

Strategic Management of NGOs in Developing Countries

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This literature review summarizes the knowledge in the field of strategic management of international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) operating in developing countries, based on the analysis of 161 books and articles published since 1980. The review yields five major themes: 1) relationships with donors, 2) relationships with governments, 3) NGO coordination, 4) NGO accountability, and 5) strategic impact of NGOs. The review reflects the growing complexity of the external environment and the challenges of strategic management. In response, NGOs have developed closer relations with UN agencies, strategic partnerships with host governments, greater inter-agency coordination and management, impact assessment, and shared learning systems. The review concludes with an evolving research agenda for addressing key issues confronting the strategic management of NGOs.

The last three decades have witnessed an enormous increase in the number, size, scope, reach, and focus of international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) operating in developing countries. From being marginal players thriving mainly on voluntary financial and human resources, NGOs have become central players in the development process, annually delivering billions of dollars of community aid from institutional and voluntary sources.

With the increasing size and complexity of NGO operations has come greater scrutiny by a variety of stakeholders (especially host governments and donors) and greater need for more sophisticated strategic management at the country and international levels. In fact, undertaking analyses of the trends in the NGOs' external environments and developing strategies for positioning the NGOs accordingly have become highly complex and onerous tasks with enormous consequences for these agencies' growth and survival. Noble intentions and compassion, long seen sufficient for volunteers to work with the poor, now need to be supplemented with solid management, finance, public-relations, communications, and diplomatic skills. These tasks are

further complicated by the highly fluid, unstable, and isolated environments in which NGOs frequently operate.

In order to increase the understanding of the major trends in the literature and to identify the gaps leading to a future research agenda, this article offers a comprehensive review of the literature on NGO strategic management, defined by the authors as *a process of analyzing the external environment, setting and adjusting long-term agency goals, obtaining resources, dealing with external threats and opportunities, evaluating progress towards overall goals, and reporting to critical stakeholders*. The following sections include a summary of the major findings of the literature review, an identification of the key themes, and the proposal of a future research agenda.

Methodology

The focus of this literature review is on non-governmental, nonprofit, not-intergovernmental, non-international treaty agencies that serve vulnerable groups by delivering human services and that are mainly operated by professionals and volunteers external to the target groups. Space limitations forced the exclusion of the following categories of nonprofit agencies: 1) religious organizations, 2) professional associations (e.g., AARP, unions, business forums, social clubs, alumni organizations), 3) intergovernmental organizations (e.g., UN bodies, the World Bank), 4) international organizations established by treaty (e.g., the Red Cross/Crescent Federation), and 5) community-based organizations. In addition, the following four categories of NGOs were excluded from the review because the authors already had an expertise in the area of human services and international development: 1) environmental NGOs, 2) human rights NGOs, 3) conflict and peace NGOs, and 4) governance/democracy NGOs.

The search focused on books and articles related to a variety of NGO strategic management issues and published since 1980, found using the Academic Search Complete database at the University of California library. The literature search yielded a total of 161 relevant articles and books on NGO strategic management. Based on this research, the following categories emerged:

- *Relationships with donors*: trends related to donations by bilateral and multilateral donors to NGOs, their impact on NGOs' policies and programs, and the extent to which NGOs have been able to influence donor policies and practices
- *Relationships with governments*: trends in the control and scrutiny of NGOs by host governments, the nature of their collaboration, and NGOs' ability to influence the policies of governments in developing countries
- *NGO Coordination*: trends related to the results of various efforts by NGOs to coordinate their activities nationally and internationally
- *NGO Accountability*: trends related to the increased numbers of calls for NGO accountability as a result of their growing size and strident advocacy and to the progress being made to develop accountability frameworks for NGO activities
- *Strategic impact of NGOs*: trends related to the impact of NGOs on implementing sustainable development programs and to the strategies related to the development and expansion of NGOs.

With the exception of *setting and adjusting long-term agency goals*, the categories emerging from this literature review reflects all aspects of the definition of strategic management noted above.

Relationships with Donors

The major focus of the literature on donor relations is the relationship between NGOs and the United Nations (UN), which funds NGOs through its specialized agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Funds (UNICEF). Mommers and van Wessel (2009) reviewed the growing relationship between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and NGOs in refugee-assistance programs with implications for current and future partnership-building initiatives. Ferris focused on the Global Humanitarian Platform that brings together donors, NGOs, UN systems, and Red Cross system to improve the operations of humanitarian programs globally (2007). In focusing on the changing institutional interactions between NGOs and the UN, Donini (1995) concluded that the relationship has undergone vast and positive changes in the last two decades, and Natsios (1995) explored the operational and policy perspectives and the NGOs' capacities to respond to ongoing challenges.

Alger (2003) reported that NGOs have become involved in virtually all issues on the UN agenda and participate in a variety of UN decision-making bodies. In fact, the involvement of NGOs in global governance is expanding at a time when financial restraints are severely limiting the capacity of the UN system to respond. Martens (2001) explored the significance of the relationships between NGOs and the UN as they evolve from adversaries to co-operative and productive partners. In studying the relationship between NGOs and UN bodies since the 1940s, Willetts (1996) and Weiss and Gordenker (1996) concluded that NGOs have considerable influence on the UN decision-making process but that NGOs have been less successful in making the UN less bureaucratic and more participatory. NGOs have also been increasingly involved in the implementation of the UN Millennium Development Goals campaign (Brinkerhoff, Smith, & Teegen, 2007). The increasing interaction among NGOs and the UN system in the form of increased funding, information, and access (Alger, 1999) is also reflected in the increase in the number of NGO applications for UN accreditation, which reflects the growing interest in collaboration with UN bodies (Martens, 2004).

A second area of donor relations addresses the relationships among NGOs and global economic institutions such as the World Bank and World Trade Organization (WTO). Zhengling (2004) found that the WTO has encouraged NGOs to participate in its policymaking and dispute settlement process as yet another way to protect the interests of poor countries. In contrast, Srivastava (2005) concluded that the success of NGOs in influencing the WTO has been limited as the WTO has focused on trying to co-opt a few NGOs to enhance its civil society credentials. Simmons (1998) noted the proliferation and growing power of NGOs and their impact on governments and multilateral institutions.

However, despite this noted proliferation, Nelson (2000), in reviewing the efforts of NGOs to influence the World Bank's economic policies, noted that examples of significant influence are difficult to find and proposed that NGOs need to develop and evaluate a practical model of policy change. Fox (1998) documented the attempts of NGOs to influence the World Bank policies and projects in different countries and the challenges they have faced. Rizzo (2009) reviewed NGOs' efforts to challenge the optimism of the 2008 World Development Report by the World Bank regarding the benign impact of unregulated agribusiness investment on

poverty reduction and put forward a convincing alternative that calls for protecting the interests of small farmers. In looking at the rhetoric and reality of the World Bank's desire to work with NGOs, Nelson (1995) concluded that the Bank's top-down approach to development has not changed significantly despite its increased engagement with NGOs. In contrast, Bräutigam and Segarra (2007) found that the efforts by World Bank's officials to encourage government borrowers by including NGOs as development partners has led to the adoption of more strategic partnership practices. Similarly, the examples of projects funded through NGOs by the World Bank (1990; 1996) reflect a growing interest within the Bank to work more closely with NGOs.

The literature also provides evidence of the role played by donors in facilitating the expansion of NGOs. Reimann (2006) described the rapid growth of NGOs in non-Western countries after the Second World War as a consequence of increased funding, political access, and interest in NGOs during the 1980s and 1990s among donor states and intergovernmental organizations. With the increasing demand for relief in war zones, Duffield (1997) noted the rising trend in the subcontracting of public functions (e.g., conflict resolution) to private firms or NGOs.

However, the trend of increased funding by donors has declined somewhat as some donors reduce their funding to NGOs. Smillie and Helmich (1999) analyzed the trends of more than twenty donor countries and found a significant reduction in funding for NGOs. Lewis (1998) noted the growing trends among official bilateral or multilateral development donors of sending funds directly to Southern NGOs and of using contracts to fund Northern NGOs. Moore and Stewart (1998) contended that the boom in official aid funding NGOs in the late 1980s and early 1990s ends with a shift in emphasis to the collective self-regulation of the organizational structure and procedures of NGOs in developing countries as a way to re-establish public confidence in the sector. As for Agg (2006), she presented a mixed picture of funding trends for NGOs and argued that this can lead to a reduction in their role rather than in their demise. Lewis and Sobhan (1999) explored the changing relationships between bilateral donors, Northern NGOs, and Southern NGOs, as the latter's competence and capacity have increased.

The increased number of conditions imposed by donors on recipients has limited the effectiveness of NGOs. Cumming (2008) explored the degree to which French NGOs are expected to increase their level of professionalization (similar to efforts in the French public sector) and the impact of this professionalization on NGOs' independence and effectiveness. Hulme and Edwards (1997) provided case studies from around the world documenting the manner in which increased donor funding leads to greater influence of donors on NGO structures and operations. Sadoun (2006) focused on the need to improve information on the flow of aid funding when donors use NGOs as intermediaries to reach local populations. The heavy reliance of NGOs on external resources has also made them less representative of and accountable to poor people and more financially fragile (Bebbington, 2005; Ghimire, 2006). The funding relationships between NGOs and European donors have impacted the quality and independence of NGO management and programs, especially the increased costs and time needed for reporting in compliance with the strategic objectives of donors (Wallace, 2003; Wallace Bornstein, & Chapman, 2006).

In summary, the literature on the relationships between NGOs and international donor organizations reflects two major trends: 1) while the linkages with the UN agencies are growing and becoming diverse, the capacity of NGOs to influence and engage with larger and more powerful multilateral institutions like the World Bank and the WTO is still limited, and 2) while funding from bilateral donors is being reduced, demands for accountability are increasing. Unfortunately, inadequate attention has been given to systematically comparing the policies of major donors (e.g., the U.S., EU, and UK governments) in order to identify major trends in the amounts of funding, the conditions of accountability, and the quality of the outcomes. The rela-

tionships with large private foundations (e.g., the Bill and Melinda Gates or the Ford Foundations) have also not been adequately assessed.

Relationships with Governments

As the scale of the NGO programs and related advocacies grows, the relationships among NGOs and host governments have become progressively more adversarial. The various governments' legislative responses to the higher profile of the NGOs' advocacies range from open hostility and suspicion to indifference (Mayhew, 2005). Gordenker and Weiss (1995) described the experiences of NGOs challenging host governments while continuing to work in partnership with these governments. Cleary (1997) documented how NGOs create space and deal with governmental pressure in countries with authoritarian regimes. Similar challenges face NGOs working with African governments (SCIAF, 1990; Sandberg, 1994; Igoe & Kelsall, 2005). In Southeast Asian countries, where rapid economic growth and authoritarianism have gone hand in hand, NGOs have raised questions about human rights, environmental, and equity issues. NGOs have faced harassment in the form of restrictions on travel and on the establishment of new NGOs (Heyzer, Riker, & Quizon, 1995). Jarvik (2007) noted that as NGOs play a greater role in civil society affairs (displacing traditional governing institutions in the process), they inadvertently strengthen terrorists, warlords, and mafia dons, thereby hindering the West's ability to mobilize allies to participate in the war on terror.

In contrast to adversarial relationships, NGOs have been able to create space for themselves by entering into collaborative relationships with certain governments. Gubser (2002) and Néfissa, Abd al-Fattāh, Hanafi, and Milani (2005) described the impact of NGOs on national and international relations in the Middle East as regimes face greater international pressures for political reform. Throughout the world, NGOs have also been able to develop collaborative relationships with governments in the areas of sustainable agricultural development and research (Bebbington & Thiele, 1993; Farrington, 1993; Farrington & Bebbington, 1993).

NGOs have adopted different strategies to enhance their effectiveness in dealing with governments. Najam (2000) discussed the costs and benefits of the following NGO strategies for dealing with governments: 1) cooptation (winning over through inducements), 2) complementarity (working separately but with similar objectives), 3) cooperation (working jointly), and 4) confrontation (working in opposition). Holmén and Jirström (2009) suggested that NGOs can increase their influence with governments by becoming more representative and better coordinated. Pick, Givaudan, and Reich (2008) illustrated how NGOs could create successful partnerships with governments in ways that meet the priority needs of the target population while protecting the NGOs' core values. Klinken (1998) discussed the trend of retired civil servants starting or joining NGOs in East Africa and the implications of that trend on the growth and independence of NGOs.

In addition to building and sustaining the relations between NGOs and governments, multiple theoretical frameworks can expand the understanding of these relationships. Using a Marxist Theory of the State, Demirovic (2003) compared NGOs in the South and North and found significant differences in the way NGOs are described in the media, their various forms of advocacy, and the degree of participation in decision making, based on the differences in the policies of the states. By extending the Sociological Institutional Theory and using evidence from South Asia, Thomas, Chhetri, and Hussaini (2008) found that the interrelations between NGOs and host governments are marked by tensions and conflicts and that both sides use accountability strategies in their conflicts with each other. Based on an analysis of the political impact of inter-

national NGOs operating in Central America in the 1980s, Macdonald (1994) argued that Critical Theory (a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole) provides the best guide for understanding the relationships between states and NGOs. Hirsch (2003) used basic concepts in the Theory of the State to analyze the processes of transformation experienced by states and NGOs in the international regulatory institutions, such as the WTO. By focusing on the renewed popularity of the state as a vehicle for development, Whaites (1998) analyzed the dangers of an imbalance between weak states and strong civil societies and the treatment of weak states as a development problem.

In summary, the literature reflects the challenges and restrictions faced by NGOs as governments attempt to exert control over them in response to their advocacy work and the capacities of NGOs to withstand such control by developing collaborative relationships with these states. The relationships between NGOs and nation states raise several interesting research questions: 1) when are governments more open to collaboration with NGOs and when are they more confrontational? 2) are these situations linked to the degree of democracy, development, stability, and openness in a country? 3) how do national legislative frameworks influence the accountability, legitimacy, organization, and vision of Southern NGOs and Northern NGOs? and 4) how do other stakeholders, such as donors and multilateral institutions, influence NGO-government relationships.

NGO Coordination

Despite the limited research on NGO coordination, considerable attention has been given to the coordination of emergency work, the scale of operations, and the need to respond quickly. The *Disasters* journal (2008) reported in its editorial on the cooperation between donors and NGOs in the promotion of rapid response donations during emergencies and on the need to raise awareness and promote exchange of experiences among donors in disaster situations. The expanding need for NGO coordination in international relief operations illustrates the problems confronted by humanitarian groups and how enhanced international coordination could improve the overall performance of NGOs (Bennett & Duffield, 1995).

Other examples of research on NGO coordination reflect specific challenges. For example, Buxton (2009) emphasized the importance of networking at the national- and regional-level to improve coordination in Central Asia and questioned whether NGOs can shift from their current positions on the periphery of global movements and debates when working within a region. Yanacopulos (2005) explored two patterns of governance in transnational NGO coalitions: 1) governance as a purposive activity (whereby organizations attempt to influence other political actors by the ways in which they frame and promote issues), and 2) governance as an explanatory framework (which aims to explain the changing strategic relationship between state and non-state actors in world politics). In analyzing the role of ever diminishing NGO funds in changing the nature of collaboration and coordination between Northern NGOs and their Southern counterparts, Malhotra (2000) called for more genuine partnerships between such organizations by altering the substantive roles and relationships of Northern and Southern NGOs. Surveying networks of NGOs, Fisher (1997) documented the significant impact of the flow of ideas, knowledge, and funding between donors, NGOs, and the people in developing countries upon international and national politics and local lives. Ritchie (1995) reviewed the birth, evolution, and infrequent death of international NGO coalitions that bring together like-minded people or organizations with those who hold sharply contrasting views.

Research on NGO coordination is still in its infancy. While some of the literature captures the dynamics of coordination in emergency situations, the work carried out by large NGO

networks (e.g., InterAction and OneWorld), on advocacy and information sharing about the policies of major Northern countries, host governments, and multilateral institutions, is poorly covered.

NGO Accountability

The growing capacities of NGOs to challenge the policies and practices of powerful political and economic forces have led to a strong and multi-dimensional backlash consisting of increased: 1) public criticisms (and in some cases physical attacks), 2) controls on operations and on access at the field level, 3) regulations for controlling NGOs, 4) questioning of NGOs' legitimacy and representativeness, and 5) calls for greater accountability. The literature features multiple techniques and strategies for improving the performance, transparency, and accountability of NGOs related to a wide variety of stakeholders (Edwards & Hulme, 1995, 1996; Jordan & Tuijl, 2006; Stillman, 2006, 2007a, 2007b). However, Jordan (2007) reported little consensus within the field of NGO accountability, pointing out that the existing approaches suffer from the following shortcomings: 1) giving higher priority to accountability to donors and governments than to beneficiaries, 2) increasing control rather than collaboration, 3) limiting understanding of the reality and context of NGO operations, 4) using unmeasurable or unrealistic goals, and 5) placing heavy cost and time burdens on NGOs. Lee (2004) analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the following NGO accountability approaches: certification, rating, infrastructure and management capacity, self-regulation, codes of conduct, and monitoring and evaluation, and concluded that approaches that ensure accountability to all stakeholders without imposing high cost and time burdens on NGOs are needed. Atack (1999), in discussing NGO accountability, argued that the legitimacy of developing NGOs depends on their effectiveness in contributing to a broadly accepted strategy for development that includes the involvement of the nation state.

Based on a review of the relationships between different stakeholders in the relief and development sector, Szporluk (2009) suggested that international NGOs should be accountable, above all, to the communities where they are implementing projects. Ebrahim (2003) examined how accountability is practiced by NGOs and identified three dimensions of accountability: upward-downward, internal-external, and functional-strategic. He observed that current accountability practices emphasize "upward" and "external" accountability to donors while "downward" and "internal" mechanisms remain comparatively underdeveloped. In exploring some ethical issues involving Northern and Southern NGOs, Townsend and Townsend (2004) identified the following problems undermining accountability: negative outcomes of the audit culture, lack of transparency, weak legitimation, and misrepresentation by donors and NGOs. Walsh and Lennihan (2006) noted that many of the tools developed to strengthen for-profit businesses can be applied to NGOs (e.g., written objectives, customer focus, process and systems approach, continuous improvement, and change management processes).

Cavill and Sohail (2007) observed that the accountability of international NGOs (INGOs) falls into two categories: practical accountability (related to inputs, processes, and outputs) and strategic accountability (related to their mission) and found that INGOs tend to use a number of quality-assurance mechanisms to achieve practical accountability. They argued that if INGOs are to achieve their missions, there need to be more strategic forms of accountability, geared towards fundamentally changing those social, economic, and political structures that contribute to the persistence of poverty. NGO accountability and legitimacy are also affected by the organizational environments and the dominant models of practice that affect organizational forms and activities (Lister, 2003).

In summary, the calls for greater NGO accountability have appeared from all directions, some of them based on a genuine desire to improve the operations of NGOs and others based on political motivations. However, comprehensive and generally accepted approaches to promote NGO accountability have yet to emerge. NGO accountability frameworks are needed to 1) enhance NGO performance and transparency, 2) empower NGOs to deal with politically motivated attacks, 3) ensure accountability to a variety of stakeholders (including governments, donors, trustees, general public, and, most importantly, beneficiary communities), 4) identify relevant accountability criteria for specific NGO activities (e.g., formation and registration, fund-raising, operations, and ultimate exit from a community or a country), and 5) provide benchmarks for criteria that ensure objective, effective, and meaningful accountability.

Strategic Impact of NGOs

The Effectiveness of NGOs during Emergencies

The increasing effectiveness of NGOs in saving lives during major emergencies is well documented. Focusing on the impact of NGOs in the field of disaster management, Stoddard (2006) reviewed several cases where the information coming from NGOs shaped the decision of the U.S. government to respond and scale-up humanitarian activities. Hilhorst (2002, 2003) reviewed NGO initiatives to raise the quality of humanitarian assistance and noted the significant improvement in coordination and timely response during emergencies over the years. Cumming (2005, 2009) described the roles of French NGOs (since the creation of Médecins Sans Frontières in 1971) to intervene rapidly and effectively in major humanitarian crises. Whaites (2000) reviewed the conflicting pressures on NGOs to respond quickly and to undertake advocacy early during emergencies, as part of the overall humanitarian ethic of saving lives. Twigg and Steiner (2002) reviewed the importance of NGOs' people's personal networks, which can help well-placed individuals promote significant innovations and enhance the speed and quality of humanitarian responses.

Theoretical Perspectives in Measuring the Impact of NGOs

The efforts to analyze the impact of NGOs can benefit from several theoretical frameworks (Tvedt, 2002). Srinivas (2009) reviewed the need for management and development studies to assess the impact of NGOs, and Wilson-grau (2003) supported the use of strategic risk management to enable NGOs to maximize their potential for success. Mitlin, Hickey, and Bebbington (2007) suggested that the success of NGOs in promoting genuine alternatives has usually depended on working in conjunction with the political programs of social movements and/or the strategies of states that effectively foster national development. Fox (1998) advocated the use of an ethnographic approach to understanding the impact of large INGOs. Cameron (2000) provided a framework to support the NGO goals of poverty eradication and social justice by drawing on the concepts of transition costs, transaction costs, and uncertainty in institutional economics in order to help NGOs support the poor.

Impact of Globalization on the Effectiveness of NGOs

Another trend in the literature addresses the impact of globalization on the work of NGOs. Salm (1999) described the strategies of the Northern international relief and development organizations as they seek to change the internal organizational culture in order to become more

effective. The changing context for international NGOs can initially lead to a rise in the role of NGOs (McGann & Johnstone, 2005) but can also lead to incremental change, global market brands, and/or international social movements (Michael, 1999). Given the changing tensions, tradeoffs, trends, and strategies posed by globalization, NGOs risk reducing the impact of their work if they expand without maintaining quality (Dichter, 1999). Trivedy (1999) discussed the role of the NGOs in a globalized world and their ability to deliver alternative development models and strategies needed to deepen and broaden their impact. For example, the internal and external challenges of globalization call for a strategy of enhanced global NGO cooperation and network building (Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001). Similarly, examining the impact on NGOs of the major socio-political changes brought about by globalization (Tandon, 2000) as well as the relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs and the sustainability of NGO operations (Eade, 2000) is also important. Finally, Pishchikova (2006) explored the impact of NGOs that operate domestically and transnationally.

The Impact of NGOs' Advocacy

While, the rights-based approach to advocacy work has enhanced the service delivery impact of NGO work (Nelson & Dorsey, 2008; Najam (1996), its impact needs to be examined more closely and systematically before a greater proportion of resources is invested into advocacy programs (Anderson, 2000; Lutabingwa & Gray, 1997). In focusing on understanding the nature and effectiveness of advocacy campaigns, Chapman and Fisher (2000) highlighted the importance of grassroots mobilization in bringing about sustained policy change, while Thompson (2004) reviewed the role of NGOs in enhancing equity and social justice through advocacy activities. However, Latin American NGOs are also moving away from the social mobilization role that characterized their work in the past (Alvarez, 2009). Reviewing the role of NGOs in building a more equitable global order, Grzybowski (2000) urged NGOs to find better ways to link their aims, analysis, actions, and ethical values throughout their different areas of work (Eade & Ligteringen, 2001; Rugendyke, 2007). Smillie (1997) noted that NGOs are in a period of fundamental transition in the delivery of development assistance, as they increase their capacities and assertive advocacy activities.

Critiques of the Effectiveness of NGOs

While reviewing the findings related to the failure of NGOs to deliver development programs as promised, Kalb (2006) noted that NGO success requires an economy with a functional national state and private sector. Barber and Bowie (2008) provided the following six prescriptions for improving NGO effectiveness: 1) educating donors, 2) coordinating with each other, 3) prioritizing consistency, 4) paying adequate salaries to national staff, 5) building national capacity, and 6) rationing donor visits. Studying the NGOs that follow in the footsteps of the missionaries that cooperated to Europe's colonization of Africa, Manji and O'Coill (2002) suggested that NGOs need to support an emancipatory agenda in Africa by disengaging from their paternalistic role in development. Joseph (2000) contended that development NGOs are losing their capacity to 1) engage in critical analysis and development of global solutions, 2) react to or seize political initiatives, 3) situate themselves on the cutting edge of those social and political processes in which new approaches and potential solutions might be found, and 4) link democracy with development.

In investigating the notion that NGOs target aid better than government agencies, Nunnenkamp, Weingarth, and Weisser (2009) found that the allocation of self-financed NGO aid is

strikingly similar to the allocation of official development aid. While highlighting the many achievements of NGOs, Muir (1996) concluded that NGOs should not be seen as a panacea and that other actors (such as the UN and governments) need to play more active roles. Suzuki (2000) contended that NGOs need to develop a clear mission and focus to avoid failure, especially since the distinctive values common to many NGOs give them a particular advantage over other types of organizations (Hailey, 2000). Edwards and Sen (2000) argued that NGOs operating as explicitly values-based organizations have a crucial role to play in supporting change through their activities, constituency-building work, and organizational praxis. Given the importance of NGOs in the developing world, identifying the causes of their successes and failures is essential (Heins, 2008; Clarke, 1998; Smillie, 1995).

Assessing the Global Impact of NGOs

Fowler (1999), undertaking an evaluation of the organizational development needs of African NGOs in a period of increased external turbulence, concluded that European NGOs need to find good partners to implement effective projects. The range of innovative methods used by NGOs includes grassroots development, program management, external relations management, and encouragement of the political and economic development of countries in the midst of the failure of markets and governments (Boyer, 1990; Dibie, 2008; Meyer, 1999; Makoba, 2002; and Shivji, 2007).

As he reviewed the impact, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness of NGO projects, Edwards (1999) found that making a difference in the livelihoods and capacities of poor people depends on NGO successes in fostering autonomous grassroots institutions and linking them with markets and political structures at higher levels. In evaluating the impact of NGO work in four countries, Riddell and Robinson (1995) concluded that while NGOs have shown remarkable progress, issues remain in terms of reaching out to the poorest, operating within the small scale of NGO work, and controlling the rising costs of project work. Similar issues are found in evaluating the strategic impact of NGO projects in urban areas in developing countries (Hall, Hart, & Mifflin, 1996) and in evaluating the impact of NGOs in Latin America (Macdonald, 1997; Eversole, 2003; Molyneux & Lazar, 2003; Carroll, 1992). When evaluating the work of Norwegian NGOs in six countries, Tvedt (1998) identified several distinguishing features of NGO approaches that set them apart from other development actors, including a community-based approach, a focus on capacity-building, and a long-term approach. Fisher (1994) discussed the significance of indigenous NGOs to population control in developing countries and their success in influencing government policy.

Increasing the Global Impact of NGOs

Given the perceived success of NGOs in addressing poverty at the community level, exploring the possibility of increasing their impact through a variety of strategies has been of interest. Fisher (1998) identified the role of the institutional sustainability of grassroots organizations in their ability to expand their operations. Geographical local expansion and increased national and international advocacy provide the two major strategies for expanding the impact of NGO operations (Lewis & Wallace, 2000; Fowler, 2000; Edwards & Hulme, 1992; Clarke, 1991). Charlton and May (1995) argued that the expansion of project-related work provides the best opportunity for enhancing the impact of NGOs in developing countries. Bebbington (2004) viewed the geographical dispersion of NGOs as a strategy to deal with the uneven spread of poverty caused by unstable economic growth in developing countries. Uvin and Jain (2000) noted the importance of increasing the impact of NGOs without drastically increasing their size. NGOs can

enhance the sustainability of their work by increasing incomes, controlling costs, and improving marketing strategies (de Santisteban, 2005; Cannon, 1999).

Organizational Learning, Management, and Capacity Development among NGOs

Fowler (1999) reviewed the role of emerging NGO research centers to support the organizational development of NGOs and concluded that their longer-term success will depend on the availability of funding from donors and NGOs. Given the often unacknowledged disparity between organizational mission and actual practice, the interest in bottom-up organizational learning as a normative framework for international NGOs is growing (Power, Maury, & Maury, 2002; Bloch & Borges, 2002). Noponen (1999) described a unique system designed to build the capacities of NGO program staff to think critically and make strategic changes through a participatory monitoring and evaluation system. The system, called an internal learning system, is designed to build key management skills through a linked set of training activities. In reflecting on an NGO action research project on social learning as an appropriate process for promoting change, Buchy and Ahmed (2007) uncovered structural and cultural issues inherent to collaborative work between academics and practitioners: the differences in organizational cultures, time horizons, and level of analysis, for example.

Padaki (2007) identified the basic concepts underpinning human resource development within NGOs and argued that the failure to develop the staff carries great risks. Evidence of the link between organizational development and NGO brand management is also growing (Quelch & Laidler-Kylander, 2006). In examining the 'Global Impact Monitoring', the evaluation framework used by Save the Children, Baños Smith (2006) highlighted the importance of building a learning culture within organizations which provides sufficient resources and incentives for innovations. Smillie and Hailey (2001), evaluating the work of South Asian NGOs, highlighted the importance of leadership, strategy, management practices and organizational structure in enabling NGOs to deliver on their missions, while Dabhi (2008) reviewed the impact of organizational culture on organizational development and effectiveness.

In reviewing issues of internal management and NGO performance, Roberts, Jones, and Fröhling (2005) offered an analytical framework for understanding the complex relationships between international and grassroots NGOs in terms of managerial issues, cultures, structures, and projects. Key organizational development functions, identified in the literature to determine the capacities of NGOs, include values instigation, strategy development, organizational behavior, organizational structure, governance and accountability, impact assessment, and shared learning and human resource issues (Edwards & Fowler, 2002; Chadha & Jagadananda, 2003; Lewis, 2001; Roper, Pettit, & Eade, 2003).

Despite the considerable literature on the strategic impact and performance of NGOs, several significant gaps still exist, especially around the lack of consensus on the methods for evaluating NGO impact and growth potential and the lack of cross-referencing and cross-fertilization of ideas needed for knowledge development.

Conclusions

As the external environment of NGOs has become increasingly more complicated, senior NGO managers need stronger analytical tools for understanding and dealing with this complexity. These strategic management tools relate to managing relationships with donors and governments, improving accountability and coordination, evaluating and improving impact and perfor-

mance, and dealing with internal management and organizational learning issues. However, the small but growing literature on strategic management suffers from limited empirical research, lack of cross-referencing and cross-fertilization of ideas among researchers, and limited number of researchers with sustained interest and research.

Figure 1 (See p. 21) highlights the main findings and gaps in the literature. The five boxes reflect the five main subsections of the paper. On the left side of the figure are the key factors impacting the capacities of the NGOs: relationships with donors (Box 1), relationships with governments (Box 2), NGO accountability (Box 3), and NGO coordination (Box 4). On the right side are the strategic impacts of NGOs (Box 5). For example, the trends in funding contribute to the inability of NGOs to expand their work. Similarly, the lack of widely used tools for NGO accountability contributes to the difficulty of measuring NGO performance.

However, these relationships are bidirectional, and the strategic impact of NGOs can affect the other four factors. For example, the increasing success of the NGOs' advocacy activities has affected the NGOs' relationships with donors and governments, contributing to reduced funding and increased calls for greater accountability. The four factors on the left are also linked to each other in a variety of ways. For example, the reduced funding and the increased restrictions from governments call for greater NGO coordination, while donors and UN agencies are often in a position to mediate the increasingly tense relationships with governments.

These multi-directional linkages and the gaps noted lead to the identification of some critical issues for a future research agenda, agenda that could be pursued by NGO management academics, relevant associations of academics, and NGO coordination groups. These issues are prioritized below in relationship to the major sections noted in Figure 1.

Relationship with Donors

The lack of sufficient information on the trends in the funding levels reached and in the conditions imposed by major donors (including large foundations) is a major gap in the literature. At the same time, the extent to which NGOs have been able to affect donor policies is also of interest. Thus, future research needs to focus on the following issues:

- Priority #1. The trends in the policies of major donors, including large private foundations, and their implications for the quality of NGO work
- Priority #2. The extent to which NGOs have been able to influence donor practices
- Priority #3. The donors' views of the NGOs' effectiveness and the impact of those views on funding levels and conditions decisions
- Priority #4. The extent of the coordination among donors and its potential to improve the effectiveness of the aid sector

Relationship with Governments

While relationships between NGOs and governments have become tense, NGOs have also succeeded in developing strategic relationships with some governments. Further research on the following issues can help senior managers identify strategies for improving relationships with host governments:

Priority #1. The complexity of NGO work in countries exhibiting authoritarianism and hostility towards civil society

Priority #2. The strategies for enhancing the collaboration of NGOs with host governments

Priority #3. The impact of NGOs' performance on host government policies

Priority #4. The role of national legislations on the right to associate

NGO Accountability

The calls for NGO accountability are based on professional and political concerns. To ensure that NGO accountability focuses on improving the performance of NGOs, the following issues need further research:

Priority #1. The development of comprehensive frameworks for NGO accountability and evaluation

Priority #2. The analysis of the impact of NGO performance on the accountability debate

NGO Coordination

The increasing complexity of the external environment calls for increased coordination in order to develop coherent and coordinated responses and resources. Further research is needed on the following issues to improve the effectiveness of NGO coordination:

Priority #1. The role of the major NGO coordination bodies (e.g., BOND for international development, InterAction), the extent of coordination among them, and the overall gaps in addressing the main issues relevant for NGO work

Priority #2. The impact of coordination activities at country levels, and the factors that facilitate and impede such coordination

Priority #3. The linkage between NGO impact factors and the NGOs' ability and willingness to coordinate

Strategic Impact of NGOs

The increased capacity of NGOs can help in dealing with the external challenges that they face today (e.g., decreased funding). Further research on the following issues can help NGOs:

Priority #1. The strategies to expand, replicate, and widely share successful and innovative practices by individual NGOs

Priority #2. The strategies for reducing costs and increasing focus on the poorest

Priority #3. The measurement of the effectiveness of advocacy work

Priority #4. The strategies for enhancing organizational management capacities

Priority #5. The development of new organizational forms and structures to deal with the growing trends of globalization and complexity

Cross-Cutting Themes

Many of the research priorities raised under the different subsections could also be researched together as a result of their interrelated nature:

Priority #1. The role of NGO coordination in enhancing effective NGO accountability.

Priority #2. The role of NGO coordination in influencing governments.

Priority #3. The role of donors in encouraging collaboration between NGOs and governments

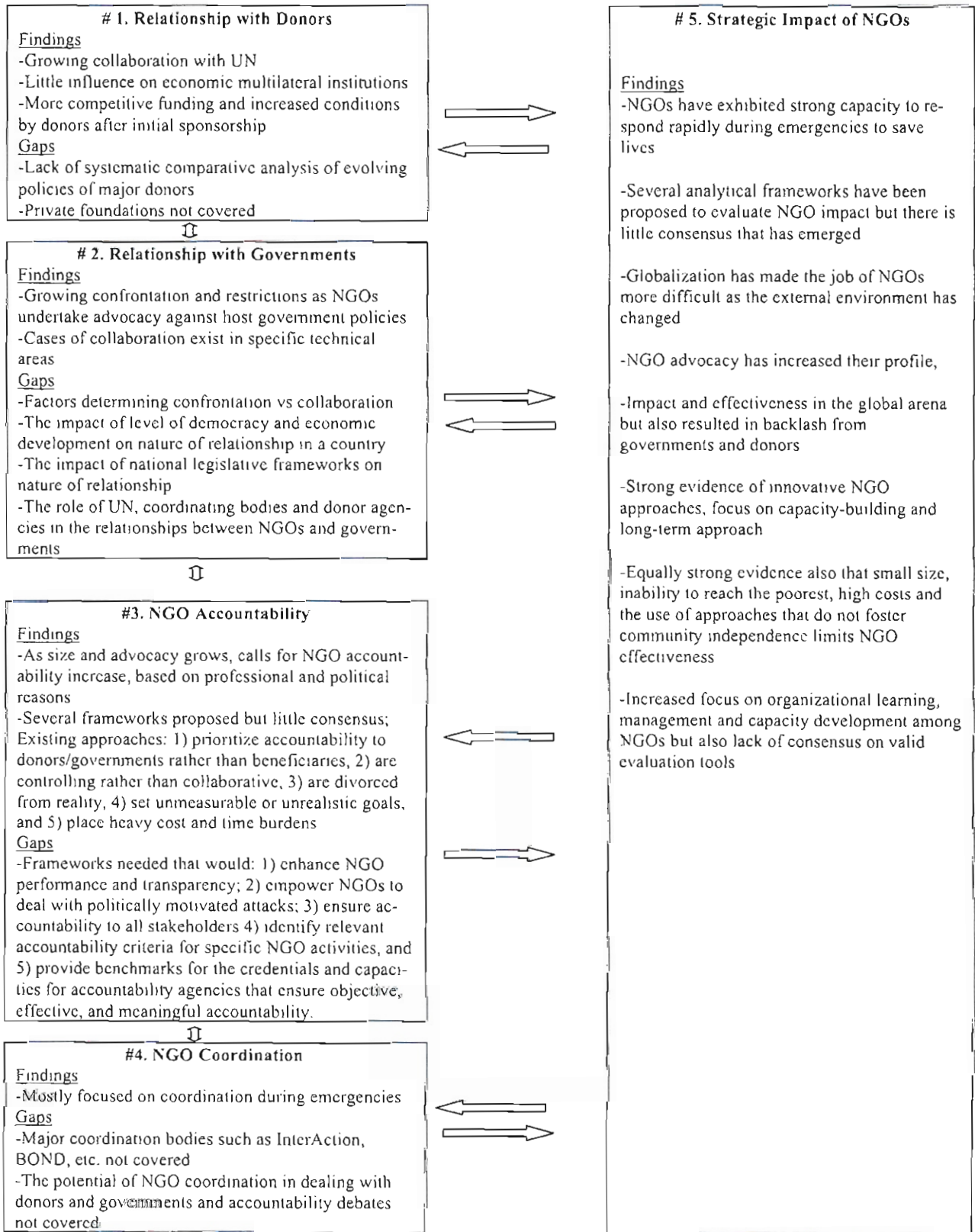


Figure 1. Strategic management issues among NGOs.

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