

THE ACCESS OF SELF-HELP NETWORKS TO THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

International Meeting of Rambouillet (France)
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Institute of Research and
Debate on Governance

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These proceedings were written in French and English with the collaboration of Nicolas Haeringer, IRG associated expert.

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INTRODUCTION: GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS AND SELF-HELP NETWORKS

In March 2009, the Ford Foundation and the Institute for Research and Debate on Governance (IRG) invited members from eleven different self-help networks and community-based/grassroots organizations to participate in a joint seminar. Its aim was to come to a better understanding of how groups of this kind structure themselves and how they engage in global advocacy. The seminar was also meant to strengthen the groups themselves, through the sharing of experienced practices, successes and failures.

This document, which begins with a presentation of each network represented, is an account of this process of exchange of experience. It tries to test theoretical elements against the hands-on experiences that the participants discussed; and ends with some proposals for future common work. It is accompanied by a documentary film, which presents the main features of grassroots/community-based organizations and self-help networks.

This seminar followed on a first meeting, organized by the IRG and the Ford Foundation in 2007, which focused mainly on the advocacy strategies of professional NGOs. Over the last decades, this specific type of organization has indeed managed to engage deeply, and in many cases efficiently, in the elaboration of public policies in transnational public arenas. They have benefited from forums opened by international institutions, and have also met public opinion demand – as well as offered opportunities to citizens eager to engage on transnational issues. Thus, NGOs, along with campaigns, social forums and transnational social movements now stand out as key entities in policy making at transnational level. They also manage to make local, national or regional decisions.

Nevertheless, civil society is very diverse. It is composed of actors of very different types, sizes, organizational cultures and resources. The dynamics of transnationalization haven't cancelled or even blurred those differences: "globalization" doesn't necessarily lead to the uniformization of political actors. "Global civil society" actors experience transnational restructuring and handle policy making at global level in different ways. Moreover, there is not one single experience of globalization, as it affects all tiers, and reaches individuals and collectives in their different contexts.

Grassroots organizations and self-help groups have remained less visible than big NGOs. Unlike NGOs, self-help groups and grassroots organization members are directly affected or concerned by the issue they address. They organize at a very



local scale, in order to face the most mundane and concrete challenges (access to medication and services, sanitation, struggle for recognition, advocacy, etc.).

Being “support groups,” they are built upon peer-based solidarity. Their members provide help to each other. They start by being (and often remain) non-professional and informal entities. Thus, when planning their actions these groups don’t distinguish between beneficiaries and (service) providers: their members contribute to the service, the support or the care and are, at the same time, their beneficiaries. Hence, proximity is not only geographic, but arises from their respective positions within the same community . In other words, the absence of distinction between providers and beneficiaries is not only a consequence of the groups’ small scale and low resources (which would prevent them from hiring professionals), but also happens to be an organizational choice.

People form these groups spontaneously: they are neither NGO driven, nor organized by or through traditional and local power structures. Instead they emerged from a self-managed process. Thus, even if they lack resources, autonomy is one of their common traits. Getting bigger (in scale, size and resources) through structuring transnational networks (or by joining existing networks) grassroots organizations and self-help groups confront a major challenge: they must achieve transnationalization, networking, capacity building, advocacy, etc. without giving up their founding principles, even if “grassroots global network” or “self-help transnational networks” sound at first like oxymorons.

PRESENTATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Four main strands of issues were represented at the seminar: marginalized urban populations; grassroots women organizations; people living with HIV/Aids; ethnic minorities and indigenous movements.

Marginalized urban populations

Streetnet

Streetnet is a global federation of organizations from the informal sector. It is now composed of thirty five affiliates from thirty countries, including a network based in the United States of America. The federation was officially launched in 2002, after a two-year process of regional meetings and alliance building. Thus, Streetnet's recruitment is indirect: individuals cannot join the network. It is composed only of trade unions, cooperatives or associations from the informal sector. It aims to promote and protect the rights and interests of street-vendors, market-vendors and hawkers, share information on critical issues that affect them, contribute to a better understanding of the informal sector; and advocate at different levels.

Streetnet works in close cooperation with WIEGO (Women in Informal Economy: Globalizing and Organizing), a "global research policy network". WIEGO focuses on the working poor, especially women, from the informal sector. Through surveys and research, WIEGO sheds light on the informal sector and provides statistics and knowledge on its main features.

PARTICIPANTS AND VIDEO CONTRIBUTORS



Pat Horn
(Streetnet)



Lucia Fernandez
(WIEGO)

International Alliance of Inhabitants (IAI)

The IAI is a global network of associations, social movements, cooperatives and communities of inhabitants. It also brings together tenants, homeowners, the homeless, slum dwellers, indigenous populations and “people from working class neighborhoods”¹. It was formed in 2003, by some members of another inhabitants’ organization, HIC (Habitat International Coalition), who strive for more autonomy and self-organization.

The IAI presents itself as a social movement and aims to be the “*voice of the voiceless*.”² It explicitly connects urban exclusions with neo-liberal policies. THE IAI intends to help inhabitants to have a voice globally, as, in its opinion, the future of cities is for a large part dependent on the decisions of international organizations such as the World Bank.

Like other grassroots organizations, the IAI intends to develop experience-sharing, in order to empower its members and strengthen residents. It also focuses on social struggles: the IAI is the promoter of the “zero evictions campaign.” Through alerts, international solidarity and social mobilization, the initiative tries to strengthen inhabitants fighting against evictions. However, the IAI also intends to promote alternatives and to participate in “exploratory and conciliation” processes at city level, in order to find alternatives to evictions.

The IAI has launched its own Urban Popular University, to conduct research activities, training and exchanges of experience.

PARTICIPANTS AND/OR VIDEO CONTRIBUTORS



Cesare Ottolini



Michael Davies



Yves Cabanes
(Urban Popular
University)

Shack/Slum dwellers international (SDI)

SDI was created after South-African organizations of slum dwellers had the opportunity to meet some Indian counterparts, back in 1996. After a series of horizontal learning and exchange meetings between urban poor from South-African settlements and pavement dwellers from Bombay, both the Indian and the South-African groups started to reach across borders to their neighboring countries. SDI now gathers local organizations that have formed federations at city or national level in twenty-eight countries from the global south.

SDI is composed of “saving schemes” – that operate more as a tool for mobilization than as a way to create wealth. SDI is meant to be a concrete answer to international policies that affect the urban poor: by building a “*force from below*” and by embedding

1. IAI's website <<http://www.habitants.org>>.

2. *Idem*.

policies in their context, it seeks to change (or reduce) “*pressure coming from the top.*” SDI focuses on “*offering solutions*”: it strives for dialogue and negotiations with the public authorities.

In order to guarantee its members autonomy over time, SDI has created its own fund, the Urban Poor Fund International.

PARTICIPANTS AND/OR VIDEO CONTRIBUTORS



Davious Muvindi



Nico Keijver



Joel Bolnick

People living with HIV/Aids

ICW: International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS

ICW is a UK-based international network that was created in Amsterdam in 1992, at the 8th International Conference on Aids, where grassroots activists felt they were misrepresented. It is run “*for and by*” women with HIV/AIDS.

ICW focuses on UN and other international conferences. It provides a space to make sure that grassroots women will be represented at conferences and will speak “*with a unified voice.*” Its advocacy and expertise is based on participatory research and is peer-oriented: ICW organizes training (e.g. for *public speaking*), and provides guides, calendars of events, etc.

Membership is individual and free of charge. More than 6,000 women participate in the networks – each of them reaching up to a dozen other women.

PARTICIPANTS AND VIDEO CONTRIBUTORS



Lilian Mworeko



Gcebile Ndlovu

WORLD / US Positive Women’s Network

Women Organized to Respond to Life-threatening Diseases (WORLD) started in 1991, when an HIV positive woman decided to break her isolation and address the lack of gender-based information on the epidemic in the US. She started off with a newsletter (sent out to 200 other women) and set up education and support retreats.

WORLD is an answer to the absence of a female-based approach to the epidemic. It also refuses to narrow HIV down to its medical implications. On the contrary, it focuses on its social dimensions.

Along with retreats and newsletters, WORLD organizes training on advocacy and has a “peer-to peer speakers bureau.” WORLD is based in the San Francisco bay area. Noting the lack of a gender-based approach to the epidemic all over the United States of America, and in order to scale up its action, WORLD was involved in launching the US Positive Women’s Network.

PARTICIPANTS AND/OR VIDEO CONTRIBUTORS



Naina Khanna



Waheeda Shabazz

NEPWHAN

The Network of People living With HIV/AIDS in Nigeria (NEPWHAN) is the umbrella to 500 Nigerian support groups. The first groups were created in 1997, eleven years after the first case of HIV was officially diagnosed in Nigeria.

At that time, NGOs had to provide most, if not all, prevention, care and treatment services, as the government was denying the reality of the epidemic. Thus, people living with HIV were socially isolated, when not excluded: “*at that time, everyone was carrying out their care on their own. We started identifying a few people living with HIV. When they came together, they decided to have a national voice, and a face.*” In the fight against stigmatization, the help of NGOs and international agencies was crucial for NEPWHAN.

NEPWHAN strives to empower support groups, engages in advocacy for “comprehensive” prevention and services and fights for a broader availability of ARV drugs. Over time, NEPWHAN has managed to build sound contacts with the Nigerian government and to take its advocacy beyond the borders of Nigeria.

PARTICIPANTS AND/OR VIDEO CONTRIBUTORS



Pat Matemilola



Gloria Asuquo

Grassroots women

GROOTS

Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood (GROOTS) was created in 1989. Twenty community leaders came together and decided to launch the network in order to ensure grassroots women's participation in UN conferences. Four years before, at the Third UN World Women's Conference in Nairobi, they had started the process. GROOTS has twenty-three members in eighteen different countries (including Northern America and Europe).

However, GROOTS' agenda doesn't only focus on global advocacy. It also aims at promoting local solutions and initiatives; and at supporting grassroots women in their search for long-term partners.

GROOTS explicitly promotes intercultural dialogue and helps its members to engage in initiatives across borders, casts or tribes. It has four thematic programs (governance, HIV/AIDS, Caring community development, and Community Resilience and Recovery.)

PARTICIPANTS AND VIDEO CONTRIBUTORS



Sandra Schilen



Esther Muiiru

WLUML

Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) was launched in 1984. After a series of trials that ended up denying women rights “*in the name of laws said to derive from Islam*”, nine women formed the network. They intended to break the isolation of women “*living in countries or states where Islam is the state religion, (...) states with Muslim majorities as well as those from Muslim communities governed by minority religious laws.*”³ While facilitating communication, the network offers opportunities for international solidarity whenever women face exclusion, oppression and/or violence. WLUML “*aims to share information and analyses in order to demystify diverse sources of control which dominate women’s lives.*”

There is no formal membership, but “*networkers*” (women, but also men, who receive information sent out from other networkers) and “*active networkers*” (actively involved in the different programs of the network, as well as in its coordination).

PARTICIPANTS AND VIDEO CONTRIBUTORS



Samia Allalou



Aisha Shaheed

3. <<http://wluml.org/english/about.shtml>>

WEAP

The Women’s Economic Agenda Project (WEAP) was created in 1982. Based in California, it aims at defending “*the underprivileged and the hardworking people of California*,” through protest and advocacy. The first principle in WEAP’s demand for economic justice is to break isolation and fatality, and to show that poverty is the result of oppression and domination.

WEAP is dedicated to building a transformative people’s movement to eliminate poverty, and to demand a new social contract based on human rights. It hosts the California arm of the national Poor People’s Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC). Among its multiple methodologies is the human rights strategy of documenting poverty as an economic human rights violation.

WEAP has launched “truth commissions.” Inspired by the South African “Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” it aims to spotlight poverty and make human rights violations clearly visible.

PARTICIPANTS AND/OR VIDEO CONTRIBUTORS



Ethel Long Scott and Portia Anderson

Katosi Women Development Trust World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishermen (WFF)

The Katosi Women Development Trust is a network of eleven Ugandan support groups. It covers two sub-counties and reaches more than two hundred women. It aims to improve their living conditions and facilitate their initiatives and the self-management of their lives through micro-credit, capacity building and sanitation. It strives to help women to take initiatives and manage their economic, social and political development in rural areas. The Katosi Women Development Trust runs five different programs: a micro-credit scheme; a capacity building initiative; a sanitation and hygiene program; a program on sustainable agriculture and development; and an initiative on environmental protection.

The WFF aims at upholding human rights and social justice for fishermen and their families. It also intends to bring international attention to “*some of the more egregious actions against fishermen and fishing communities*”. It was launched in order to enable fishermen around the world to make their voices heard in international arenas: for its organizers consider that decisions made at the global level directly affect their communities and livelihood.

PARTICIPANT AND VIDEO CONTRIBUTOR



Margaret Nakato

Ethnic minorities and Indigenous People

International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests

The International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal People of the Tropical Forests was created in 1992, in Malaysia. It is the umbrella to national or regional organizations from Asia/Pacific, America and Africa. It strives for the recognition of both indigenous rights and territories. It stands as “*a response to a hundred years of continual encroachment and colonization of our territories and the undermining of our lives, livelihoods and cultures caused by the destruction of the forest.*”⁴

It was launched in order to ensure direct indigenous participation in UN conventions on climate change, biological diversity and desertification – i.e. conferences that impact the lives and livelihoods of indigenous people.

PARTICIPANTS AND VIDEO CONTRIBUTORS



Estebancio
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4. From the Alliance’s charter <http://www.internationalalliance.org/charter_eng.htm>.

THE ORIGINS OF THE NETWORKS

The brief presentation of participant networks shows that grassroots organizations and self-help groups share common ground for “going global” – i.e. for forming transnational entities. Most of them intend to **ensure their members’ direct participation in transnational arenas** – be it a UN conference, a World Social Forum, or an informal forum where global policies are being shaped:

Our aim is to ensure that women living with HIV/Aids are meaningfully involved at the levels where decisions are made. We realized that women living with HIV were not represented at the levels where policies were being made. Some of us were invited to international forums, UN conventions, etc. And we saw that the people speaking there for us didn’t represent us. They didn’t have the experience we have. Yet, our representation at the levels where decisions are made is still very limited. But we try to ensure that women living with HIV/Aids are meaningfully involved. By meaningfully, we mean that we want to have access to services, prevention, care treatment and support in a way that is relevant for both our lives and identities.

(**GCEBILE NDLOVU**, International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS - ICW).

We started talking about what a tragedy it was that there was a tendency within the women’s movement to speak for and about poor women in forums where there were no organized leaders of poor women speaking for themselves on their own issues.

(**SANDRA SCHILEN**, GROOTS).

Our aim is that inhabitants carry their own destiny, not only in their neighborhoods, not only in their territories, but also at the global level.

(**CESARE OTTOLINI**, International Alliance of Inhabitants).

Back in the 1990s, there was a set of UN conventions on climate change, on desertification, on issues that directly affect indigenous people. We as indigenous people realized how important it was for us to have a common perspective and bring it into the negotiations. And yet, there was no organized voice of indigenous people. At that time, the only way we had to get involved was to be invited by an NGO, to go as members of other organizations. So we asked ourselves: how do we intend to participate? Is it relevant for us to participate within the framework of an NGO? Or should we take part on our own, with our own perspective? So we got together, and decided to form the Alliance, so that we could bring our own voice there.

(**ESTEBANCIO CASTRO DIAZ**, Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples from the Tropical Forest).

The origin of the network is from a meeting in 1995 in Québec. Representatives in the meeting realized that the needs of fishing people and communities were not well taken care of. The World Forum of Fishermen and Fish Harvesters (WFF) was created to give a space to people in these communities, so that they could review the ideas or issues that affect them. Because the decisions about the issues that affect the people in the communities are made at the global level.

(**MARGARET NAKATO**, World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers).

Sharing the same concerns, these organizations and groups have reached the transnational level in different ways. Some networks have grown out of contacts between grassroots organizations that experienced the power and worth of cross-national exchanges and decided to push on. This is the case for SDI: *“The very origin of the work was not international but intra-national. It was links between networks of the urban poor from one country connecting to another country. There was no international advocacy agenda,”* reports Joel Bolnick. Indeed, SDI started to grow as a transnational network, only after South-African slum dwellers participated in a first series of exchanges with Indian organizations, at the end of Apartheid:

Over time, the Indians began to replicate their experience in neighboring countries and shifted to South East Asia. At the same time, the South-Africans started to move across their borders into other countries, eventually moving all the way to East Africa. Shortly after, in conjunction with the Indians, they jumped to West Africa and then to Latin America

(**NICO KEIJVER**, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

Other networks were created precisely with the aim of offering a transnational space to existing organizations:

Streetnet started as a global space for organizations that were already there. We didn't start something local and then go global. We identified many organizations around the world and set up Streetnet to give them a space where they could be involved jointly in an international organization. Of course, some of our affiliates were very new when they joined Streetnet. Others had been going for a long time, but they had no international voice.

(**PAT HORN**).

In many scenarios, transnational networks have been aiming at creating a permanent, yet loose, organizational frame for international solidarity – i.e. to support local struggles through international mobilization; as well as to create opportunities for constant horizontal exchanges.

Networkers, whatever their activities in their own countries, are connected to one another, in order to warn each other of cases of injustice.

(**SAMIA ALLALOU**, Women Living Under Muslim Laws).

We've moved to actually promoting the knowledge, the effective experiences and the abilities of grassroots groups to transfer their good practices and to transfer their advocacy in policy-making processes to one another. We have built an entire network of support.

(**SANDRA SCHILEN**, GROOTS).

Breaking isolation, fighting against invisibility

Indeed, in order to achieve collective organization, all groups have to break invisibility. The exclusion and injustices their members suffer from make them socially invisible. And their invisibility is, at the same time, a cause and a consequence of their daily experience.⁵ Public institutions and authorities do not acknowledge them as legitimate “actors”. Thus, they appear as being “collateral victims” of housing policies, international negotiations on tropical forests, economic growth, health policies, etc.; dumb victims, as they are absent from the forums where these policies are being made.

Thus, organizing collectively is in itself a challenge, an objective and a political statement. It is a “*fight for the switch*,” aimed at “*lighting the projector*” on isolated and excluded groups. Hence, claims and actions don’t only strive for (better) redistributive policies: their authors refuse to be confined to the role of service beneficiaries. Grassroots activists also claim recognition. Becoming an actor – and being acknowledged as such by institutions at any scale (as well as by other civil society actors) is a first and important aim.

GROOTS stands out for not being an organization where staff and other people are speaking for themselves, but rather for creating a space for grassroots voices to take center stage.

(SANDRA SCHILEN, GROOTS).

To break isolation and shed light on their situation, grassroots activists affirm their identity – as indigenous, homeless, HIV positive; or, more generally, as the “*voiceless*” or “*have-nots*.” Their activism consists in seeking to reverse stigma and turn it into the base of their identity as political actors.

NEPWHAN came into existence in 1998, when a few people living with HIV/AIDS came together and decided they should have a national voice and a face. Because of stigmatization, it was difficult to bring people together, especially people with high skills. Stigma is a major barrier. A lot of the time people don’t want to speak about what we’re doing... even members from our own network. So having our voice heard is really challenging.

(PAT MATEMILOLA, NEPWHAN).

Groups affirm their identities and define themselves through the affliction they suffer from – the punning of “positive” in *US Positive Women’s Network* is a good example of how groups can turn stigma around into a source of collective identity:

While other organizations and other issue arenas or stakeholders often look at skills and expertise, our entry point is our identity: we identify with the problem, and we want to be part of the solution. Organizations from our sector often look at us as beneficiaries of services... We’re not perceived as experts, as actors, even if we’re sure that we have something to contribute.

(WAHEEDA SHABAZZ, US Positive Women’s Network).

5. On “invisibility”, see Beaud, Confavreux and Lindgaard, *La France invisible*, La Découverte, 2006. The following quotes are from the book.

We're the ones who know what it means to live with HIV. We started because all of us, positive women living in the US, were really finding that we didn't have an organized voice. Women speaking about HIV in the US simply didn't look like us. They didn't look like the epidemic anymore: the face of HIV has changed a lot over the last years, but our own advocacy community has not really recognized and acknowledged these changes.

(**NAINA KHANNA**, WORLD/ US Positive Women's Network).

In fact, this explains why these groups don't confine their aims and actions to technical support or to peer-based services but explicitly and intentionally enter public forums.

The Alliance was created by people from all over the world who decided to get together to carry the voice of inhabitants. They said: "We have the right not to be only users or clients, but to be recognized as the builders of the city. We need our own network." And it was not meant "to go it alone," but to be able to speak out at the same level as others on issues that affect housing.

(**CESARE OTTOLINI**, International Alliance of Inhabitants).

Reporting injustices

Peer based solidarity

The group's most concrete task is to provide support and organize peer-based solidarity and services: by mutualizing their energies and skills, members can face their problems with more accuracy and, eventually, efficiency than if they remain isolated. Coming together creates a leverage effect all groups acknowledge clearly:

The process should not hang on me only. I should hand it over to the next person, so that other people can also take the responsibility to pass it on... We understood that our voices were not enough to convince authorities to offer us land. We needed a collective voice, and money. And for that, we've discovered that it is very important to group together, to share our problems, and discuss how we could find solutions to them. For us, it is better to get a million people saving one dollar than to get a millionaire coming and putting the money on the table. Because the millionaire, he will also tell us how to use the money. But money is not important. It is about building people.

(**DAVIOUS MUVINDI**, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

We thought that by coming together, we would have a better response to the HIV epidemic and we would be able to advocate for better participation, equal rights, etc. in the general community.

(**PAT MATEMILOLA**, NEPWAN).

Linking local struggles with global challenges...

Opting for collective organization goes beyond the need to provide a relevant and efficient support. Creating a self-help group or a grassroots organization is a way for individuals suffering from exclusion, injustice, diseases, etc. to break with fatality and, often, with shame. As reported by a WEAP member, "*people are ashamed of being poor*" and tend to consider their situation as "*a personal failure*." The same occurs with people living with HIV/Aids: they suffer stigmatization – i.e. "*people blame other people for being sick*" (Waheeda Shabazz, US Positive Women's Network).

As soon as they refuse to consider that their situation results from fatality or personal failure, groups start describing their members' situations as being unjust. They state the reversibility of the situation, and point to the consequences of policies (or the absence of policies) to explain the injustice they suffer from. Movements of people living with HIV/AIDS will for instance put the stress on the social dimension of HIV rather than sticking to a medical approach. HIV then appears not as the consequence of personal carelessness, but as having socio-economic determinant factors:

In the US, HIV prevention has been predicated on a behavioral model: that is, if you change your behavior, you won't get HIV. That is just not true for everybody. But it is particularly not true for women in the US. We're not talking about behaviors. Because we know that HIV/AIDS has other causes, like... structural and social injustices. This is what we dedicate our work to: addressing the related issues. HIV is a symptom, it's not a problem. It is the positive proof of social and economic injustices, and socio-economic disparity.

(**NAINA KHANNA**, WORLD, US Positive Women's Network).

HIV manifests itself where you see poverty, it manifests itself where you see domestic violence, it manifests itself where you see single heads of households. HIV is a social and economic disease. If a community gets sick from drinking the water, you don't blame the community and say: "Hey, you should choose another community and only then drink the water." We treat the people, then treat the water (that is a structural intervention). We have to stop blaming people for having HIV and do whatever we can to ensure that they have access to the life saving treatments they need. That is a structural intervention...

(**WAHEEDA SHABAZZ**, US Positive Women's Network).

... in order to reframe the causes and effects of injustices

It requires the reconstruction of causal chains, i.e. to connect distant political actors (for instance an international institution and slum dwellers) and show how their political choices are responsible for the exclusion of others. There, transnational entities are a key resource: in many cases, the two ends of the chain can be very distant (in time as well as in space) and can, at first sight, have no apparent connection. Indeed, transnational networks can quite easily show up global responsibilities and their local consequences – for instance as they record the recurrence of forms of exclusion in different contexts.

There is indeed a huge gap, for instance, between slum dwellers fighting against eviction in the district of an eastern-African city and the World Bank loan or IMF's structural adjustment programs from the 1990s and the early 2000s. Social mobilization (including when it is conflictual), as well as alternative expertise that grassroots organizations engage in, can manage to fill such gaps and point out connections and responsibilities. In fact, the following statements made by SDI and the IAI sound familiar today, even if they weren't obvious at all ten or twenty years ago:



(We) jointly stand against the perverse effects of exclusion, poverty, environmental degradation, exploitation, violence and problems related to transportation, housing and urban governance produced by neo-liberal globalization.

(INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF INHABITANTS WEBSITE).

Most of the shack dwellers organizations of the urban poor organize themselves against external enemies or against external threats. One of the main sources of eviction today is actually globally driven development. A city facing the need to increase and upgrade its infrastructure will invariably look to international sources of finances. Slum dwellers have to be able to impact on policies at this level.

(JOEL BOLNICK, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

Through establishing the causal chains (between policies and their – possibly distant – consequences), they identify actors with whom to dialogue, whom to confront, with whom to advocate; and they provide a framework to decrypt and denounce injustices. These frameworks take different forms, depending on the groups' strategies and analyses. Frameworks can either point out clear responsibilities (and name specific actors or institutions) or remain more elliptic (and refer to broad processes). They can be embedded in larger systems of interpretation or choose to be very factual. The IAI clearly names "*neoliberal globalization*" and considers that "*the future of global cities is decided by the World Bank*" (from their website). The International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples from the Tropical Forest identifies the "*colonization of (indigenous) territories*" as one of the causes of the situation of indigenous peoples. Others might refer to "*classes*" (Portia Anderson, Women's Economic Agenda Project), or "*laws and customs said to derive from Islam*" (Women Living Under Muslim Laws website).

By stating injustices, the groups state that people are not responsible for the affliction they suffer from, but that they are victims of political choices:

When you throw in a class analysis, people begin to understand it isn't an individual problem. And we push that, because often people consider it as a personal failure: you're supposed to be ashamed of being poor, ashamed of being working class, ashamed of being homeless, ashamed of not having an income.

(PORTIA ANDERSON, Women's Economic Agenda Project).

FROM EMPOWERMENT TO EXPERTISE

Empowering members, strengthening their public engagement

Transnational grassroots organizations and self-help networks do not only intend to be run “for” but also “by”. Therefore, they often refuse to negotiate their identities before entering public/transnational spaces, where participating in an international negotiation within a third organization could come at a price (“polishing their act”, giving up the possibility to appear as “indigenous people”, “slum dwellers”, tone down a demand, etc.). Their identity being closely linked to the “peer-based” principle, they intend to handle most, if not all of their action, from the most daily support to global advocacy on their own. The same principles that guide the way support is provided also apply to their engagement in global arenas. They tend to focus on their own resources and capacities, rather than to delegate their engagement in the public sphere to intermediaries, such as NGOs, external experts, etc.

Therefore, grassroots organizations and self-help groups dedicate a lot of their time to empowering their members: for instance, they organize very practical training sessions intended for grassroots leaders (like “public speaking”, “community management”, etc.). Of course, some tasks require particular skills and specialization. Networks who dedicate most of their work and time to transnational advocacy can choose to work with a few professionals rather than to stick to pure peer-based resources. Moreover, they can choose peer-based specialization, i.e. to build up gradually a highly skilled staff composed of peers. WORLD’s speakers’ bureau is one example of such specialization. It aims at advocating for the rights of people who live with HIV, as well as preventing further infections. Speakers address diverse audiences: schoolchildren, members of youth groups, recovery centers, social services providers, pregnant teenagers, those recently diagnosed positive, journalists, etc. They tell stories about how HIV impacts their lives, their families, their communities. These stories play the role of “*tools for change*”: this peer-based dynamics puts experience sharing at its core. Exchanging on their daily lives, and listening to the experience of others facing the same situations, increases HIV positive women’s autonomy. WORLD organizes special training for those who want to join the speakers bureau.

In fact, very often, empowerment is embedded in the group’s ways of working and is rooted in its funding principles. SDI’s constituency is its “saving schemes.” These “base units” don’t only aim to collect money. Organizing collectively around savings requires some specific skills and money creates demands for accountability. It implies knowing how to manage a budget, to plan actions in the mid-term or even long-term.

In fact, saving is a powerful tool to develop SDI's members' skills. It increases the movement's autonomy, both financially and organizationally. Hence, SDI refers to "savings" as being one of its "*rituals*."

WORLD organizes "*retreats*" several times a year, the aim of which is both to train and to provide emotional support and care. These retreats, "*open to HIV-positive women only*" are designed as a "*holistic experience*" and include education on treatment, workshops on stress management, and discussions on "*disclosure and stigma*." ICW organizes regular "*public speaking*" workshops, so that as many of its members as possible can represent the network in conferences, meeting, dialogues with institutions, sensitization initiatives, etc.

Promoting grassroots expertise

One of the grassroots- and self-help networks main features is, for some, the high degree of reflexivity that they apply to their practices and to their members' situation. Facing daily emergencies, and having low resources, organizations and groups have difficulties in engaging in reflexive processes alone. Grouping together in networks creates new opportunities: most of these groups are engaged in a recurrent process of experience capitalization. They regularly review their actions, their ways of doing, the forms of care and the support they provide to their members, their analysis of their own situation, etc. This dynamic can be very informal. But often, groups try to structure this aspect of their commitment – whether they decide to build a grassroots university, an action-research entity, or a network for sharing experiences.

In order to increase the relevance of their training and of their advocacy, many of these organizations have engaged in research – either on their own, or together with research institutions:

We conduct and carry out research, because globally, when you talk about any issue, you'll be asked "do you have the evidence?" There, we try as much as possible, especially using our membership, to carry out research, so that our advocacy is informed by the research that we do within our constituency.

(LILIAN MWOREKO, International Community of Women living with HIV/AIDS).

This reflexivity starts with sharing experiences on "good practices", failures and successes. There, going global works as a leverage effect: the broader a network is, the broader is the scope and diversity of practices and experiences it covers – i.e. the deeper the learning can be. Strengthening their own expertise does not only provide data for advocacy. It also contributes to give cohesion to the network, as it eases the identification of common organizational cultures or approaches on an issue:

The network grew because of a number of reasons. At the beginning, saving schemes brought people together, and it was all about exchanges, horizontal learning, etc. In the meantime, saving scheme members developed their own rituals, like registration process, to get knowledge of each other, and of the cities: how many people live there? How do they organize? What do they do? How many schools? So they conducted socio-economic research, not only in the slums, but expanding to cities. And it helped the network define its principles, its rituals further.

(JOEL BOLNICK, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

The uninitiated and the academics

Of course, the need to engage in grassroots and peer-based research has also to do with invisibility: invisibility is not confined to the political and the public spheres. It also spreads out to the academic world. Research on issues that affect grassroots communities can sometimes ignore them and forget to integrate their vision, experiences and situation in their focus, as well as ignore the kind of (informal) social relations they develop, their creativity, etc.

Turning experience into a relevant source of knowledge

Creating grassroots universities, or engaging in research programs is a way to shed light on experience and to acknowledge the relevance of empiricism. In fact, grassroots organizations and self-help networks intend to fulfill what they perceive as a gap between empiricism and academic knowledge. Filling this gap is a two-way process: it implies turning experience into a recognized source of knowledge; and promoting knowledge that would be useful to grassroots actors. It requires experts and academics to integrate the potential concrete output of their research into the design of their programs.

I'm surprised by the growing gap between the knowledge that comes from the field - the know-how from inhabitants, what they learn through hard processes which leads to documentation, systematization, production of tools, etc - and academic knowledge...

(YVES CABANES, International Alliance of Inhabitants).

We have this tool, the Urban Popular University. There, we have the possibility to elaborate ways of organizing, to elaborate contents... and to link research with its diffusion to inhabitant organizations. Scholars and social leaders can share their knowledge and methodologies.

(YVES CABANES, International Alliance of Inhabitants).

Shaping the groups' projects and structuring through action-research and partnerships with academic institutions

Empirical research and action-research processes can eventually contribute to change the groups' ways of working. Whether they are driven by the groups themselves, or together with institutions, they can also provide a better picture of the relevance of their actions and programs.

At the national and the international levels, SDI continues to build relationships with academic institutions. One very important benefit of that is that you create potential for a set of assessment, analysis of the work that SDI is doing.

(JOEL BOLNICK, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

In fact, grassroots expertise is crucial to frame the exact issue networks will address and focus on. Research engaged by WLUML contributed to clarifying how to name the source of oppression the network fights against:

Very soon, after exchanging on their lives, women involved in the beginning of our network got aware of the variety of contexts they live in. What is considered as Muslim law in my country may not be considered as Muslim law in your country. This is one thing that we spend a lot of time explaining to people: the significance of the “s” at the end of Women living under Muslim laws. There’s no such thing as the Charia. There isn’t any single codified corpus of law. And we have to be aware of those differences.

(**AISHA SHAHEED**, Women Living Under Muslims Laws).

Awareness of these differences came out of organized experience sharing, and, later, on the basis of studies on colonial laws, customary laws, state laws and constitutions, etc. Partnerships with academic institutions can be crucial to grasp the relevance and the efficiency of the groups actions:

We’ve worked a lot with a variety of academic researchers in our campaigns. And academic researchers helped us to feature the good work done by grassroots women in their communities.

(**SANDRA SCHILEN**, GROOTS).

Using external expertise to change policies

Such programs, which associate grassroots expertise and academic knowledge can also have direct or indirect impacts on policy making. Indirect: research (or training) organized jointly by grassroots organizations or self-help groups and academic institutions can be integrated in the curriculum of (future) political elites. Direct: the same research provides alternative data, which help informing better political actors. Through such partnerships, grassroots knowledge is not relegated to the field of “counter-expertise”, but gains political and/or academic legitimacy.

Academic institutions, by being exposed to these different ways of mobilizing, and engaging around urban development can lead to us being slowly, but surely introduced into the curricula that produce the professionals of the future.

(**JOEL BOLNICK**, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

We do a lot of work with universities in the area, working with students, who are on their journey to developing their own set of specializations and disciplines. That’s what we’re trying to pursue... and we’re also kind of expanding the notion of a university without walls. Because we think that if we extend the education of students who participate, we’re partners in that regard. They get one education at university, and they get an extension of that in the “community” university

(**ETHEL LONG-SCOTT**, Women’s Economic Agenda Project).

We believe strongly that good research can assist our work, because we come from a sector which is usually invisible. There are bad statistics, or no statistics. And when we do have research, it helps us a lot to get policy change. So we collaborate a lot with researchers.

(**PAT HORN**, Streetnet).

The experience of organizations of people living with HIV/AIDS is a very good example of how fighting for the recognition of experience as a relevant source of knowledge can change health policies. Over time, organizations of people living with

HIV/AIDS have claimed, and shown, their expertise on the disease and its impact. They have put into question traditional approaches to the epidemic, in showing that Aids is not only a medical issue, but that any prevention has to be embedded in social contexts and realities. Moreover, people living with HIV/AIDS have asserted that they know better than anyone else how people are affected by the disease – and what issues touch them more than others:

When I first started treatment, my doctor, a man, showed me the picture of an HIV molecule, and a huge medication chart. And he explained to me how the virus would impact my immune system. But it didn't make any sense to me. It didn't match any of the questions I had. My questions were not "What medication should I take," but "What happens if I want to have a baby," and that guy... he couldn't answer any of my questions. It is only when I got to meet World, and peer-advocates that I found understanding ears and answers.

(NAINA KHANNA, WORLD/US Positive Women's Network).

At the beginning of the epidemic, organizations of people living with HIV/AIDS successfully claimed that research protocols should be changed. They refused research using placebos: using placebos implied that some patients wouldn't get any real medication. By refusing to remain passive, and actively engaging in the building of alternative research protocols, patients – who were laymen and laywomen, compared to researchers – managed to gain an acknowledged expertise on the epidemic⁶. They contributed to mitigate the heteronomy of patients in their relation to medicine.

Of course, the recognition of laymen/women's expertise remains tenuous. Organizing collectively is a way to strengthen the specific status of this expertise. And to extend it to new areas – ICW for instance strongly advocates for the development of "*female-controlled interventions*", such as microbicides.

Indeed, grassroots expertise is built on the conviction that research isn't neutral and that favoring one research orientation more than others has clear social impacts. Grassroots activists refuse to divide the world of ideas between those who know (experts) and those who don't (uninitiated).

6. On the impact of the AIDS epidemic on relations between patient and medical staff, laymen/laywomen and experts, see Callon, Lascoume and Barthe, *Agir dans un monde incertain, essai sur la démocratie technique*, Seuil, 2001.

COLLABORATING WITH NGOs

As mentioned earlier in this document, networks of grassroots organizations and self-help groups are created in order to perform in the public sphere, at different scales.

Globally, grassroots organizations, self-help groups, along with other civil society actors have recently created common spaces in which to discuss alternatives and prepare social mobilization. Indeed, social forums, campaigns as well as counter-summits appear to be “global civil society’s” privileged forms of expression and sociability. These platforms are meant to facilitate discussions among different groups, on an equal basis, whatever their size, culture and resources.⁷

Public forums, especially global ones, are far from being wide open. In fact, the registration fees can be rather high. Funding them requires the mobilization of rare, unevenly available resources. There, financial resources (i.e. the ability to fund travel and transnational networking) aren’t the only barriers. It also requires specific skills, knowledge, social capital, etc.

NGOs and other civil society actors: partners and issues

Potential conflicts

NGOs have shown their capacity to move in transnational spaces, whereas grassroots/self-help organizations rather happen to be immobile, “rooted” in daily emergencies and actions. In global terms, mobility appears as a major challenge and concern – the main issue isn’t so much the freedom of capital and finance to move across borders but rather the absence of such freedom for the “victims” of globalization.⁸ Thus, civil society is also a highly competitive sphere, where organizations compete for resources, visibility and legitimacy. Even when actors share similar objectives, they either (and successively) cooperate, oppose or fight.

Thus, grassroots and self-help networks state their specificity compared to NGOs.⁹

NGOs raise money in the North, but they operate in the South. They are very active in international negotiations. They can very easily come to have an audience with the international institutions, because they have experience, they have a powerful constituency. In fact, their legitimacy is based both on this northern membership and on their experience in operational aspects in the South.

(NICO KEIJVER, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

7. It is to be noted that civil society is not necessarily a virtuous space. As stated by Jan Aart Scholte, civil society contains civil as well as uncivil elements. Ulrich Beck even defines terrorist groups as “terrorist NGOs”.

8. On this issue, see Ulrich Beck, *Power in the global age*, Polity, 2006.

9. They report the same difficulties in their contacts with external experts (including scientists).

We have a lot of cultural incompatibilities with a lot of international NGOs around how they present themselves. Who do they really represent? Who are they accountable to?

(SANDRA SCHILEN, GROOTS).

Some of these networks were even created out of NGOs, in order to ensure a better, and more direct representation of “victims”. For instance, the International Alliance of Inhabitants was created after some groups and organizations decided to leave an existing NGO:

Organizations such as NGOs regrouped in the Habitat International Coalition. Over time, social movements grew in importance, and got associated with HIC. But the leading groups were still the NGOs. Social movements had little room for their own voice in the coalition

(YVES CABANES, International Alliance of Inhabitants).

Many grassroots organizations underline these inequalities and differences, for instance when witnessing international NGOs with no local constituency managing to make contact with actors from the official public sphere:

They have direct access to our governments much more than we do. They can come to an audience with the Kenyan government much more easily than we do. They even have formal relationships with some governments. But they mostly look for service delivery, rather than for capacity building. Sometimes, they even manage to shift the programs we establish.

(ESTHER MUIRU, GROOTS).

Within transnational arenas, social mobilization is not the only lever to succeed in promoting alternative projects or advocating for the rights of a specific group. Interpersonal relations are crucial. Success rather depends on individual contacts and relationship between elites from both the official public and the non-governmental spheres.

Complementarities and common projects

Civil society isn't just a space of confrontation and competition amongst its actors. Strong complementarities have to be acknowledged as the basis for dynamics of cooperation:

Looking globally, I have the belief that if we can identify organizations with objectives and goals similar to ours, and who have strengths where we are weak, those are the kind of organizations we're working with. Because of stigmatization, people who are of high caliber, people of capacity, they tend to hide. So there is more capacity in NGOs than in the NEPWHAN. We have to work together and get the benefits of synergy.

(PAT MATEMILOLA, NEPWHAN).

If NGOs' capacity to open doors at different scales raises problems of transparency, it also creates new opportunities for low-resource groups: “*The NGOs helped us to understand and to make the federal government accept our status, and to give us equal rights*” (NEPWHAN). Indeed, the capacity to “open the right door” is both a skill, and a resource (that can be analyzed in terms of “social capital”). NGOs and

grassroots organizations can cooperate (to make the skill benefit everyone, or to build grassroots activist capacities in that skill) and build strategic partnerships (to share their “social capital”). In this perspective, the relation between NGOs and grassroots organizations or self-help groups can appear less asymmetric: NGOs lack resources other groups own (that can, for instance, be expressed in terms of legitimacy).

In fact, grassroots organizations and self-help networks are eager to engage in projects with NGOs or experts, but with care and pragmatism:

The relationship with professionals is a very contradictory relationship. In many ways professionals represent for slum dwellers a necessary evil. They bring skills and capacities that are required, especially skills such as housing finance, architecture, engineering, infrastructure development, for the kind of complex projects SDI is involved in. But in a way, when the added value comes with professionals, it brings a great risk. The risk is that the professionals quite frequently control the process. So working with external professionals, especially experts and NGOs, especially at the global level, is a challenge for SDI. There have been some interesting successes. But there also have been some interesting misses.

(**NICO KEIJVER**, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

We regard NGOs as service providers. They are organizations that provide services to our members, whether it is micro-credit schemes, human rights issues or various types of services. They are not entitled to affiliate with Streetnet. If they propose to provide services, but they don't deliver the goods, then we won't develop a good relationship with them, even if they have a nice mission statement. So our relationship with them is very pragmatic.

(**PAT HORN**, Streetnet).

When inhabitants need legal advice on how to handle a lawsuit, it's important to have professionals who have skills in national or international laws. So we're collaborating with some NGOs.

(**CESARE OTTOLINI**, International Alliance of Inhabitants).

Preventing asymmetric relationships to emerge and preserving the groups' autonomy appears there both as means for good cooperation and an objective in itself:

The reality is that the community owns its own process. We are not directed in what to do by our supporting NGOs, our partners. They stay as advisers to our process. But initiatives come from the grassroots. And the NGOs are there as professionals, to perfect our ideas, and they are taken globally. They are helping us to open doors when we need to negotiate with our governments for the various needs of our community.

(**DAVIOUS MUVINDI**, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

ENGAGING WITH ACTORS FROM THE PUBLIC SPHERE: COOPERATIVE CONFLICT AND CONFLICTUAL COOPERATION

We have already underlined the paradox of grassroots organizations and self-help networks when entering transnational spaces: being “grassrooted” or “community based”, they address issues that are directly bound in their members’ daily experience. But, even if their privileged level(s) of action seem(s) to be local, they often refuse to be confined to local actions and watch other actors take over transnational spheres. Their desire to be actively and “*meaningfully*” involved at all scales “*where policies are being made*” (including global ones) provides a first explanation of why they decide to go global. No doubt that similarity in their structures is a factor for going global: the transnationalization of decision making would naturally or mechanically lead to a globalization of social mobilization, and, thus, of civil society actors. The emergence of international institutions such as WTO or the IMF would create the need for civil society equivalents. Technological innovations would play a very important role in facilitating transnational structuring. The rise of “network capitalism”, as well as the generalization of access to the Internet, would also push civil society actors to choose connective forms of organizations. Henceforth, global networks would be the typical form of association in the globalized era.

Explaining the international structuring of civil society actors through isomorphism enables one to draw a pretty good picture of *why* civil society actors decide to “*go global*.” Nevertheless, it doesn’t provide sufficient information to understand *how* they proceed, and *what* “going global” concretely means for an organization. Moreover, this approach doesn’t really cover the specificities of grassroots organizations and self-help networks: isomorphism presupposes mobility – i.e. that groups can mobilize a lot of rare resources.

Borrowing a few concepts from the sociology of mobilizations might provide some tools to, at least, establish a few hypotheses and to move further in the understanding of grassroots transnational networks.



The transnational detour: Opening new (local) opportunities

First, social mobilizations can be explained through the “political opportunity structure.”¹⁰ In this approach, social mobilizations’ rise and success would depend on the “opportunities” opened by official public institutions – or, to be more precise, on how social groups perceive them. The relative attitudes of public authorities would also play a role – they include: ready access to the official public sphere, the stability or otherwise of political attitudes (do political actors have well identified positions, are forces well established and balanced?), conflict among political elites (are the political elites cooperating, or have they developed a conflictual relation?), etc. All these factors would indeed have an impact on the possibilities, for civil society groups, to mobilize, express claims and demands, engage in relationships (conflictual or otherwise) with public authorities.

If political opportunities are closed (or perceived to be) at the national scale (either because the state is undemocratic or because barriers to access the official public sphere can’t be overcome by low-resource groups), actors might be pushed to switch scales of action, and, eventually “go global.” The “global public sphere” being still far from having stabilized, opportunities would be broader at the global scale.

Therefore, at the global scale, groups can be more efficient than they are locally to shape policies:

Actually, locally, the IAI is not very efficient to solve day-to-day problems, like the concrete consequences of evictions. We are more efficient to build public policies, housing rights, and to ensure that these rights are integrated into international development plans, etc.

(YVES CABANES, International Alliance of Inhabitants).

They can even achieve some success, and be actively recognized as legitimate actors:

We’re in close cooperation with UN Habitat. We even have one person based in the office of the cities’ alliance. We’ve been able to succeed in that, because we’ve been offering solutions. Organized networks that have knowledge can help UN agencies, because they haven’t been able yet to find sustainable solutions to our problems. And little by little, you’re influencing policies and procedures.

(JOEL BOLNICK, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

In fact, engaging with global scales might even open opportunities that are usually closed at the national scale:

In international forums, we sometimes get to meet officials from our own governments. And we can discuss with them, whereby nationally, we don’t have access to them.

(MARGARET NAKATO, World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers).

Politically, there is so much competition that it is very hard to get local set-ups recognized either at the local level or at the national one. So the network has been very crucial to legitimate globally the

10. See, for instance, Doug McAdam, J. McCarthy and M.N. Zald, *Comparative Perspective on Social Movements. Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Culture Framings*; D. MacAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of contention*.

successes and the priorities grassroots women reflect and also to bring that success back to the local and regional levels. You'll find numbers of leaders who've met their ministers or mayors at international meetings who would never see them or be received by them locally.

(**SANDRA SCHILEN**, GROOTS).

The “transnational detour” would be a way to escape from closed spheres, while investing spaces that are perceived as being more open. Thus, while going global, organizations can gain legitimacy and access resources that are unavailable to them on the national sphere.¹¹

In fact, the transnationalization of policy making can also provide resources and frameworks that can be used directly for local or national mobilizations:

The UN declaration provides a great framework for us to work within, so that we're not kept away from what is the most important thing. It really helps to guide our work, and guide our struggles.

(**ETHEL LONG-SCOTT**, Women's Economic Agenda Project).

Global commitment, but local consequences

However, taking on global public spaces can also have consequences on the groups' relations to local and national authorities and contribute to close the political opportunities at these levels. National authorities can for instance perceive the claims and demands that groups express in global arenas as being attacks on their own policies, either directly or implicitly.

Our relationship with governments in Europe is good. They even fund some of our meetings. We have constraints, however, because as civil society, when we're working globally, we tend to address issues, which our governments are usually not in favor of. So it's like you're working against your own government. When you go back to your country, you're sometimes marginalized, you're sometimes isolated, and you're looked at as a rebel.

(**MARGARET NAKATO**, World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers).

When you meet government officials at the highest level, you can be sidelined when coming back to your country. The government institutions can later try to drop you. At the national level, you may not engage effectively, but at the international level, you're protected by declarations. So there, you're able to engage people that you're already disengaged with when you're at home. But there's a risk, when you come back...

(**ESTHER MUIRU**, GROOTS).

Global scales of actions are not disconnected from one another. But opportunities are diverse, unsynchronized, and their dynamics can diverge from one scale to the other. There again, the broad solidarity, as well as the critical mass, that transnational networks might offer are key resources for grassroots organizations and self-help groups. It is also a cue that “globalization” is not the name of a dynamics of substitution of one scale for another (the global scale would take over the national

11. On this specific idea, see Isabelle Sommier, *Le Renouveau des mouvements contestataires à l'heure de la mondialisation*, 2003, and Éric Agrikoliansky, Olivier Fillieule and Nonna Mayer, *L'Altermondialisme en France, la longue histoire d'une nouvelle cause*.

one) but rather a dense and thick process that affects all scales, from the very local to the international.

This is no simple dynamics that would only be lead by the search for legitimacy. It is rather the product of a dense process, where actors try to find the most efficient and accessible ways to break with invisibility and to make their claims and demands audible. According to this aim, groups articulate different scales of actions:

Our central strategy in growing and achieving the expectation of our membership is engaging with all kinds of actors, whether in the cities, with the city authorities; at the provincial level, with provincial authorities; whether it is in the banks; with national authorities, with multilateral ones...

(NICO KEIJVER, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

Political pragmatism: Between dialogue and confrontation

There exists a very wide and diverse “action repertoire” these groups resort to. All the groups share a very pragmatic approach to the relation to authorities, whatever their scale of action is – however; their strategies might diverge deeply. Thus, some of them tend to focus on dialogue, while others engage in confrontation. Actually, there is no hard and fast alternative whereby groups would either have to choose between cooperation and confrontation. The boundaries are rather porous and shape a wide and vast set of tactics, strategies and attractions.

As pointed out by Jan Aart Scholte,¹² choosing conflict or cooperation has to be disconnected from the relative radicalism of groups. It is rather a consequence of the way they respectively perceive opportunities. Groups that put the stress on dialogue are not necessarily less radical than groups that willingly engage in confrontation.

One major feature of networks is their plasticity, i.e. their capacity to change their form of structuring and to integrate a huge range of groups, cultures and approaches. This plasticity creates facilities for groups to switch from one attitude to the other. They can even manage to mix several approaches at the same time.

Some groups clearly favor cooperation:

Grassroots women cannot afford the price of confrontation in terms of what's at stake for them. So relationship building and dialogue, and large-scale mobilizations at the community level and through networks have been crucial. And also building alliances with people of influence, that can help you get meetings and can help you to be understood when other people don't want to receive you or want to view you negatively. But I think that we are pretty aggressive in knocking on doors. We try to find ways that we can partner and play some kind of agenda setting role in policy issues. We don't have a problem maintaining our independence and being critical of the decisions being made... We've always been very critical of the World Bank's post disaster investment approach, for instance.

(SANDRA SCHILEN, GROOTS).

Others might seek a critical pragmatism...

12. In *Global civil society; changing the world?* CSGR working paper, May 1999.

SDI is regarded as an organization that has a very pragmatic response to development processes. It tends to have a very collaborative relationship with other institutions, based upon the mass mobilization of a social movement. However, the social movement that gets mobilized through savings in the SDI network is not mobilized in order to be able to take on confrontation or a name and shame agenda. That doesn't mean that these sets of tools are excluded from the SDI toolbox. SDI affiliates will necessarily and if needed take up issues such as confrontation, and challenge demands, in their engagement with other actors, such as the state, at local, provincial and national levels or other actors such as multinationals or multilateral institutions. However, the preferred option is to find a way in which to negotiate a solution.

(**JOEL BOLNICK**, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

... whereas some of them might be more engaged in social mobilizations and social conflicts:

If authorities agree that cities are not for sale, and that their roots, rights, cultures and the desire to build their future are important, because they are living organisms, then we can do things together. But this will always include conflict. Not as a negative thing, but as a maybe necessary thing to do to move forward. We want to be able to follow our own rhythm, to set our own agenda, rather than following the one imposed by authorities. And demanding for a line to be changed in an official document is not enough... It's not efficient... The challenge is that inhabitants become aware that we can really change the cities. And again, this includes conflict.

(**CESARE OTTOLINI**, International Alliance of Inhabitants).

Each group's strengths and weaknesses (or rather: each group's perception of its strengths and weaknesses) determinates its choices. One of the strengths that many organizations underline is precisely their capacity to articulate different approaches and to draw strategies from a wide action-repertoire. SDI's capacity to cooperate with public authorities has to be linked with the potential mass mobilization the network could launch:

Our solutions are heard, because we have the critical mass. We're not talking about ten people. We're talking about a three millions persons network. They come with alternatives, they come with money, they come with knowledge, they have solutions, and they have the critical mass. So they become actors.

(**NICO KEIJVER**, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

Similarly, the IAI's "Zero eviction campaign" shows how the network articulates social mobilization (as a way of putting pressure on authorities) and cooperation with institutions: the campaign demands a "*world-wide moratorium on evictions and funding for housing and habitats in a 'New green deal' for at least a billion people.*" It amounts to a common space for movements to gather together and try to coordinate local, national and international mobilizations and initiatives, articulating different approaches: "*an international alert system,*" that will be used whenever inhabitants face eviction; international solidarity (including petitions); but also concrete proposals of collaboration with institutions: exploratory missions and conciliation.

Difficulties in international dialogue can also arise from the international institutions, and their difficulties to understand grassroots organizations and self-help networks specificities, as reported by Elisa Peters (UN NGLS): "*A lot of my colleagues at the*

UN have an understanding of what an NGO is. In their eyes, a NGO, and most of civil society organizations in general, are well established organizations, usually well funded, with a clear structure, a designated board of trustees. They also happen to be based in the North. They have more difficulties to understand what social movements and grassroots organizations really are, how they work, the way they do things.” But there is still some room for convergence: *“One of the reasons why the UN is engaging more with social movements, is that they’re realizing that to a certain extent, those movements, they are more legitimate, and also more accountable to the people they represent than traditional NGOs. There’s a lot of questioning about the legitimacy and representativity of actors. The fear is that the NGOs don’t necessarily represent the people they claim to represent. Social movements have more legitimacy in the sense that they’re often much more in touch with their members, or the people they represent.”*

In fact, opportunities are far from being static. They evolve over time – the concerns about insufficient NGO representativity can open paths for grassroots organizations. Conversely, the “backlash” (GROOTS) in the UN that happened in the late 1990s and early 2000s can shut doors and reduce the number of UN forums and conferences opened to civil society actors.

Civil society has less participation than before. Because now, in the UN conferences, you have only three minutes to address the issue you want to address... And not for one organization, but you need a few organizations. It is difficult for us to address our issues in these forums...

(ESTEBANCIO CASTRO DIAZ, International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples from the Tropical Forest).

There’s been an enormous backlash and right-wing movement that has turned the UN into what it is today. In the nineties, there was an enormous civil society movement, to frame the global issues around the environment, around hunger, around women’s empowerment and equality, around population issues... We were punished for that activism. And that space shrinks. Governments turned the United Nations into something for governments. Global policy makers know they need the poor. They know they need solutions. That’s the good news. The bad news is: they have no principles for consultation, for global citizenship, for consulting with those most affected, and they play games all the times about disassociating you from the solutions you press for.

(SANDRA SCHILEN, GROOTS).

ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES

When going global, grassroots organizations and self-help groups face various organizational challenges. They should find ways that won't create distance between those who are active at the global level and the group's constituency – but remain consistent with the “peer-based” orientation of the group. Similarly, their search for visibility has to be concretely translated within the transnational structures themselves: in other words, it creates organizational constraints in terms of representation, delegation and decision-making processes.

How to build democratic entities?

Unsurprisingly, they almost systematically decide to structure in networks, rather than choosing rigid hierarchies. Indeed, the choice for the network-form appears not only as the consequence of a collective attraction for horizontality and direct democracy. It is also an organizational necessity: a network features a set of concrete answers that can match the challenge of transnational structuring. Such organizational choices are also related to the state of transnational public spaces, whose structuring and instability would make reticular, consensus-based forms of organizations more efficient. “*Operating in the realm of the uncertain*,”¹³ groups would be pushed to organizational innovations and, thus, flexible and yet inclusive forms of organizing.

Networks can be defined as collectives of “weak ties,” where networkers need neither give up their identity nor trade their principles and values. They rather require agreement on a common project (a campaign, the promotion of an alternative, the defense of a particular population, a social confrontation, etc.); and the clarification of methodologies and principles whose boundaries will be flexible enough to take in a variety of participants, organizational cultures or traditions.

Nevertheless, the structures of the different networks involved in the seminar reflect the variety of organizational answers that they can find, which they create “*as they go along*.”

Some have a rather loose and horizontal structuring. WLUMML has, for instance, no formal members, but “networkers” – i.e. whoever is in the loop of the network's dissemination of information on its initiatives, campaigns and research, and, conversely, can share information in a “*regular two-way contact*.” This choice aims at facilitating the participation of autonomous groups or individuals. “Active networkers” are promoted through cooptation, and are people involved “*in aspects of cross-regional networking with WLUMML for a significant period of time*.” Twenty to thirty of them (women or men) form the “program implementation council.” It has a small international coordination office, as well as regional ones, each of them being autonomous financially and legally. Their role is to coordinate the work,

13. Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting*, University of Chicago Press, 2002.

facilitate meetings among networkers and to “*strengthen local, regional and global effectiveness*”¹⁴:

You cannot become a member of WLUML, as we are a non-hierarchical, non-membership based network. But you can be a networker. Being a networker merely means adhering to our overall principles and putting them into context in one zone, country or location. To be an active networker is to actively engage in the collective programs and projects, or remain in two way communication with one of our officers.

(**AISHA SHAHEED**, Women Living Under Muslim Laws).

Other organizations have chosen a more compact and more formal structuring:

Streetnet from day one has always had structures. It is governed by an international congress that meets every three years. All our affiliate organizations attend and they vote for an international council of fifteen members - eight women at least, and the balance being men. Those people come from our different affiliates, and they are the body that governs Streetnet in the meantime. All our affiliate organizations have their constitutions, and Streetnet has copies of these constitutions, and we engage with them through their structures. So we are not a loose network. We are actually a structured international federation that operates like a network, but primarily we are accountable to all our members. We have a general assembly every four years. Two representatives from each member-organisation attend the assembly if they have funding for that. We put in place a structure with a coordination committee, made up of representatives from all the continents. When it meets, we are able to review our actions, connect them with the grassroots and meet the organization’s objectives at the international level. So it’s a formal and permanent organization.

(**PAT HORN**, Streetnet).

There again, groups try to remain pragmatic: organizational choices remain quite fluid, and can evolve over time, when experiencing difficulties or facing new challenges.

SDI is in a way moving on a trajectory from being a loose network to becoming a coalition of organizations of the urban poor. There are constant debates inside SDI around the level of institutionalization required by international agencies of this kind. The challenge between formality and informality defines every single working day of every single member of this network. It’s rooted in the fact that the majority of members (over 3,5 million people) come from an informal context. Every one of them comes from a situation in which the informality is the most effective tool to ensure survival in the environment in which poor people are discriminated against and excluded. But when you start to engage with formal institutions, city authorities, national governments or international agencies, there is a need to move towards the formalization of the way your organization is structured. The more you formalize, the more you put at risk the energies, the efforts, the capacities, the potentialities that exist in informal institutional arrangements. And this tension between informality and formality governs the way SDI operates on a day-to-day basis. Where there is a need to find resolutions to this, SDI prefers to put the stress on informality rather than on formality.

(**JOEL BOLNICK**, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

Each choice raises its own issues. Indeed, “going global” is, in itself, a source of organizational challenges, as it might clash with local dynamics.

14. From the network’s website.

There are challenges in being global in a way that will respect the integrity of the work being done on the ground, and that tries to link it with the international level. A lot of organizations think that if they've got contact with an international organization, then it gives them some kind of credibility, just because they have the contact. We get a lot of opportunistic approaches with that idea in mind. And a lot of people from grassroots organizations, when they do start growing internationally, they sometimes lose their contact with the base. And we have to support them to retain that. We put some pressure on them to report back to their organizations and affiliates. It is quite a responsibility for international networks.

(PAT HORN, Streetnet).

Horizontality and its limits

Reticular forms of organizations feature open opportunities to face these issues in a rather flexible, yet efficient way. Network-forms balk at the idea of delegation. And their privileged decision-making method (consensus) facilitates the cohesion of broad and diverse groups. It enables the inclusion of marginalized and peripheric groups, whose aim is precisely to gain visibility. As it requires frequent negotiations, it creates opportunities for regular and intense meetings, and for the recognition of all actors as being legitimate: the goal is not (only) unanimity (or broad adhesion to the decision) but the discussion that necessarily precedes any decision. Thus, *“the process of decision making makes for a greater acceptance of the differences that coexist with a shared purpose”*¹⁵. It is *“a way to justify members' continuous participation.”* It is also a way to accept diversity, as consensus-building implies integrating the various positions of actors on one issue, rather than choosing one at the exclusion of every other. In her account on direct forms of democracy within US social movements and organizations, Francesca Polletta explains: *“far from being at odds with the demands of political effectiveness, participatory decision-making can help activists build solidarity, innovate tactically, secure the leverage of political opinion, and develop enduring mechanisms of political accountability.”*

Many groups have expressed their attraction for horizontality and stated that their privileged decision-making process is consensus building. In reality, these claims cover a variety of organizational workings. In many cases, they remain declarations of intent, rather than turning into concrete organizational choices and tools. Moreover, many groups use “consensus” to describe the way they handle democracy, whereas decisions rather appear to be compromises. Often, consensus is reduced to a very loose definition: it would apply to all decision-making methods but vote.

Two different and opposed risks apply to networks. Experience and work have shown that informality can be an obstacle to the implementation of democracy. If power structures aren't made clear but left hidden, forms of domination can emerge. As long as power remains unacknowledged, these inequalities cannot easily be overcome.¹⁶ Conversely, flat forms of organization can push groups to excessively “proceduralize” their ways of working: procedures might be perceived as a way to disclose all power relations and to anticipate conflicts or difficulties. However, they run against individual factors: network regulation is also, if not mostly, based on inter-personal relations – hence, the importance of developing *“a sophisticated set*

15. Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an endless meeting*, same for following quotes.

16. This can include gender inequalities, for instance. See Jo Freeman, *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*.

of normative understandings, that accompany the formal rules, a kind of etiquette of deliberation” (Polletta).

Even when the decision-making process is built upon consensus, democracy is challenged: consensus gives more importance to the rejection of a proposal than to adhesion. Thus, minority groups can gain much more importance than others, as a real consensus requires that they accept and endorse the decision. As long as they oppose the proposal, it has to be amended.

In the end, informality and horizontality can lead to the dilution of the network’s message, and, eventually, to a loss of cohesion. A risk that some groups have concretely experienced:

Being a non-membership network, we have the issue of who can speak on behalf of the network. We have no designated spokesperson, no designated members. So we have to ensure a consistent message.

(**AISHA SHAHEED**, Women Living Under Muslim Laws).

Conversely, others tend to choose more informality, and decide to blur the distinction between who is a member and who is not:

SDI is right now shifting from being a membership-based organization whereby you need, in order to be a member, to be a saving scheme member; to a broader network. It should not be the federation of saving schemes only. But we should make it a community wide activity, so that we involve everyone, not only the membership of the slum dwellers. So we are moving towards a community wide, a citywide approach, to involve people who are not members. We are fighting for the urban poor, so everyone who is in that category is a member.

(**DAVIUS MUVINDI**, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

Interculturality and diversity

before such organizational challenges, groups often decide to gather around a set of shared, yet broad, values that can possibly be presented in the network’s charter of principles:

The organizations in SDI share a number of basic common methodologies or practices that we prefer to call rituals. Rituals are not rules, or laws or preconditions, but shared practices. Every single member of SDI, at the city level, at national level or international level is a person involved in saving a small amount of money on an everyday basis. It is through savings that SDI creates a common strategy of monetizing the political capital of the urban poor.

(**JOEL BOLNICK**, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

GROOTS’ activists insist on the idea that the “*process is based on values.*” This choice is a way to be able to face the challenge of diversity. Indeed, transnational structuring inevitably creates difficulties of understanding, cultural disagreements, etc.:

For a long time, in the early stage of GROOTS, it was just very hard to get people to listen. The Asians didn’t understand what the Latin Americans were about; most people couldn’t understand what the Africans were saying in the early 1990s about markets, etc. There are a lot of differences

in leadership styles that create tensions at times. Obviously some groups have organized themselves with religion at the center of their values. For groups that don't do that, that has created some tensions, for instance between Christians and non-Christians.

(**SANDRA SCHILEN**, GROOTS).

We have the gender issue. It is defined by our culture and is different from country to country. What could be a gender issue in Uganda may not be a gender issue in China. So this possibly will lead to the rise of misunderstandings, and conflicts within our organization.

(**MARGARET NAKATO**, World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers).

Groups try to find concrete answers to diversity: they define broad goals, so that they remain inclusive, instead of excluding groups that would not fit-in precise objectives:

The way we manage to stand together as one network and to break isolation is to have very broad common goals: gender equality, social justice, anti-militarization. But the way that we'll get there is going to be very different depending on the context our networkers live in, the cultures they're coming from, the legal systems they're facing.

(**AISHA SHAHEED**, Women Living Under Muslim Laws).

Other clearly frame what they will handle within the network and what they will leave out of the discussions:

We have clear areas that frequently surface that we can't agree on. Many of them are what I would call social values and other forms of political values. In GROOTS, we don't take a position on abortion, we don't take a position on contraception, we don't take a position on left and centrist political struggles, because this is not what we come together in GROOTS to focus on. And we have methodologies to agree on what we can't agree on. We set basic agreements on how we're going to work together. Consensus and values are based on organizing methods. We work together on what we agreed to cooperate around. But it's not about meaning to be a unified and global space first and foremost. It's not all glossy; it's a lot of hard work.

(**SANDRA SCHILEN**, GROOTS).

Joining GROOTS means that you want to engage in these kinds of relationship building, in cross-national or cross-regional cooperation. We try to guarantee that we can express our identities in a way that makes sense from our own backgrounds. In our meetings, women concretely talk about and celebrate what they are proud of in their own backgrounds and their own identities, and how they want to cooperate across regions, countries, casts or religions. We keep talking about cultures, we sing a lot in our meetings; we talk about the stories of our lifetime so that we keep reminding each other that we are different and that we can deal with our diversity. And at the end of the day, what binds us is the common project of what we do together, that we cannot do by ourselves.

(**ESTHER MUIRU**, GROOTS).



Tackling language diversity

For transnational networks, diversity is concretely translated into the language issue:

Language is a real issue. We cannot find ways to deal with the French. So it can take a very long time to get answers, to come to collective decisions.

(**ESTEBANCIO CASTRO DIAZ**, Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples for the Tropical Forest).

When we go to meetings, when we go to seminars, there's always that language barrier, which we're working strongly to overcome. Luckily for us, francophones always tend to have a better understanding of English than we have for French.

(**PAT MATEMILOLA**, NEPWHAN).

However, the capacity of transnational networks to include people with various skills and profiles can provide innovative answers to this specific challenge, as does the IAI:

One of the major questions we have faced in growing our network was to find ways to manage our linguistic diversity, as a network. We've set up a network of interpreters, who want to get involved in the field of housing rights. We now have more than 500 interpreters, who all work on a voluntary basis with us. They help us for our debates and exchanges, as well as for our external communication. In fact, they're a very effective tool to give voice to inhabitants themselves. We cover more than forty languages. Common languages, of course, but also some indigenous ones besides. We've got a budget of 34,000 Euros for that. Last year, we translated more than 690,000 words, which means less than five cents a word.

(**CESARE OTTOLINI**, International Alliance of Inhabitants).

FUNDING AND FUNDING AGENCIES

Finally, transnational structuring raises the critical issue of funding. Groups express their difficulties to find financial resources in sufficient amounts to efficiently and meaningfully invest in transnational public spaces. They also face difficulties in letting their specificities be acknowledged and valued by funding agencies.

Each time, it's a struggle. We struggle to gain some space... Very few of our partners are ready to take risks with us, to support us, to help us in our activities and programs. In many forums, people talk about HIV, officials discuss issues, but when we come to resource allocation, it's always the same scenario. We have learned from our experience that most of the work we do is free work, is voluntary work.

(**LILLIAN MWOREKO**, International Community of Women living with HIV/AIDS).

It's true than when you go global, you need more money. It's difficult to keep an eye on all the processes that have consequences on our lives. We're dealing with the UNDP, the World Bank, and the WTO. But none of them gives us money...

(**ESTEBANCIO CASTRO DIAZ**, International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples from the Tropical Forest).

Organizing ourselves to be part of the solution is not something that everybody buys into. We're competing for resources as everybody is, often without the degrees or the capacities to be competing meaningfully. We need to build our own capacity to compete meaningfully in different arenas, at different levels. And we also need donors to be ready to support the type of capacity building that's needed.

(**GCEBILE NDLOVU**, International Community of Women living with HIV/AIDS).

Challenging donors and putting their own accountability and evaluation criteria into question, without risking to be later ignored by them, appears to be a major issue groups have to deal with.

The difference between what makes an NGO and what makes a donor is now blurring. There's been a big evolution. And the evolution may be confusing things more than it's clarifying them.

(**SANDRA SCHILEN**, GROOTS).

We refused money from some funding agencies. We had only three staff, but we already had a very well connected network. Funders came to us, and proposed us a vehicle and they said that from then on, they could help us build our capacities. But we refused. We wanted to grow our own space, to do it our own way. It takes us away from formalizing our relationship with the grassroots and of building our capacity, it takes us further from the work we do.

(**ESTHER MUIRU**, GROOTS).

We've learned a lot from our partners, as well as from asking multilateral and bilateral institutions for help. Some of our donors ask us to work like other NGOs, like having projects to educate the community... and every time, we have to answer "but we are the community, we're not from the outside."

(**PAT MATEMILOLA**, NEPWAN).

We are very clear with donors. We tell them that SDI is a funny federation. How can they expect having a three-year plan from us when slum dwellers face daily harassment? Moreover, many of the SDI members are not equipped to handle on their own autonomy. This is quite a challenge. And this is one of the factors that contributed to slum dwellers organizing globally. We're trying to influence the development industry in changing its ways of working. In a donor organization, you have very strict procedures for a project to be approved. We try to bring our own indicators of success and choose to disseminate in our own way.

(**JOEL BOLNICK**, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

There's a limited amount of money, and all players on the field are trying to get their own bit of what's available. Sometimes we argue very much, sometimes players are given more than they require.

(**LILLIAN MWOREKO**, International Community of Women living with HIV/AIDS).

CONCLUSION

The organizational diversity this document presents doesn't reflect the whole range of organizational forms grassroots organizations and self-help groups have experienced and created – and still experience and create. Nevertheless, some common points emerge, that appear to be crucial in order to understand what these groups are, how they work and what they stand for.

Empowerment, training, horizontal learning, search for visibility, political pragmatism and flexibility are recurrent means and objectives. None of these groups limit their action to (peer-based) service providing. On the contrary: they intend to fight against social and political isolation; to break the barriers of stigma and invisibility; and promote their own perspectives and answers. In other words: not only do they demand to be acknowledged as citizens and wait for institutions to move, they also open spaces where they start being citizens, by reporting injustices, building public issues, setting policy-making agendas, raising public awareness on their situation, promoting solutions, etc.

These groups are rather young, when compared to other stakeholders, such as trade-unions and NGOs, whose birth sometimes dates back to the 19th century. Thus, understanding the way they work, and how they stand together is also a means to get a better picture of globalization. Indeed, if these groups bring together what could be termed the “victims of globalization”, they don't suffer globalization. They co-produce it, together with multinationals, global cities, diasporas, financial markets, international institutions, etc.¹⁷

In fact, globalization is a multidimensional and dense process. Rather than replacing a hierarchy of tiers with another (from a nation-centered one to a global-centered one) it multiplies them: different sets of tiers coexist. Being grassrooted doesn't conflict with being part of “global civil society”, “global regulation devices” and, in the end, “globalization” itself. On the contrary: grassroots/community based organizations and self-help networks appear as being one “*localization*,” one “*dimension*” of the global. Indeed, globalization isn't only made of (or doesn't only arise from) global events, global interdependencies or global warming: “*local micro-events*” also shape globalization. GROOTS Kenya, an SDI Uganda branch, ICW Zimbabwe activists or WLUML Algerian networkers are actors of globalization rather than its voiceless victims. They all belong to “*specific forms of globality*”: the international contact and net of solidarity they are building, the mindscape they are producing and circulating shape the global tier as well as the way shareholders from a US multinational act.

Over the last two decades, activists have engaged in a dynamics of organizational innovations. They have experienced new forms of association, be it transnational networks of grassroots organizations; social forums; citizen alliances, etc. They've used new technologies as a lever to build some sense of commonality out of the discontinuity of contexts they evolve in.

17. Many ideas from this paragraph and the following ones are borrowed from Saskia Sassen's *Sociology of Globalization*. Quotes are personal translation from the french edition of the book.

Among them, grassroots/community based organizations and self-help networks propose very fluid but complex forms of recognition and cooperation. They don't necessarily require face-to-face interactions, nor frequent and evenly spread out contacts. Still, they create the frame for a renewed democratic collective engagement.

Social sciences are still mainly rooted in the "nation-centered" set of tiers. They have difficulties in switching perspectives. Thus, continuing to exchange on grassroots experiences of globality, including its most local dimensions, is a major challenge. These movements don't only inform us on their causes, claims and demands. They also enable us to grasp aspects of globality, which they are a vector of.

No comprehensive understanding of grassroots organizations and self-help groups' specificities could be built without taking into account the complex – and yet still conflictual – relation between these groups, donors, funding agencies and NGOs. Opening forums for confrontational dialogue and trying to establish a common set of criteria for funding – and for donor accountability – appears as a necessary step to take collectively. Clearly, the current economic crisis makes the finding of solutions the more urgent as funds will reduce dramatically.

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THE EMERGENCE OF GLOBAL NETWORKS: WHAT DOES “GOING GLOBAL” MEANS?

By JAN AART SCHOLTE¹

When speaking about globalization, many people talk about “levels”: the local level, the national level, the international level, etc. But “levels” imply that the “local”, the “national”, the “international” are separate. This supposes a local space, a national space, and a global space – and each of them clearly separated from the others. “Levels” also invite the idea of a kind of hierarchy between these separate spaces, starting at the bottom. And then, as you grew bigger and better, you could go global.

But these spaces are not separate. Rather, they overlap each other. And they are also non-hierarchical. There is no space bigger, better or lower than the others.

Thus, I would rather speak about tiers and spaces. It says more on the range and scope of these organizations, without setting any hierarchy. “tiers” and “spaces” also allow the local, the national and the global to overlap. One can be in a space that is local, national and global at the same time.

There are other language issues. Often, people use indifferently “international”, “transnational”, and “global”, as if they were the same thing, as if they described the same process or dynamics. But this is definitely not the case.

“International” defines what happens between Nation States. And it suggests that the units (a group in Kenya, another group in South Africa and a group in Canada, for instance) are separate units. “Transnational” is about what happens “across” borders, it deals with organizing “across” Nation-States. In both “international” and “transnational”, the national remains the point of reference. If one really wants to get out of Nation-centric thinking, it is important to use words that are not nation-centered. This is where “global” comes into its own – along with “regional”, and indeed all the spaces that are not dependant on the national. Of course, they interrelate with the national. But they have got a reality on their own, and they also interrelate with other tiers. Regions are often overlooked, even if the times we are living in are not only times of globalization, but also times of regionalization.

It is also necessary to introduce another dimension, between the local and the national. In some countries, thinking only in terms of national civil society activities and local actions means that you miss a great deal of civil society organizing – which the World Bank, the IMF and others often do. In fact, it is important to acknowledge the

1. University of Warwick, United Kingdom.

“provincial”: so we have the “regional” between the national and the global, and the “provincial” between the national and the local.

All those spaces overlap and interact. No organization works “locally” one day, “nationally” the next day, so that e.g. Friday is “global” day. Everything is interconnected, and organizations have adopted a multi-tiered approach: organizations are moving constantly across tiers of activity.

Organizations are global in a number of aspects, not only in the way they organize their activities. In fact, in contemporary civil society you must be global: there is no entry gate to the global space at which to wait one’s turn. As soon as organizations begin their activity, they are global: there are a lot of global aspects to the work organizations do on a daily basis, even if they remain very local: they address issues of global scope, and with (at least partially) global causation.

All the issues grassroots organizations deal with are global issues, as they have trans-planetary applications: features, values, practices, realities, situations that are to be found all over the planet in one form or another, whether concerning housing, HIV/Aids, indigeneity, environmental issues, etc. Issues are global in the sense that they cover the whole world.

Moreover, organizations use global infrastructures of communication and mobilizations from the outset. They may also tap into global arenas for resources: for funds, but also for their staff, their equipment, their supplies, etc. And, of course, grassroots groups draw on global solidarity and global identities. Part of their evolving, their belonging and their being is actually global. Thus, any social movement, any civil society organization is significantly global. People who live with HIV/Aids are scattered all over the world. Likewise, indigenous people have built a trans-planetary identity and solidarity that transcend the territory where they live.

Members of these organizations may not always define themselves as “global citizens” but that’s what they are becoming because they claim rights, they exercise duties. These rights and duties are not only connected to the nation-State, they also rely on global rules and the institutions that implement these rules.

There are global circumstances that encourage grassroots organizations to “go ever more global”. The empowering effect of global communication infrastructures pushes groups to “go global”. The Internet encourages organizations to connect globally, so that they can take advantage of the opportunities opened by technology. By “going global”, organizations can get more people involved in their activities, and thus be stronger – or benefit from what economists would call “economies of scale”. It also enables organizations to learn from and share experiences with others. And, sometimes, donors encourage their beneficiaries to connect globally.

But these reasons are secondary. When organizations recognize that the issues they address are actually global, they will organize in a way that corresponds to the problem they face, in order to tackle it adequately. A lot of problems organizations handle are caused by the globalization of capitalism. A lot of the rules, a lot of the norms, a lot of the standards and a lot of the regulations, which affect deeply what diverse groups may do or experience, come from global spaces and institutions. Not being organized globally would prevent them from dealing easily with their problems.

GOING GLOBAL, STAYING LOCAL, TRYING 'GLOCAL'?

CHALLENGES AND DILEMMAS IN TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS STRUCTURING

By DOMINIQUE CAOUILLE²

Oftentimes more visible in the form of discrete events and of mass protest against specific international official summits and institutions, transnational collective action encompasses increasingly eclectic expressions. These include for example global social movements, federation of NGOs and loosely connected and flexible international networks.³ In its bare form, transnational activism can be described as social movements and other civil society organisations and individuals operating across state borders.⁴

Contemporary transnational networks might resist the globalisation of production and finances in their various distillations, offer alternative solutions and mechanism (fair trade, codes of conducts for enterprises, organic agricultural production, seeds saving and exchanges, etc) or allow for marginalized and excluded groups to link and join their forces. These transnational initiatives and multiple modes of action are influenced by the advent of communications technologies and the related cultural diffusion of global proportions.⁵

2. University of Montreal, Canada.

3. Some of the ideas presented here are further explored in Caouille, D and S. Turner eds. (2009), "Agrarian Angst and Rural Resistance" in *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, London: Routledge.

4. See, Piper, Nicola and Anders Uhlin. (2004). *Transnational Activism in Asia : Problems of Power and Democracy*, London: Routledge; p. 4-5. The same authors define activism as "political activities that are: (1) based on a conflict of interests and thus are of a contentious nature; (2) challenging or supporting certain power structures; (3) involving non-State actors; and (4) taking place (at least partly) outside formal political arenas." (p.4). Using Thomas Risse-Kappen's work, they define *transnational* as "interaction across state borders involving at least one non-State actors" (p.5). See, Risse-Kappen, Thomas ed. (1995). *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. This definition was further refined by two social movement specialists, Della Porta and Tarrow who referred to *transnational collective action* as "the coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states, or international institutions." Della Porta, Donatella and Sidney Tarrow (2005), *Transnational Protest and Global Activism*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield; p.7.

5. See, Louise Amoore, (2005), "Introduction: Global Resistance - Global Politics," In *The Global Resistance Reader*, ed. L. Amoore, Oxon: Routledge: 1-11; Robert W. Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method," In *The Global Resistance Reader*, op.cit., 35-47, Stephen Gill. "Theorizing the Interregnum: the Double Movement and Global Politics in the 1990s," In *The Global Resistance Reader*, op.cit., 54-64.

Individuals involved in global networks and initiatives are seldom only working at the transnational level exclusively. Instead, they tend to be “rooted at the local level and national level” and engaging simultaneously different levels of government institutions.⁶ But most significantly, transnational networkers are able to create linkages and form coalitions among various types of actors operating on different levels (local, national, regional, international) and respond to various political contexts, each offering a different range of political opportunities.

In the following pages, I discuss how transnational networking constitutes one form of response to global socio-economic and political processes generally associated with globalization. In doing so, I suggest that while transnational networking offers possibilities for social transformation and has become an increasingly important modality of action for social justice organizations, it also creates a range of dilemmas that need to be considered. Developing an informed understanding of what are the implications and potentials of global networking in relation to the broad range of initiatives and endeavours for social transformation might permit to achieve greater complementarities with local and national level activism and influence on political processes.

Such a reflection is now timely as both practitioners and analysts are often faced with very concrete and difficult questions in terms of what are the priorities, what type of activities should be given greater attention and at what level (local, regional, national or supranational), or even, how can integration between these various levels of efforts can be ensured. This is especially true among international development organizations which find themselves increasingly involved in supporting this type of networks in addition to more grassroots locally-based work done by local community organizations and NGOs.

The Ecology of Transnational Activism

As any global phenomena, contemporary transnational activism and networking are rooted and contingent of a specific context. These contextual elements need consideration as they represent important variables in order to comprehend the specific contours of transnational networking. For now, it is possible to identify at least four elements:

1. *Heterogeneous societies, languages, cultures, and uneven access to communication technologies:* A first element to consider is the heterogeneity of political, cultural and demographic contexts in which networking is taking place. Such diversity represents both an asset as well as a challenge for transnational collective action. The capacities of organisations and networks to understand and enrich their praxis from such diversity appear a central factor to ensure that transnational activism will become an important component and a complementary means to affect social transformation. Greater and cheaper availability of internet and new communication technologies, a more widespread knowledge

6. See, Della Porta, Donatella and Sidney Tarrow (2005)

of a common language (usually English), and the possibility of relatively cheap travel have now made transnational networking among grassroots organizations increasingly feasible.

2. *Fragility and limitations of the democratic space*: There are important differences in the nature and degree of democratic space that exists between states. In some cases, the “democratic space” is very limited and there are few domestic political opportunities that exist for domestic organizing. In such context, transnational networking might become an important modality of struggle as Keck and Sikkink and others have shown in analyzing human rights struggles and advocacy in Latin America.⁷ Transnational organizing is sometime used as an alternative to local and national organizing in cases where the domestic political space is limited and constrained. At the same time, such type of organizing can be seen as a diversion to the more pressing local and national issues of enlarging democratic space. It is important to examine if and how does transnational social networks interact with these domestic grassroots mobilization efforts and whether they contributed positively to open and enlarge democratic space.

3. *Unevenness of civil society organizing*. As a whole the unevenness of civil society organizing and experiences has to be considered and factored in while assessing the potentialities and possibilities of transnational networking. The density, the qualities and the attributes of social movements, self-help networks and NGOs vary significantly from one country and one from region to the other. At the same time, there are now regional networks and organizations such as Focus on the Global South or Third World Network that play a key role by providing analyses and regional and national perspectives to resource-poor social movements and networks, improving and enhancing the quality and depth of the policy advocacy.

4. *Importance of the rural sector*: To a different degree, most states of the Global South have important proportions of their populations living and working in rural areas. It is also in those areas where poverty and exploitation are most obvious and widespread. This reality requires a critical examination in particular how rural issues - such as land reform, land tenure, right to food, people’s control over seeds and genetic resources, fair trade, ecological agriculture, etc. – can be carried forward by transnational networks. For grassroots rural organizations, determining what value-added participation of transnational rural networks might add to local struggles is a central one as well as ensuring the participation of rural-based organizers.⁸

7. See, Keck and Sikkink (1998), op.cit; Brysk, Alison ed. (2002). *Globalization and Human Rights*. Berkeley: University of California Press; and Risse, Thomas, Stephen C. Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink eds. (1999). *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

8. See, Desmarais, Annette (2003). « The WTO... Will Meet Somewhere, Sometime. And We Will Be There,» Prepared to VOICES: The Rise of Non-Governmental Voices in Multilateral Organizations. Ottawa: North-South Institute (September); and Borras Jr. Saturnino.(2004). “La Via Campesina: An Evolving Transnational Social Movement.” TNI Briefing Series No.2004/6. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute.

These above features, of what I called the “ecology” of transnational networking do not exhaust the range of differences and commonalities that exist. Rather, they were presented here as a first attempt to identify some of the defining features of the context in which transnational collective action takes place.⁹

Key Dilemmas and Challenges for Transnational Networking

While transnational networking action offers many advantages and significant potential for transformative action, it is not without its own set of dilemmas. The following paragraphs discuss those. The list here is not intended to be exhaustive but seeks to identify those important ones.

Allocation of resources: Supporting transnational social movements, INGOs or activists networks means that funding agencies are making certain choices in terms of allocation of resources. These choices require at least two types of consideration. A first one is to ensure that there is coherence within the choices that are made and complementarities exist among the various levels of interventions. Ideally, transnational networks should echo and amplify actions at the local and national levels. In some cases, when local and national channels for social and political transformation are blocked, one could think of Burma, transnational action (cross border interventions) might become the privileged axis of work. A second consideration is to avoid situations when limited resources are being substantially allocated for transnational events, such as the World Social Forums and other important gatherings, with the end result that support of grassroots programming is undermined.

Democratic processes and “voice”: A second set of consideration has to do with the functioning of transnational activism. As it is true for local and national forms of organization, issues of democratic participation and “voice” are very much at the heart of sustainable transnational action. How are decisions taken? Who is speaking for whom? These are not easy issues to confront when dealing with relatively loose organizational forms and several national contexts, cultures and languages. However, these seem unavoidable issues that require discussions and considerations.¹⁰

Local versus global issues: Transnational networking does not imply necessarily global issues. Advocating only for regional and global issues (trade agreements, regional security, global regulations, etc.) only constitute one form of global networking. Very local issues such as the construction of dams, environmental threats by mining companies, or the impact of deforestation can all be sources of transnational networking. The decisive factor might be one of strategic and tactical considerations. What are the opportunities that exist to enable and initiate change processes? Are there clear

9. One might want to read a similar effort by Piper and Uhlin, in their chapter « New Perspectives on Transnational Activism », in particular the sub-section “Contextualizing Transnational Activism in East and Southeast Asia”. Piper and Uhlin eds. (2004). *Transnational Activism in Asia*, pp.19-20.

10. See Appendix A taken from Bandy, Joe and Jackie Smith. (2005). « Factors Affecting Conflict and Cooperation in Transnational Movement Networks. » in *Coalitions Across Borders : Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order*. Lanham : Rowman and Littlefield : pp.231-252.

connections and parallels between situations and problems in various countries and can resistance struggles be connected? Can such connections multiply or enhance the chances of policy changes?

Existing models and frames of collective action: Self-help networks have a rich history of social mobilizations ranging from very local resistance struggles to national movements. Throughout those struggles collective action frames and repertoires of collective actions were developed and tested. Social movement organizers, activists and NGO workers learned from previous failures and successes. Successful patterns of mobilization and themes of action are internalized and disseminated within societies and across societies. With the growing access to international information and the global connections that exist among activist networks, forms and theme of protest are now rapidly diffused. The challenge here is how to learn from other movements' experiences and struggles and adjust those to a particular context.

High density of social movement activists, NGO and networks: The growing number of social movements, NGOs and networks, in particular those that have regional connections means that it has become increasingly possible to organize coordinated campaigns and activities. The expanding density of civil society organisations also means that there are often several NGOs and networks working and addressing the same issues, oftentimes with differing views on tactics and strategies. This organizational plurality and diversity of responses is oftentimes depicted as a dilution and diversion of energy and dynamism. It nonetheless constitutes a significant achievement in terms of having now a ticker civil society capable of mobilizing a wide range of exploited sectors and proposing innovative alternatives. In the coming years, the challenge seems to be on how to construct deliberative processes and build common grounds that can strengthen the overall capabilities of grassroots organizations and activist networks to offer counter-hegemonic proposals on democratic and participatory governance, ecologically sustainable socio-economic development, accessible and universal health care and social housing and women's rights and feminist practices.

Oppositional versus propositional politics: This is not a new dilemma and as time is passing, less and less is it perceived as a binary opposition. To the contrary, whenever the two can be combined, the better the advocacy. As time passes, the importance of developing alternative propositions is becoming a priority. In fact, the present time might be an opportune moment to document and present the growing range of alternative practices to globalization that have been set into motion. Two types of alternatives can be imagined: One would be constituted of the range of alternative organizational practices that have been proposed and set into motion by transnational civil society. This would require an effort of introspection by such actors to analyze and reflect on how global civil society organizes and functions in a way that is democratic, transparent and accountable. A second type would be made of the various development alternatives that have been put forward on the ground, especially those that have been implemented in more than one national contexts, for example, ecological agriculture, agriculture supported by the community (ASC), environmentally

sound small-scale industrial, alternative urban settlement development, workers' managed coop. and community-managed programs, etc.

Anti-globalization élites or shared participation: As the anti-alter globalization movement develops and expands, there is a need to assess whether or not the movement has ended creating its own sets of elites - the "rock-star" syndrome - who participate in all gatherings and campaigns. This might seem like an unavoidable situation, however, being conscious of it might trigger actions towards decentralized leadership, the development of a plurality of spokesperson and a greater concern for popular education and dissemination of analyses. Ideally, the more diverse, the more rooted and the more localized the leadership, the better, especially if aiming at building up another "World" respectful of differences and rooted in the multitude of local experiences.

Mobilization-driven and campaign-driven? Is transnational networking only rooted in mobilization and campaign activities? While it is clear to practitioners that it is much more than this, it might be important to reflect on the different components of transnational networking. In what ways is it having its greatest impacts? Is it able to make local and national governments and supranational institutions adjust and respond to pressures from below? Equally important is a discussion on the combination of forms of contentious politics. What issues, what forms and what timing are most likely to affect the dominant discourse and practices of ruling institutions and government.

Policy influence and impact: This is the most difficult aspect of transnational networking. Part of difficulty is that policy influence is often hard to measure. In very few situations, it is possible to trace direct causal relations between a civil society action and a policy change. However, this is also true of true of national level campaigns. What seems like important variables are: 1) the level of knowledge and expertise that transnational networks and organizations are able to bring and offer on key certain specific policy issues; 2) the level of public support they generate, especially their capacities to mobilize widespread opposition movement; 3) the type of political opportunities that exists: Are there divisions within the ruling elites? Are there divisions among decision-makers on policy issues? Are there possibilities for tactical alliances?

Conclusion

In this paper, I have briefly examined the challenges and dilemmas brought about by transnational collective action and networking. This form of collective action connects activist networks, NGOs and social movements across borders and can be seen both as a complement to local and national activism as well as an activist modality on its own. Concrete impact and policy influence of such form of activism takes different forms and is often difficult to trace in a linear way. At one level, transnational advocacy efforts produces shared identities and a common understanding of issues. It also generates common campaigns and proposals that can be put forward

during regional and international gatherings and implemented both at the regional and national levels. In some cases, transnational activism influences the dominant discourse and forces its tenants to defend and justify their positions. In other cases, it can inform reformist policy-makers interested in developing alternative proposals to the more orthodox globalization agenda who are seeking the expertise and knowledge generated by transnational networks. But more importantly, by connecting community organizations and local networks to a broader set of issues and struggles, local activists are able to amplify and enrich both their work being conducted at the very local level and the advocacy and policy work conducted regionally and globally. Interacting with other local activists and global networks allows for new learning and experiences that later on can enrich and feed local organizing efforts.¹¹

As mentioned before, this emerging form of activism is not without its own sets of dilemmas and challenges. Exploring further the micro-processes at work when local issues and struggles become part of transnational network remain a key analytical challenge. Nonetheless, it offers important possibilities and potentials to augment and enrich the practice of international development organizations and civil society organizations. Linkages between local and global scales become all the more complex as cyber activism now forms one of the modalities by which local networks can disseminate globally (Bob 2001, Bennett 2003). Websites, mailing lists and other web 2.0 applications have been key tools for disseminating research and policy advocacy platforms. While it is essential to ensure that those directly affected at the local scale are able to access and use these new technologies, these do not replace the need for direct encounters and gatherings, as well as the need for public mass mobilizations.

In the coming years, a key analytical as well as practical challenge will be to understand concretely and operationally how such form of transnational networking “fits” in the overall picture of grassroots struggles and how it contributes to strengthening deliberative processes and fostering alternative practices that can improve the lives of the exploited people.¹² In doing so, it might become possible to illustrate and make operational what James Rosenau (2003) described as “distant proximities” to illustrate the contradictory and intertwined dynamics of these “glocal” connections. Understanding resistance on multiple scales might require us to break away from easily understood and usual dichotomies, local versus global, open versus hidden, inclusionary versus exclusionary, private versus public, and so on.

11. See Caouette, Dominique (2006), « Thinking and Nurturing Transnational Activism in Southeast Asia : Global Advocacy through Knowledge-Building. » *Kasarinlan: A Philippine Quarterly of Third World Studies*, Manila, Philippines, 21, 2 (2006): pp.3-3.

12. A recent work of Jonathan Fox can provide a useful starting point: Fox, Jonathan. (2002). “Assessing Binational Civil Society Coalitions: Lessons from the Mexico-U.S. Experience.” In *Cross-Border Dialogues: U.S.-Mexico Social Movement Networking*, edited by D. Brooks and J. Fox. La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California-San Diego: pp.341-417. Another useful effort is Clark, John. ed. (2003). *Globalizing Civic Engagement*. London: Earthscan.



Appendix : List of “factors affecting conflict and cooperation in transnational movement networks”

as identified by Joe Bandy and Jackie Smith

In the concluding chapter of their book on transnational coalitions and protest against neoliberal capitalism, Bandy and Smith established: 1) a series of conditions auspicious to the formation of transnational networks; 2) a typology of contentious issues within these networks, and, 3) the elements that are most conducive to the construction of transnational coalition. These conditions, issues and elements are here presented in a point form:

I. Social Conditions that Enable Transnational Networks

- 1) The presence of IGOs [International Governmental Organizations] or INGOs [International Nongovernmental Organizations] that facilitate network development;
- 2) The presence of well-organized national movements;
- 3) The presence of well-organized foreign movement allies;
- 4) Many pre-existing similarities among movements of different nations;
- 5) The capacity for regular communication between national movements;
- 6) Government or corporate institutions that are open to change;
- 7) Economic conditions conducive to movement resource building;
- 8) The absence of international political conflict, such as war on terrorism; and,
- 9) Mass public dissent.

II. Conflicts within Transnational Movement Networks

- 1) Resource conflicts, resource dependencies
- 2) Organizational conflicts
- 3) Identity conflicts
- 4) Conflicts over goals and strategies

III. Collective Actions Conducive to Coalition

- 1) The leadership of skilled movement brokers
- 2) The development of coalition forums towards transnational public spheres
- 3) The promotion of a flexible, democratic organizational culture
- 4) Perceived successes of coalition

Source : Bandy, Joe and Jackie Smith (2005). “Factors Affecting Conflict and Cooperation in Transnational Movements Networks.” In *Coalitions Across Borders: Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield: pp.231-252.

SELF-HELP NETWORKS AND THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE MULTILATERAL SYSTEM

By ELISA PETER¹³

The United Nations and its non-State interlocutors

Over the past decade there has been a significant increase in the range of partnerships between the United Nations and non-State actors, including civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, local authorities and parliaments in such areas as peacekeeping, promoting effective (and decentralized) international development cooperation, strengthening good governance and the rule of law, promoting respect for human rights and working towards the achievements of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

The relative openness of the UN conferences and summits in the 1990s illustrate this evolution. In this respect, the United Nations increasingly recognizes the importance of a new vision of multilateralism that draws upon the resources and legitimacy of non-State actors that are both flexible and responsive to the complex challenges of today's world. This process of increasing engagement with civil society and other non-State actors has strengthened both the United Nations and the intergovernmental debate and has been part of the ongoing process of modernization and institutional change that the Organization has undergone in the past decade.

However, there is space for improvement in the way the United Nations engages non-State actors in its deliberations.

The bulk of the UN's relations with civil society are still with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of various kinds, including humanitarian, environmental and development NGOs, trade unions, faith-based organizations and professional associations.

These organizations are making extremely valuable contributions to the work of the UN, both at the operational/field level, and at the normative/policy level. Many have established partnerships with various UN agencies and have developed advocacy

13. UNNGLS, United States of America.

campaigns and strategies to influence a wide range of intergovernmental deliberations and even set the agenda on some issues. Their presence at the UN contributes to making the decision making processes of the UN more transparent and participatory and therefore contributes to the democratization of global governance.

However, these organizations are not always perceived as being “representative” of those sectors of the world’s population who are intended to be the main beneficiaries of the the UN’s goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and who are key actors in attaining them. Among others, these include peasant farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, rural women, Indigenous Peoples, shack/slum dwellers, people living with HIV/AIDS, etc.

It is the voice of these constituencies that is largely missing in UN forums. When they are heard from, it is often through the intermediary of NGOs who undertake to voice their concerns, or who sponsor the participation of “poor and marginalized people” to bear witness, as individuals, to their situations. This might have been understandable some years ago, when these constituencies were weak and fragmented. But over the past decade they have made great strides in building up their own organizations, mandated to speak for them and accountable to them, and in developing their capacity to articulate their own messages.

Why bother? Potential benefits of closer engagement between the UN and self-help networks

Increased levels of engagement between self-help networks and the UN can contribute to making the UN a more authoritative and effective defender of common goods, human rights and peace.

For the UN

By strengthening the advocacy capacity of organizations which represent the majority of the population of the global South, it can contribute to building accountable national governance on which the UN system depends and to generating political will in support of the UN’s mission.

UN policies and programmes will also have greater public support if they incorporate the insights and proposals of those they are intended to support. Engaging them is particularly relevant and urgent in a moment in which global challenges have emerged with force – climate change, economic and financial turmoil, food, energy and water shortages - which call into question the development approaches that have dominated the past decades. These crises manifestly cannot be addressed by governments alone armed with the same policies and instruments that have contributed to generate them.

For self-help networks

The legitimacy of self-help networks is often perceived as stronger than that of NGOs since it derives from their representation of people's constituencies or Nations. Their legitimacy is based on the fact that they are direct emanations of and are accountable to their constituencies. This may be particularly important in a moment in which issues of legitimacy and accountability of civil society organizations are attracting a lot of attention.

For their part, self-help networks representing the prime victims of the crises, but also potentially the solutions, need the UN since it may be the most appropriate international forum for the expression of their concerns, as the first lines of the UN Charter recall: "We the peoples of the United Nations..."¹⁴ The people they represent often have been on the front line of suffering the consequences of the liberalization and privatization policies of the past decades. Some of them look to the United Nations system as a potentially significant forum for the advancement of their objectives. Closer engagement with the UN can reinforce the strategies which self-help networks adopt to advance their agendas at all levels, from local to global.

Hindrances to greater engagement of self-help network at the UN

The difficulties of grappling with so vast and heterogeneous a category as "civil society" is one reason often cited by UN officials and member government representatives to motivate their hesitancy to engage more intensely with these actors. But sorting out the contents of the "civil society bag" is less complicated than it might seem, if certain basic distinctions are applied. It is important to do so since the different identities of different kinds of civil society organizations make them suitable for different kinds of engagement with the UN system.

Some of the hindrances to be addressed include:

- Institutional culture and procedures of UN secretariats (heavy bureaucracy, top down, etc);
- Lack of policy coherence at the international (and national) levels;
- Member governments' stances and lack of political space;
- Insufficient familiarity with self-help networks; uncertainty about their representativity;
- Networks weaknesses including lack of resources;
- Individual vs. institutional relationships; ad-hoc practices vs. formal arrangements, sporadic consultation vs. mechanisms that ensure their effective input into intergovernmental decision-making;
- How to speak truth to power;
- Cultural differences;
- Relations between NGO elites who occupy the space and don't necessarily want to share it.

14. Also, Article 71 of the UN Charter allows ECOSOC to entertain consultative relationships with NGOs. The details of the participation rights are set out in an ECOSOC resolution passed in 1996. The resolution envisages far-reaching participatory opportunities for national and international NGOs within ECOSOC and its Functional Commissions. The resolution also details the participation of NGOs at international UN conferences.



Basic principles for engagement

There are significant differences among both UN entities and self-help networks. No single model of engagement could possibly be universally applicable and it would be counterproductive to try to enforce one. Nonetheless, the following set of guidelines is felt to be valid for situations of UN engagement with self-help networks generally. All of them derive from the concrete experience of one or more UN entities, have been shown to enhance the quality of interaction to the mutual benefit of the UN and the movements concerned, and are felt to be applicable to all levels of the UN system's work – from global to regional and national.

Mutual recognition

The UN's Charter and its mission to defend human rights constitute the overarching principle on which its engagement with CSOs and people's movements is founded. Social actors can and should be enabled to influence policy decisions that affect their lives, without putting into question the sovereignty of States and their decision-making responsibilities.

Rights and obligations of the parties in dialogue

In its relationships with non-State actors, it is the responsibility of the UN system – acting in defense of common goods, human rights and global equity – to ensure that the voices of people's movements representing marginalized constituencies are heard, and to create safe spaces and mobilize resources for policy debate.

The heterogeneous nature of “civil society” needs to be recognized in order for meaningful dialogue to take place. It is up to civil society organizations to determine autonomously how they wish to organize themselves in their interaction with the UN system. It is important to acknowledge the specific legitimacy self-help networks, deriving from the fact that they represent and have a mandate to speak for constituencies or nations which are among those most affected by UN policies and programmes.

- It is the responsibility of self-help networks to practice transparent governance and to seek to build effective two-way communication with, and accountability to, their bases. They should be ready to document these practices to their UN system interlocutors.

Necessary elements of a meaningful dialogue

- In order to promote truly meaningful engagement of self-help networks, a number of elements should be taken into consideration: ensuring their timely access to strategic information; ensuring their engagement in the design of policies and programmes from the onset; maintaining continuity in the relationship; respecting their languages, agendas and consultation practices; and jointly making every effort to ensure that the necessary resources are available to fulfill these requirements. The ever present issue of resource mobilization needs to be addressed, and part of the answer may be found with governments, development partners present in the country, NGOs, foundations and budgets of specific projects and programmes.

However, the resources need to be managed with the participation of the networks themselves.

- The rationale, timing and expected outcomes of any consultation/dialogue should be specified from the outset. Co-convened and co-managed interface spaces should operate according to agreed criteria and should be inclusive and pluralistic within the terms of these criteria. PMs should have an autonomous space to consult among themselves before interacting with intergovernmental forums. In addition, it is important to ensure that consultation processes are part of a long-term strategy rather than done on an ad-hoc basis.

A final word

Promoting networking and facilitating a community of practice among UN entities in their relations with civil society is at the core of the mandate of the United Nations Non Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS). NGLS encourages engagement with these constituencies, building on the existing experiences, aiming to offer space to civil society voices that are not yet fully at home in the global system.

INTERNATIONAL NGOs AND SELF-HELP NETWORKS : FROM CRITICS TO COMPLEMENTARITY?

By **GEOFFREY PLEYERS**¹⁵

During this seminar, self-help networks members have often stressed the ambiguous, and sometimes conflictual, relations their organizations have with International NGOs working in the field of development. Whereas self-help networks are based on members who are, at the same time, the beneficiaries and the promoters of the programs they implement, NGOs can be defined as “voluntary formation, working for development and amelioration of suffering, working with non-self serving aims and relative independence” (Murthy and Rao, 1997)¹.

Although each case is different, we shall try to identify some of the main features characterizing the relationship between these two composite sets, on the basis of the testimonies and comments of the participants in the Rambouillet seminar. We will also refer to the videos made on that occasion and to the experiences of other movements we studied, especially from the global justice movement.

We will start by identifying the three main categories of criticisms these local movements and self-help networks raise against NGOs. The second part will address what has emerged as the central element of the comments and testimonies in the seminar: the affirmation of local movement and membership based networks as being autonomous actors (rather than as “poor” or as “NGO programs’ beneficiaries”). The third part will provide two elements that could form the basis for a more mature and cooperative relationship between NGOs and membership-based networks: pragmatism and reflexivity.

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Criticisms leveled at NGOs by membership-based organizations

NGOs as a business sector?

A first set of criticism raised by membership-based movements dealing with NGOs is based on the business orientation of some NGOs. Following the decline of the State usually associated to structural adjustments programs, NGOs have captured a significant part of development programs' funds (Kaldo, 2003 ; Pirotte, 2007). These changes have been more discernible in some sectors: "HIV/Aids has become a very big business, there is a lot of money in this sector" (Pat Matemilola, NEPWHAN, Nigeria). Thus, this has ensured significant income for NGOs and their management, so that in many countries from the Global South, NGOs are primarily seen as a business, as small firms that vie on a very competitive market for funds from the various international donors. Indeed, profit for NGOs from the South, or for their management is not necessarily excluded². But some have grown significantly rich or have diverted funds, by manipulating situations of poverty: "many institutions continue to build power out of our misery and we need to change this pattern." (Pat Horn, Streenet).

Many criticisms also refer to NGOs' institutionalization. This process often proves to be essential to tap funds from international development agencies, but it may distance NGOs from their local constituencies and lead them to adopt a bureaucratic and vertical approach to development and to the needs of the population (see below).

NGOs do not represent poor people but speak in their name

The second set of criticism deals with the legitimacy of representation. One of the NGOs' main missions is to relay the "voice of the voiceless", to make the claims of marginalized groups heard and to convey their demands to development agencies, policy makers and to the public.

However, many NGOs have ended up monopolizing the access to international arenas and institutions. Elisa Peter (UNNGLS) has stated "NGOs often take the place of social movements in the international institutions, and are not prepared to share it". The stakes are high as it is not only about tapping into resources but also about NGO rationale. Thus, representatives from self-help networks denounce "double-talk: they speak about participation, but concretely, associated movements have little or no room to discuss the project" (Pat Horn, Streetnet). The US sociologist M. Davis (2006: 76) even considers that "the true beneficiaries of the 'participatory turn' at the World Bank [since the 80s] seem to be big NGOs rather than local people".

Ch. Tilly (2004: 152) also pointed to the risks of emergence of an international elite of NGOs hinting that they represent themselves as speaking 'for the people' without creating either deep grassroots connections or means for ordinary people to speak

through them” (cf. Pleyers, 2008). Having the mission to speak about the poor, for the poor and in the name of the poor, they have ended up speaking for themselves. M. Davis (2006: 72) and the Indian sociologist G. Verma (2003) thus consider NGOs as being “middle-men who, with the benediction of foreign philanthropies, are usurping the authentic voices of the poor”. Some international institutions become however more sensitive to these issues. Elisa Peter stated: “the UN is engaging more with social movements, as they’re realizing that, to a certain extent, those movements are more legitimate and more accountable to the people they claim they represent than traditional NGOs”.

NGOs impose a vision of development

The third set of criticism deals with the definition and terms of development and interventions. Grassroots actors consider that the interventions controlled and defined by “experts”, NGOs and a complex of development rooted in a bureaucratic approach dispossess them of their vision of development and of their ideas about what should be done. This vision of development often leads to the exclusion of the poorest local actors, though they are supposed to be the beneficiaries. The requirements donors impose at international level are often at odds with local realities. The campaign against AIDS in Nigeria is a good example: “they want volunteers, and they do not want to pay people. But this is our reality”. An effective campaign can indeed hardly be conducted on the basis of volunteering in a country blighted by poverty. Another example refers to the requirements donors imposed while shaping the project: “how can one expect a slum dwellers organization to write what it will be in three years’ time when they don’t know how tomorrow will be, and when they risk being evicted at any time?” wondered Nico Keijver (Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

More generally, NGOs have been charged with wanting to impose their vision of development and their ways to operate at the expense of the population, and with believing they “know better than the people themselves what they need”: “once NGOs had joined the network, they wanted to decide everything and to impose their vision of what we should do” (Pat Matemilola, NEPWHAN). A few months after the Zapatista uprising in Mexico, the leader of the movement, Subcomandante Marcos, rebelled against this attitude he poetically described as the “Cinderella syndrome”:

“I saved an example of “humanitarian aid”, which arrived a few weeks ago: good people who send us a pink stiletto heel, size 6 1/2, imported, without its mate, thinking that, poor as we are, we’ll accept anything, charity and alms. How can we tell all those good people that no, we no longer want to continue living in shame. And that’s not all. There is a more sophisticated charity. It’s the one that a few NGOs and international agencies practice. It consists, broadly speaking, in their deciding what the communities need, and, without even consulting them, in imposing not just specific projects, but also the times and means of their implementation. Imagine the desperation of a community that needs drinkable water and they’re saddled with a library. The one that requires a school for the children, and they give them a course on herbs”.

Being autonomous actors

Given the dominant (or perceived as such) position of NGOs, the element that has strongly emerged during the seminar is for member-based organizations to affirm themselves as full actors, autonomous from NGOs, and to form their own networks, defending their own vision of development. Cesare Ottolini (International Alliance of Inhabitants) explains, “inhabitants are not only users or customers, but the builders of cities. (...) They decide to carry their own destiny, not only in the neighbourhood, but at the international level”.

This statement implies the rejection of the identification as “poor” or “victims”, as these categories refer to the idea of non-actors dependant on the spin-off benefits of a proactive modernization policy, whether it is conducted by the State or NGOs. Aisha Shaheed (Women Living Under Muslim Laws) argued that women from her network are “actors, agents for change, not beneficiaries”. Similarly, for Streetnet, “street workers are not poor people, nor victims of neo-liberal capitalism, but actors who want to improve their living conditions”. Members of the network present at the seminar sought to affirm themselves as the actors of their own change. This is the rationale for Wastepickers International’s actions: “it is essential for us to explain that it is a full profession, which does not only enable us to keep a job, but also to have a deep public utility, in particular regarding waste sorting”.

Affirming self-help networks as autonomous actors implies the building of their own international networks (which will often compete with international NGOs), as well as the building of their own knowledge and expertise. Whether between small farmers or informal waste collectors, international networks are created from local movements. The aim is for policy makers to understand them better, as well as to share the movements’ experiences in various countries around similar issues.

In fact, their internationalization does not necessarily require NGOs. Some movements, such as the International Alliance of Inhabitants even came out of NGO-dominated international networks in order to create their own space. Networks of membership-based movements consider indeed that “we’re not worth less than NGOs. Actually, I would even say we’re worth more, because we have a social constituency” (Cesare Ottolini, International Alliance of Inhabitants). Affirming their independence from NGOs is also an important feature of peasants’ international network Via Campesina. At the 2006 Bamako Polycentric WSF, Paul Nicholson, a leader of Via Campesina, argued that peasants “no longer want NGOs to speak in our name to international institutions and about agricultural policy. We want to build our own movement, our own international network and to speak for ourselves”. These international networks of movements compete therefore with some NGOs for representation in international institutions and development projects. This creates a lot of tensions and a competition that can turn fierce and “nasty” as Elisa Peter (UNNGLS), a seasoned observer of these struggles, observed.

Building their own knowledge is another crucial issue: “we’re actors and not beneficiaries, that means that we are people who have our own knowledge and expertise” (Ethel Long Scott, Women’s Economic Agenda Project). Popular universities, training activities, internal networks of experts play a prominent role in the activities of the networks involved in the Rambouillet seminar. Thus, the Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal People from the Tropical Forest develops, on the basis of its daily analysis of news on the issues that mobilize indigenous movement, “a common approach to preserve its own vision of the world and backs it with a knowledge that changes constantly”. GROOTS also focuses a lot on its “grassroots academy to create knowledge and to try to do it in a cumulative way”. This is also at the core of the WIEGO networks (Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing), which organizes “popular universities” and has its own research bodies working out statistics on the informal economy and on the evolution of global markets. The objective is to develop “research as a service for informal workers, with a participatory methodology”. The utility of social forums and of arenas for exchanges and reflection is apparent in this context, as they enable local movements to exchange experiences and to build knowledge.

Towards a more mature relationship

A growing number of NGOs are trying to address these criticisms and focus on developing more horizontal relationships with grassroots movements. Such relationships can be built around three elements: the autonomy of the associations and groups from the NGOs (which we just addressed), pragmatism and each actor’s critical reflexivity.

Pragmatic relationships

Regarding NGOs, groups decide to set their own criteria and their own vision of the projects that should be implemented. “If this does not suits donors or NGOs, they can stay at home. We will conduct our work and we will not comply with all their criteria”. Nevertheless, the position of most actors in self-help networks does not lie with the rejection of NGOs, but with their desire to develop pragmatic relationships with them, under some conditions. “Sometimes we collaborate with NGOs, the government or the UN and sometimes not. By these opportunities to work together, we are not bound to any further commitments towards these institutions” (Aisha Shaheed, Women Living Under Muslim Laws). “Working with external professionals, especially NGOs, and especially at the global level is a new challenge for SDI. There have been some interesting successes, but they also have been some interesting misses” (Joel Bolnick, Shack/Slum Dwellers International).

Self-help networks’ representatives have underlined the importance of NGOs and other international networks as “service providers” as long as they fit into a logic whose aim is to build local actors’ capacity (rather than to make them dependent on NGOs and international aid): “our approach is to empower our organization, to be more self-sufficient. We organize for example capacity building training (with a minimum

quota of 50% women) to favor new leadership within these local networks” (Lucia Fernandez, Streetnet). In this context, NGOs, intellectual-activists and international networks have an important role to play, be it regarding legal advice, communication (“to make voices heard”), as an institutional relay or by organizing training in order to help movements better to expose their projects and ideas to donors. Researchers and NGOs have for instance helped GROOTS: “they helped us to feature the good work done by grassroots women in their communities”. Cooperation between NGOs and local movements or self-help networks may prove very fruitful. While not overlooking criticisms raised against several NGOs, Pat Matemilola (NEPWHAN) believes that “in the end, working with international players has brought a lot to the network fighting against Aids in Nigeria”.

Reflexivity

Although they have undeniable strengths, self-help networks should not be idealized. Issues of representation, power, resource allocation and information control also dog them. The autonomy of one organization and its locally rooted social basis don’t guarantee its degree of internal democracy, of transparency or accountability.

The growth and the internationalization of a movement built on a social constituency are important issues in order to make the people’s voice heard and to promote global solutions that tackle problems at their roots. However, they also change the structure of an organization and affect relations within the different categories of network members (Tilly, 2004; Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005). The risk of forming an elite that could become separated from its constituency is even bigger as access to international networks requires specific skills (starting with knowing foreign languages) that grassroots activists can only acquire if specifically trained. How are the international expressions of self-help networks to avoid reproducing the discrepancy they denounce in some NGOs? How to ensure that their leaders do not also end up “speaking on behalf of people without leaving these people the opportunity to speak through them”?

Even if it is not a perfect solution, the exercise of critical reflexivity within networks and organizations is one of the most effective tool to avoid major backsliding. Critical self-assessments against the founding goals and values of the movements, as well as the implementation of internal feedback that fully associate grassroots activists turns out to be indispensable to enable leaders to continue to carry the voice of those they claim to represent. It is also crucial for these groups to regularly monitor the weight of grassroots members’ active participation. In this matter, communication is a crucial challenge. Lisa Jordan (Ford Foundation) stressed the importance of checking that the information flows in both directions (downwards to the constituency, but also from the base up to the leadership). Do representatives report back to local activists on what happens at the international level, and do they reflect what happens at the local level in the national and international coordination forums? The videos shown during the seminar, as well as some organizations’ website have proven that they could be fine media to get the message across or to echo the voice of local actors.

However, they may also form barriers that reinforce the exclusion of those who have no access to these technologies.

The concrete and systematic organization of self-assessment practices is not an easy task. Organizations' resources are limited, and international organizations' deadline impose tight schedules, whereas campaigns and projects are often lead in a hurry around issues that dramatically affect the lives of organization members. In this context, regularly spending time to rethink one's own organization may appear a waste of both time and resources that won't necessarily be easy to justify, while facing the needs of the organization's members or the performance requirements from donors. However, maintaining internal democracy and funding objectives, as well as grassroots members' active participation probably requires it.

In addition to internal meetings dedicated to self-assessment, it is also important to stress the value of national and international meetings (like this seminar) that allow participants not only to reflect on their own practices, but also to learn from the successes and failures of similar groups. As Aisha Shaheed (Women Living Under Muslim Laws) pointed out after the seminar: "our own self-reflexivity is fed by the other networks' experience".

Conclusion

The issues raised by the global age and by improving poor people's quality of life represent such significant challenges that it would be counterproductive to set NGOs and self-help networks' efforts against each other. A more balanced relationship between NGOs and self-help networks may not emerge should the criticisms raised against NGOs go unnoticed. On the contrary, it is quite important to take them into account in the regular assessment of NGOs and self-help networks' practices, and to try to address them along three axes: the respect for each actor's autonomy and specificity, pragmatic relationships based on complementarities, and critical reflexivity on one's own practices.

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NETWORK ACTION PLAN

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Attributes	Weak	Moderate	Strong
<p>1. Strong Social Ties</p> <p>Core actors in the network MUST know or come to know each other. They must be familiar with each other's talents, motives, skills, reputation and personalities. The core actors must be able to develop appropriate levels of trust and reliance on each other based on understanding of those variables.</p>	<p>Participants have no connections with each other personally.</p> <p>Few Friendships.</p>	<p>Building Member to member interaction and coherence as a collection or team. Core Actors interested in using network to organize. Willingness to build ties to each other given a particular campaign or to address a threat.</p>	<p>160 hours of interaction.</p> <p>Tight friends with enough social capital to smooth over the friction created by collaboration and work.</p> <p>Strong universal access to reputations and skill level assessment from trusted sources.</p>
<p>2. Common Story</p> <p>The core actors in the network must know each other's common unifying and motivating story. The participants must understand the unifying values of the entire network along with the language that resonates with the core actors group.</p>	<p>Initial meetings and communications are difficult and awkward.</p> <p>Unifying values, interest, motivations and language are fractured and unknown.</p>	<p>General outline of core actors' motivations is shared. Meetings and communications focus on shared action and debate rather than social returns. Assumptions about language and values hold true for 50% or more of the network participants.</p>	<p>Deep, nuanced and complete view of the unifying values of the entire network.</p> <p>Clear language selections that resonate with the core actors. A story that can reinforce commitment and actions. A view of 100% of the stories and language that works and doesn't work.</p>
<p>3. Communications Grid</p> <p>All networks "live" on the strength of one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many conversations and exchanges. The communications grid must have the ability to filter, feedback and sort the delivery of messages and segment audiences in multiple ways across all boundaries of organization, geography and time.</p>	<p>It is difficult for network participants to find and contact each other.</p>	<p>Basic communications with limited ability to manage scale or filter signal to noise.</p> <p>Some unified language</p>	<p>Robust one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications that can handle traffic and noise. Multi-channel and –multi-paths to move information across the network. Timeless capacity to integrate new core actors into the communications grid and catch them up to speed.</p>
<p>4. Shared Resources</p> <p>The network must be able to exert management of resources and application of network assets to coordinated network tasks. The return on investment in networks drives from measures change in the shared resources and growth.</p>	<p>There is little or no understanding of what is available or how to access it. Inability to share, request, or manage joint resources.</p>	<p>Need of others resources. Capacity not being used efficiently</p> <p>Willingness to share, support and engage across the network.</p> <p>Financial flexibility</p>	<p>Ability to see resources and coordinate them into network actions and projects.</p> <p>Clear path to open resources to the network for access</p>
<p>5. Clarity of Purpose</p> <p>Networks need to be able to design, synchronize, converge, test and hone specific detailed efforts. The networks must be presented with purposes and given the opportunity to evaluate, rank and refine purpose and projects.</p>	<p>There is no clear process for introducing next steps into the network action chain. There are no mechanisms for participating, evaluating and providing input on prorates and projects.</p>	<p>Good ideas with defined projects</p> <p>Clear leadership willing to step into the process in a collaborative environment.</p>	<p>Open task lists . Ability to select and discuss tasks</p> <p>Ability for core network to work on any priority task and collaboratively filter work to be done.</p>

I. Social Ties

The social strength of your network of friends/community/church

Weak	Moderate	Strong

The social ties of your staff

Weak	Moderate	Strong

The social ties of the advocacy community you work with on campaigns

Weak	Moderate	Strong

How does your campaign activities build strong social networks? What are some ways you can use your work to build social ties across the critical network of supporters you work with to create change?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

How can a focus on social ties change my work?

What are the problems/ challenges with testing social ties building approach in my work?

What are the questions I need answered before I can take the next step in deciding if this is relevant to my work?

II. Common Story

How cohesive is the common story of your network of friends/community/church?

Weak	Moderate	Strong

How cohesive is the story and language that unifies and animates your staff?

Weak	Moderate	Strong

How unified is the story and language of the advocacy community you work with on campaigns?

Weak	Moderate	Strong

How does your campaign listen to, explore and unify the common language and story of the critical network of supporters you work with to create change? What are ways to unify language, values and story of your core network?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

How can a focus on building a common story among the network of activist change my work?

What are the problems/ challenges with testing this approach in my work?

What are the questions I need answered before I can take the next step in deciding if this is relevant to my work?

III. Communications Grid

How complete is the mix of communication opportunity across your network of friends/community/church?

Weak	Moderate	Strong

What is the communication reach across your staff (one-one, one-many many-many)?

Weak	Moderate	Strong

What is the communication reach across the advocacy community you work with on campaigns? Can they easily connect one-one, one to many, many to many?

Weak	Moderate	Strong

How do your efforts continually layer new communications channels across those that support your campaigns and efforts?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

How can a focus on building communications capacity among the network of activist change my work?

What are the problems/ challenges with testing this approach in my work?

What are the questions I need answered before I can take the next step in deciding if this is relevant to my work?

IV. Shared Resources

How clear is the understanding of what resources you have access to across your network of friends/community/church? Is there a good ratio of shared property to number of people engaged?

Weak	Moderate	Strong

How clear are your staff on the availability and value of shared resources they have access to them as employees?

Weak	Moderate	Strong

How clear is the understanding of what resources participants have access to across the advocacy community you work with on campaigns? Is there a good ratio of shared property to number of people engaged?

Weak	Moderate	Strong

How do your efforts open up resources for the broader community? What are ways you can open more resources to be available to the network?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

How can a focus on providing and managing shared resources among the network of activist change my work?

What are the problems/ challenges with testing this approach in my work?

What are the questions I need answered before I can take the next step in deciding if this is relevant to my work?

V. Clarity of Purpose

How well defined are the purpose, norms and limits of acceptable “Ask” across your network of friends/community/church? Can participants ask for money, jobs, sex, advise, etc?

Weak	Moderate	Strong

How clear are your staff on the projects, direction and purpose of the organization?

Weak	Moderate	Strong

How clear and well defined is purpose, norms and limits of acceptable “ask” across your network of the advocacy community you work with on campaigns? What is the flexibility to launch new projects and initiatives within those norms?

Weak	Moderate	Strong

How can efforts to explore the limits of acceptable “asks” and projects open innovation and adaptability across the network of those that support your campaigns and efforts?

What are ways you can help the network of people working on your issue better understand the limits and flexibility of the network? How can the network jointly understand purpose and direction as a way to empower innovation?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

How can a focus on strengthening the clarity of purpose among the network of activist change my work?

What are the problems/ challenges with testing this approach in my work?

What are the questions I need answered before I can take the next step in deciding if this is relevant to my work?