability [to the grassroots] begins to make the likelihood of ineffective or illegitimate actions by an organization much more probable.”
Organizational autonomy, defined as the freedom to make decisions with minimal external constraints, has an interesting twist in the Third World context with regard to accountability. GROs must be accountable to, rather than autonomous from, their members even as they develop autonomous relationships with GRSOs that permit technical and financial support to continue. By the same token, a GRSO's autonomy from GROs would mean that the GRSO was not accountable and, therefore, not doing its job. Networks also need to be accountable to their member organizations while preserving their autonomy from donors and governments. The meaning of autonomy should thus be confined to upward relationships.

In Asia and Latin America, for example, there are thousands of GRSOs that have grown out of the ties that young dissidents established with GROs. Even in Africa, where GRSOs recently emerged in response to the availability of foreign funding, the idea of grassroots accountability is spreading.

**Five Keys to Autonomy**

Strong grassroots ties are therefore the first of five crucial keys to GRSO autonomy. Although grassroots ties may be more difficult to achieve in a repressive political context than under a democratic system, they may enable an NGO to survive until a more responsive government emerges. Two types of NGO networks have mass bases—horizontal GRO networks, sometimes called "social movements," and GRSOs that are vertically linked to GROs or other mass membership organizations, such as unions or political parties. In contrast, GRSO membership in a consortium or umbrella organization without direct grassroots ties usually has less impact on autonomy.

**Grassroots or Social Movements**

Grassroots networks have influenced policy in the past, usually over many decades, as in Kerala, where an organized peasant movement against the feudal system initiated in the mid-19th century, had a major impact over time. Today, regional grassroots movements and networks are having a far more rapid political impact.

Nowhere has GRO autonomy been more dramatically and effectively asserted than in the explosion of new and reorganized GROs emerging after the Mexico City earthquake in 1985. A network of 100 GROs, organized six days after the earthquake, refused an international proposal to provide food packages, and instead linked rural GROs directly to low-income urban residents. Mass marches pushing for expropriation of tenements succeeded, and tenant organization plans for reconstruction were adopted. Within one year, 48,000 new houses based on tenant plans were constructed, with tenants charged only the monthly cost of building. Another result of the protest was the creation of the National Forum for Effective Suffrage, which included GRSOs and political parties and pushed for honest voting in the 1988 elections. These events helped lead to the sea change in Mexican politics over the next 15 years.
Individual GROs can also have a collective impact by simultaneously engaging in individual problem solving and political protest. During the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, women in many city neighborhoods organized community kitchens to feed their families under acute conditions of economic hardship, functioning also as a spontaneous form of protest.

Grassroots networks, which are not formally organized, may also impact policy. For instance, uncoordinated but multiple urban squatter invasions have helped shape a kind of de facto government policy in Latin America for many years. In the past, some governments reacted violently and tried to displace squatters. However, this reaction has been gradually replaced by an acceptance of the invasion process as a safety valve on popular discontent.

More formally organized GRO networks greatly enhance the possibilities for individual GROs to become major political players. In Brazil, the Union of Indigenous Nations (UNI), successfully lobbied for protection of their land against developers during the writing of the new constitution in 1987. Votes in the constitutional convention showed that the tribes had built a great deal of support among their fellow citizens, even though the convention did not fully safeguard their land against mining interests and the repressive policies of FUNAI, the official “protector” of native Brazilians.

Whatever its origins, grassroots organizing to influence governments is growing on a global scale and frequently focuses on a mix of environmental and resource issues. Massive environmental movements in India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Kenya, Brazil, Ecuador and several Central American countries derive their support from lower-class constituencies or indigenous peoples, and are sometimes linked with other groups. Mass protests against limestone quarrying in India’s Doon Valley were joined by hotel owners concerned about the detrimental impact of quarrying on tourism. All but six mines were closed, and villagers continue to work on reforestation. In Ecuador, 148 indigenous communities organized a protest march of thousands leading to legal title to three million acres in the biodiverse Pastaza area of the Oriente.

Vertical Networks: GROs and GRSOs

Networks combining vertical and horizontal ties among GROs and GRSOs are among the most effective organizational relationships for maintaining autonomy and achieving sustainable development. In his study of 25 NGOs, Uvin found that “leaders that were politically well connected before they began working within community-based organizations often constitute cases of enlightened charity, while those people who, through their successful work with the poor, became a political force to be reckoned with, are rather cases of ‘people’s power.’” For example, women lawyers working for the Colombian Association for the Study of Population discovered a dormant provision in the law that led to domestic workers receiving social security benefits, including medical and dental care.
To be sure, GRSOs often face difficult potential trade-offs between increasing professionalization and grassroots ties. Diaz-Albertini suggests that this trade-off can be avoided when advocacy is buttressed by an upsurge in grassroots participation, so that professionalization becomes “organic.” This occurs, for example, when GRSOs are created from the bottom up by federations of GROs that hire their own professionals.

By the same token, GROs and their networks benefit from ties with professional advocates that can build autonomous linkages with governments. Bratton has shown how an extensive, successful GRO network in Zimbabwe, the Savings and Development Movement, was actually too “bottom heavy.” Over 5,000 women’s savings groups had only a few professionals to represent them at the national level and failed to influence government.

GRSOs can also help GROs build ties with governments, which were initially intent on creating their own local organizations. In 1972, the Colombian government established fishing cooperatives, ignoring the indigenous organizations of people living along the coasts and rivers. At that time, fishing communities were dependent on middlemen and were suffering from water pollution and unlawful appropriation of swamps. After a group of university students and professors founded a GRSO to sponsor regional seminars with the fishermen and help them dramatize their plight on videotape, the Ministry of Agriculture set up an advisory commission that included representatives of fishermen. Through the Association of Colombian Artisanal Fishermen (ANPAC), regional centers were established to provide training and to organize grassroots exchanges.

Moreover, when GRSOs link GROs to international donors, both types of NGOs are better able to influence governments, as well as the donors themselves. Brazilian GRSOs working with the Catholic Church in the 1970s raised money, initiated a massive popular education process in the Amazon, collected information from the government and other sources, and shared it with GROs and the environmental movement in Europe and the United States. GRSO and GRO representatives came to the United States and pressured the European Community and the World Bank to stop supporting the Brazilian government. In 1987, the World Bank stopped providing money for the government’s Amazon project. By 1993, the Brazilian Forum on Environment and Development included 1,000 NGOs, resulting in the official establishment of 14 extractive reserves covering three million hectares—about one percent of the Amazon. Although the Amazon continues to burn, awareness of its role as the commons for the planet has increased.

Although GRO-GRSO-government connections are potentially powerful vehicles for grassroots empowerment, some of the contextual factors outlined above, such as political culture, may override any positive influence on government policies. In Colombia—in contrast to most other Latin American countries—GRSOs tend to adapt to a political culture in which major political parties rarely assume roles that challenge the existing distribution of power and resources.
**GRSO Networks**

Ties between GRSO networks and GROs are often indirect, through member organizations. This can make GRSO networks less politically influential than GRO networks or individual GRSOs. Although such networks sometimes mold policies that affect them directly, such as registration procedures, they do not often challenge government policies. The Nicaraguan Federation of NGOs, for example, is a forum for policy discussions but lobbies only on issues relating to the role and status of nonprofit organizations. Other GRSO networks spend so much time as government or international donor subcontractors that building autonomy through strengthening member cooperation is neglected. On the other hand, some GRSO consortia are using the experience of their members in grassroots organizing as a tool to enhance autonomy and influence. The Voluntary Health Association of India, for example, has had an influence on government policy through its sophisticated use of the media and its strong ties with grassroots health workers all over the country. Joint governmental-nongovernmental commissions on the environment, set up in some countries after the Rio Conference in 1992, also build on the grassroots connections of GRsOs. In Lesotho, the National Environmental Council includes local development associations, as well as GRsOs such as the Lesotho Planned Parenthood Association.

Moreover, a survey of 19 NGO consortia in 16 African countries concluded that having a coordinating body has helped create an enabling environment for NGOs in countries where NGO-government relationships have been difficult. In Swaziland, for example, the Coordinating Agency of NGOs (CANGO) was asked by the government to organize NGOs during a drought and has helped formulate new government policies on health and women. In Tanzania, GRsOs have developed a joint strategic plan to more effectively engage in policy actions.

The second factor tied to autonomy is a clear, self-conscious organizational commitment, which often emerges, surprisingly, as contacts with governments increase. In Brazil, where government contacts have been increasing for many years, “NGOs have raised the banner of autonomy more visibly.” In Mexico, post-1968 grassroots movements have been far less willing than previous popular movements to accept incorporation into official structures, even though interactions with the state are frequent, according to Rubin. A third key is diversified financial support that enables NGOs to be independent of any single donor, including the government. Although raising private money domestically probably has the strongest positive impact on autonomy, in most Third World countries philanthropic traditions are weak, domestic fundraising is in its infancy, and there have been few attempts by GRsOs and their networks to lobby for changes in tax policy that would favor individual donations.

Financial support from foreign donors initially enhances autonomy in relation to governments, allows GRsOs to exert political pressure and helps them retain independence when governments want to hire them as subcontractors. Yet foreign ties, particularly to
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a single donor, can also reduce autonomy. In Kenya, for example, a consortia called Voluntary Agencies Development Assistance (VADA) accepted USAID’s goals rather than its own. The National Farmer’s Association of Zimbabwe had more influence on government than VADA, because it had technical assistance from the University of Zimbabwe and diversified financial support from a mass base. GRO networks that charge dues or engage in for-profit enterprises and barter among villages have built-in sources of financing that enhance autonomy, even if these activities cover only a portion of their expenses.

Other GRSO networks may make up for the lack of a mass base by developing strong technical, managerial and strategic knowledge about development—a fourth key to autonomy for the network or its member organizations. Knowledge acquired by GRSOs can be both scientific and technical on the one hand and policy-related on the other. Usually, technical expertise emerges from field research. In Bangladesh, for example, BRAC’s field-tested knowledge of poultry production was, by 1990, replicated in 7,400 villages by both the government and other GRSOs.

Although collaborative research between governments and GRSOs is still uncommon, it is sometimes sponsored by specialized GRSO networks that help member organizations share research. A Bolivian network called UNITAS strengthened its own ties with the Instituto Boliviano de Tecnologia Agropecuario (IBTA) so its member organizations could transfer technologies to the government, set the research agenda and collaborate in research trials. In Brazil, the Instituto Brasileiro de Analises Sociais e Economicas (IBASE) compiles a monthly analysis of government policies written by 20 to 30 representatives of GRSO members. This critical evaluation is distributed to 3,000 institutions, including many in government.

Collaborative research with underpaid government field agents often requires social as well as technical skills. SOPRODER, while working with the Mapuche tribe in Chile, found that plowed-under wheat seedlings reemerged with more vigor than weeds. However, because the government agent was providing free herbicides, SOPRODER suggested that half of each field be treated with the old method and half with the new one, to avoid offending him until the positive results of the organic method became obvious.

Whether based on laboratory or field experience, technical research is sometimes used for direct policy advocacy, instead of being filtered through grassroots development projects. GRSOs in Sri Lanka wrote their own economic and environmental appraisal of a proposed coal power plant in Trincomalee before revealing that the government team that drew up the proposal had not even visited the area.

GRSOs and GRSO networks also pressure governments to fund the social research needed to change government policy. In India, the Self-Employed Women’s Association pushed the government into creating a commission on the self-employed that traveled to 18 states and sent out a million questionnaires to GRSOs and other voluntary organizations. Many of its specific policy recommendations to protect the self-employed and raise
their standard of living were adopted.\textsuperscript{74}

More often, however, as with technical knowledge, it is field experience that strengthens policy implementation and management. In Colombia, the Centro de Cooperación al Indígena (CENCOIN) has ties to 70 communities that provide it with a unique flow of reliable data on local resources, problems and solutions that have informed both government and nongovernmental assistance.\textsuperscript{75} In India, the Center for Science and Environment, Myrada, AVARD and Lokayan have worked together to develop expertise in involuntary relocation that has been utilized by the government.\textsuperscript{76} Such policy changes differ from government acquiescence to special interests, since governments often act logically in the national self-interest once pertinent information is made available to them.\textsuperscript{77}

Social or organizational innovations developed through grassroots experience have a potentially broad impact. The Chilean government, for instance, is adopting the small-farmer grain-marketing practices developed by a GRSO.\textsuperscript{78} And in Indonesia, the government established a village cooperative unit for transmigration projects based on the methods developed by Bina Swadaya, a GRSO that emerged out of GRO networking. One result was that thousands of GROs gained access to government family planning and agricultural programs.\textsuperscript{79}

When GRSOs are continually challenged from below, they are more likely to develop flexible, responsive managerial strategies that offer alternative approaches to service provision; this makes them attractive to governments, since demonstrations accompanied by participatory evaluations can lessen potential government risk. However, new managerial approaches are not necessarily easy to scale up. Human Settlements of Zambia (HUZA) convinced the government to train local women as staff and build a conservation strategy based on local community involvement. With a staff of only 18, however, HUZA had difficulty scaling up and training the government to deliver services to half a million squatters in Lusaka.\textsuperscript{80}

Moreover, it is more difficult to communicate participatory innovations than technical expertise to policy makers. Within a Chilean GRSO, this has led to tensions between staff members working under government contract, who have little time for social promotion, and those working under foreign donors committed to the participatory approach.\textsuperscript{81} Social or managerial innovations developed by NGOs are more likely to influence policies on redistributive social issues, such as agrarian reform, when governments are already committed to major change. Technoserve-Peru persuaded the Banco Agrario that it should provide credit to individual farmers through its service cooperatives, thus strengthening these organizations.\textsuperscript{82}

While enhancing their own understanding of participatory management at the grassroots level, GRSOs must also manage themselves, thus providing governments with demonstrations of effective service provision.\textsuperscript{83} BRAC in Bangladesh, for example, with a "reputation for effective development work, professional management and careful control of money," has had a number of significant impacts on official development policies.\textsuperscript{84}
Conversely, according to Tandon, an observer of the Indian scene, "internal weakness—lack of procedures and financial controls—fuel [government] harassment [of NGOs]."  

Given governments’ need to reach larger and larger populations, even a well-managed GRSO or GRSO network may have less policy impact than GRO networks. The ability of some GRO networks to scale out is impressive and immediately visible. In Bihar, India, where 8,000 women are members of women’s dairy cooperatives, government decision-makers became convinced that the women’s cooperatives were more productive and less vulnerable to corruption than other cooperatives and switched their technical support.  

In addition to technical expertise and community-based implementation knowledge, strategic “lessons learned,” have the potential to inform development efforts everywhere, including those of governments. In contrast to scaling up an existing development project, “strategic knowledge” can be replicated in diverse settings. Examples of strategic knowledge include the need for beneficiaries to “buy in” to projects through their own decisions, training GROs in data collection and research, combining women’s education and family planning and the powerful impact of revolving loan funds focusing on women’s solidarity groups. The microcredit movement spearheaded by the Grameen Bank inspired not only the government of Bangladesh but also the governments of other countries, such as Mali and Nigeria.  

The fifth key to autonomy is staff experience in training government professionals, which enhances the self-confidence and autonomy of GRSOs while propelling them toward continuing active contacts with governments. In Barbados, for example, the Caribbean Conservation Association trained “environmental economists” to advise both governments and industries throughout the Caribbean.  

In India, the Ministry of Agriculture’s watershed management program coordinates NGOs that train government and other NGO staff to evaluate social impacts and diagnose organizational problems.  

Government initiatives may also be the result of earlier contacts with GRSOs or with international donors. During the 1970s, a group of social scientists working in Bangkok at the Asian Development Institute (sponsored by the UNDP) undertook studies of grassroots movements and established close ties to PROSHIKA, a Bangladesh GRSO, and to the government-sponsored Rural Action Project (RAP) in India. This international network persuaded the Sri Lankan government’s Ministry of Rural Development to initiate training and action research in participatory rural development. Development workers trained government officials to train village-level change agents.  

Despite the problems inherent in communicating what works internationally—or even within one country—technical, managerial and strategic knowledge gained through grassroots experience has influenced governments worldwide. For example, GRSO and government respondents in a Thai survey mentioned many policy approaches adapted from GRSOs, including basic-needs indicators, the use of schools as centers for village development, the concept of beneficiary participation and the linking of secondary-
Clearly, this growing influence also depends on a strong commitment to research as well as field demonstration in many countries. As Velarde writes about Peru: “The vast majority of the intellectual production of the country is provided by the Centros [GRSOs], their experience and personnel. Research themes, seminars, and debates... are in the center of the national debate... [and] many themes and alternatives launched from the “centers” appear... in the rhetoric of the government.”

However, in writing about Colombia, Arbab observes that, “the effort is usually carried out in an atmosphere of frantic action with little analysis of the underlying assumptions... especially when NGOs also become the salesmen of their own ideas, further burdening over-extended institutions.” Another potential pitfall is that with success, NGOs may become state substitutes, as governments avoid their social responsibilities. A Bolivian NGO leader observed that NGOs must “constantly evaluate the effect of our role as state substitute. Wherever [the] organizational bases for meeting the needs of the population have been developed, responsibility for these... programs is transferred to the public sector.” Another pitfall is that government policies can undermine even the scaled-up, successful efforts of NGOs. For example, when the V. P. Singh regime in India waived outstanding dues for farmers with good repayment records, many borrowers withheld repayments, “with the result that the banks are now wary about lending to the poor.”

Most important, all NGOs are not created equal; indeed, they range from highly effective and committed to poorly organized, dependent and opportunistic. However, NGOs that are autonomous and highly effective tend to use their ties to governments to help redefine policies shaped by their national political contexts and to create new political spaces and opportunities through government contacts. Even though the more capable and knowledgeable NGOs are likely to be autonomous and politically influential, the shift to government implementation on a wider scale will be slow and extremely difficult. Governments can be capricious and inconsistent, with one ministry undoing what another has supported.

Conclusions

What lessons, then, are important to international actors wanting to support the positive interactions of governments and civil societies in the developing world as a way of strengthening democracy, supporting sustainable development and reducing the number of failed states? Based on this analysis it is important to:

- Take account of the wide range of political systems, cultures, governments and differences within governments in formulating policies to support and strengthen what people are already doing.
• Understand that it is what happens within civil society, broadly defined, that enhances self rule at the local level and therefore engages people in improving their own lives and ultimately their governments.

In thinking about potential positive connections between national civil societies and global governance two other recent global trends are particularly important to acknowledge:

• Domestic and transnational organizations or social movements can unite to bring pressure on governments, as Risse has shown in a number of cases involving human rights.97

• NGOs focusing on development and human rights have been around for at least 30 years, but in the last decade a small but growing number are focusing more directly on democracy and may be increasingly crucial in creating effective national and international governance. In Argentina, for example, Poder Ciudadano trains local communities in public deliberation, works on voter registration and is the Argentine chapter of Transparency International.98

Both national and international policies should therefore not only focus on building partnerships with the most capable and autonomous NGOs, but also on learning from and supporting the strengths of existing indigenous organizations. Given the immensely complex task of balancing grassroots empowerment and accountability with organizational autonomy and government ties, it is inconceivable that any Northern donor or international NGO could begin to match the diversity of experience and knowledge already extant within the Third World.99 Rather, foreign donors need to support strategic networking that strengthens the autonomy of NGOs, particularly in their relationships with governments. If individual professionals within Third World governments also come to view autonomous NGOs, not as threatening but as empowering the government to be both more effective and more accountable, they too may significantly advance the processes of democratization, sustainable development and, ultimately, global stability.100

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1 See, for example, United Nations Development Program, 2002.
4 Yearbook of International Organizations: Guide to Civil Society Networks, 5. Edited by the Union of International Organizations Publications, Munchen; K. G. Saur,2002-2003): 35. Many of these are international trade associations rather than INGOs focusing on development, human rights, etc.
6 Victor Perez Diaz, The Return of Civil Society: The Emergence of Democratic Spain (Cambridge,
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Some GRSOs in Brazil have close ties to the Worker's Party, and there are some partisan GRSOs in Peru.


Tandon.


Krasner (1985) describes this in terms of a distinction between "relational" politics and "metapolitics."


This may be less true at the beginning of basic-needs implementation. The Nepalese government policy of the late 1970s requiring university students to spend a year in a in a rural village was revoked because the graduates were becoming too critical of the government. Many graduates
founded GRSOs or entered government and began to change its policies in small but subtle ways.

34 Julie Fisher, *The Road from Rio: Sustainable Development and the nongovernmental Movement in the Third World*. (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1993.) 78. This may be changing in Vietnam. Vietnamese NGOs were legalized in 1991 and must adhere to the Communist Party program. However, NGOs are proliferating and "increasing their autonomy from state-controlled mass organizations to which they are loosely affiliated, emboldened by state policy of Doi Moi (Renovation)."

33 Fox and Hernandez, 189


38 Ibid., 76-80.


40 Precisely because some NGOs are far more autonomous than others, overall characterizations of relationships with governments should be treated with caution, even within one country. Some observers, for example, have characterized relationships between Indian GRSOs and the government as dependent; yet as long ago as 1983, a field-study found all degrees of dependence and independence in twenty organizations surveyed in the field. "Terry Alliband, Catalysts of Development: Voluntary Agencies in India. (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press1987).


42 Ibid.


46 Albert Hirschman, *Journeys toward Peace: Studies of Economic Policy in Latin America* (Bologna: Twentieth Century Fund, 1963) 259. Albert Hirschman made this point long before GROs had become so widespread in the Third World. He noted that, "a final characteristic of the violence we have met in our studies is that it is not only protest and pressure on problem solving authorities, but also direct problem solving activity. The Colombian peasant satisfies his craving for a piece of land when he squats and the Northeastern drought refugee solves his immediate problem of hunger when he loots food stores in the coastal cities as does the Chilean worker when he wins higher wages through strikes. Hence, these individual decentralized actions not only signal a problem to the central decision makers, but they reduce the size of the problem that remains to be solved by the authorities."


49 However, although there is a serious pollution problem from petroleum extraction in the Oriente, the agreement did not include mineral rights. In 1995, CONAIE worked out a system with government and the companies to protect the Pastaza from petroleum spills during exploration and extraction. Ron Weber, "Local Leaders, Global Heroes," *Grassroots Development* 19, no. 1 (1995) 41-42.


51 Uvin, 936.

52 Inter-American Foundation (1993).


56 Ibid.


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60 Valerie Miller, presentation at the symposium Shaping the Policy Debate: The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in International Development, (Cambridge, MA: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 22 April 1993).

61 Some consortia are enormous. CODE-NGO in the Philippines, for example, represents 30,000 NGOs through smaller networks.


67 International debt swaps are more likely than direct foreign assistance to empower GRSOs in relation to both governments and donors. For example, as part of a debt swap, the Nature Conservancy helped promote the Bolivia National Environmental Trust Fund, which has both government and GRSO representatives on its board. Michael, Bratton, "Poverty, Organization and Public Policy: Towards a Voice for Africa's Rural Poor," unpublished paper (1989) 23, 32.


70 Remarks by Jose Pinelo in Carlos F. Toranza Roca, ed. La Relacion entre Estado y ONGs (La Paz, Bolivia: Contesu, Ildis, Cooperacion Holandesia 1992) 122.


72 Clark, 97.


78 Farrington and Bebbington, 6.


80 Many Christian churches in Africa are acquiring “grassroots support functions,” Fisher (1993) 6. Jenkins points out that African churches established school systems during the colonial era and have a long-accepted practice of collecting financial donations from their members. Jenkins (1994) 91.


86 Karen McGuiness of the Ford Foundation, presentation for Association for Women in Development (Washington, D.C., November 1989). In spite of this increased awareness, however, the women’s co-ops still did not have access to artificial insemination services provided by the government.


88 Farrington and Bebbington, 159.


90 Maniemai Tongsowate and Walter E. J. Tipps Coordination Between Governmental and Non-
Local and Global: Governance and Civil Society

Governmental Organizations in Thailand's Rural Development Monograph no. 5 (Bangkok: Division of Human Settlements Development, Asian Institute of Technology 1985).


93 See, however, Salamon et al's (1999) comparative international study, 13-15, which provides little support for this assumption.

94 Theunis, 241.


96 Yet as Meyer points out, “Entrepreneurship should not be confused with opportunism. While much of the NGO literature has defined ‘opportunism’ as activity motivated by financial gain, opportunities for financial gain can stimulate beneficial entrepreneurial activity.” True opportunism, defined as “self-interest seeking with guile,” conceals the truth, Carrie Meyer, “Opportunism and NGOs: Entrepreneurship and Green North-South Transfers,” World Development 23 no. 8 (1995) 1280.


98 Transparency International had 80 national chapters by the end of 1999. They often form alliances with other NGOs at the national level on issues of common concern. Galtung (2000) 36, 39. Poder Ciudadano is also a member of the Inter-American Democracy Network. See p. 2.

99 Fowler for example, argues that GRSOs must have the “ability to do, that is, to achieve stakeholder satisfaction, [and] the ability to relate, that is, to manage external interactions while maintaining autonomy.” (1996) 179.