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### Title

Transnational Civil Society Coalitions and the World Bank: Lessons from Project and Policy Influence Campaigns

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5885r699>

### Authors

Brown, L. David  
Fox, Jonathan A

### Publication Date

2001

Peer reviewed

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## Transnational Civil Society Coalitions and the World Bank: Lessons from Project and Policy Influence Campaigns

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*L. David Brown and Jonathan Fox*

For more than two decades, the World Bank has been a lightning rod for transnational civil society action. Coalitions of civil society organizations—nongovernmental organizations, churches, indigenous peoples movements, and international environment and human rights networks—have repeatedly challenged the World Bank's high profile promotion of socially and environmentally costly development strategies. Playing David to the Bank's Goliath is a particularly striking example of ambitious North-South civil society campaigning. In turn, the World Bank has responded in many different, sometimes contradictory, ways, ranging from short-term damage control, substantive policy reforms, and islands of innovation on the one hand to persistent gaps in meeting its own social and environmental reform commitments and a more-of-the-same approach for structural adjustment on the other. The diversity of Bank campaigns across countries and issues, together with the Bank's long track records, makes those campaigns especially rich sources of lessons for understanding transnational coalitions more generally.

The World Trade Organization's (WTO) debacle in Seattle in 1999 led the *Economist* to trace civil society protests in part back to the 50 Years Is Enough campaign against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1994. The *Economist* proceeded to congratulate the Bank for its subsequent effort, supposedly successful, to demobilize and coopt its NGO critics. The *Economist* observed that

From environmental policy to debt relief, NGOs are at the center of World Bank policy. Often they determine it. The new World Bank is more transparent, but it is also more beholden to a new set of special interests.<sup>1</sup>

Is it possible that NGOs have gained this much influence? Have they really demobilized as much as is claimed?

While it is true that, since 1994, the IMF, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), and the WTO superceded the Bank on some protesters' lists of top targets, many other advocacy groups and social organizations—especially those closer to the ground and further from the global media spotlight—remain deeply concerned with the issue of how to get the World Bank to live up to its social and environmental reform commitments.<sup>2</sup>

The analytical challenge implicit in the *Economist's* assessment is how to disentangle cooptation from substantive concessions while recognizing that the difference is often in the eye of the beholder. There is, moreover, a basic contradiction in the *Economist's* assessment: If NGOs really did determine World Bank policy, that would suggest that they have much more influence than the term *cooptation* implies. For example, if NGOs set Bank policy, then it would be difficult to explain why, for the first time in 1999, more than half of the Bank's lending went to quick-disbursing, nonproject macroeconomic adjustment loans (a category of loan inherently far removed from both civil society levers of influence and the Bank's own social and environmental reform policies). Even at the level of specific infrastructural investments, which offer critics more tangible targets, the World Bank continues to propose new projects that directly subsidize huge transnational corporations to carry out likely environmental disasters, as in the case of Exxon and the Chad-Cameroon pipeline.<sup>3</sup> Also in 1999, an international debate exploded over the discovery that the Bank was planning to fund a project called China Western Poverty Reduction, which turned out to threaten ethnic Tibetans. In spite of the Bank's well-known, sophisticated NGO engagement, involving extensive operational collaboration, policy consultations, and enlightened discourse, in the Tibet case, the institution unknowingly stumbled over one of world's most influential indigenous rights campaigns. The resulting mobilization was almost as intense as the previous peak of anti-Bank protest back in the early 1990s, leading to widespread press coverage, unusual "no" votes by the U.S. and German representatives on the Bank's board, high-level international diplomatic tensions with China, imprisonment and serious injury to NGO investigators, an ongoing investigation by the Bank's official inspection panel, and possible suspension of the project.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, as powerful elements within the World Bank continue to ignore its own environmental and social reforms, in some sectors and in some countries, civil society actors perceive the Bank's enlightened discourse as an important partial opening, especially under regimes that are even less enlightened than the World Bank. Moreover, at least some contro-

versial projects that once would have sailed through the approval process are now subjected to greater scrutiny in the design phase, both internally and externally. The Bank's involvement in postconflict situations also creates opportunities for constructive leadership, as in the case of East Timor. The overall result is a highly uneven, patchwork quilt of partial reforms combined with entrenched resistance to change. Transnational campaigns continue to challenge the World Bank, and they have had some degree of influence. In the process, with their long track record, these campaigns have helped to build ever more balanced partnerships between Northern and Southern civil society actors.

This chapter explores these patterns by drawing on a series of transnational coalition efforts aimed at influencing World Bank policies and projects. These case studies were carried out between 1992 and 2000 under the auspices of the Institute for Development Research.<sup>5</sup> We seek to extract from the cases lessons about what makes such efforts successful. More particularly, the chapter focuses on two questions:

1. What is required for transnational coalitions to influence institutions like the World Bank?
2. How can transnational coalition members be accountable to each other across large gaps of power, wealth, and culture?

### The Transnational Coalitions Study

This study explores critical factors embedded in complex, long-term campaigns. We chose to develop in-depth case studies and then compared those cases to see what sorts of patterns emerged. The cases were written by individuals close to events on the ground with access to both the grassroots populations involved and decisionmakers at the World Bank and other agencies. Four cases focused on coalition efforts to influence specific development *projects*—a geothermal plant in the Philippines, a natural resource management project in Brazil, petroleum and land legislation linked to structural adjustment in Ecuador, and a dam in Indonesia.<sup>6</sup> Four other cases focused on coalition efforts to shape Bank *policies* on critical issues—indigenous peoples, water resources management, resettlement of populations ousted by projects, and information and inspection panel policy.<sup>7</sup> Tables 4.1 and 4.2 summarize major features of the project and policy cases.

In this chapter we present some important lessons suggested by the detailed analyses of these cases published elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> The next two sections present and illustrate eight lessons, four concerning coalition impacts

**Table 4.1 Project Reform Campaigns**

Projects and Key Actors	Critical Events in Alliance Evolution
<p>Kedung Ombo Dam, Indonesia (1984–1994)            GRO: Villagers; students            NGO: Local and national legal aid; other local and national poverty and environmental NGOs            BO: International NGO Group on Indonesia (INGI)            INGO: Members of INGI from Northern countries</p>	<p>Most families were not aware of relocation plans until the dam was almost finished. Then some families asked local and national legal aid NGOs for help getting more compensation for their land. Some suits were eventually successful, but the Indonesian government invalidated the judgments. INGI began to lobby the World Bank via its international members in 1988. Popular protests by students and religious groups supported affected villagers after dam completion in 1989. INGI meetings with the World Bank led to government attacks on INGI for “washing dirty linen” in public. The government did make other land available to villagers. The Bank and other international actors agreed to avoid future “Kedung Ombos.”</p>
<p>Mt. Apo Thermal Plant, Philippines (1987–1993)            GRO: Indigenous peoples groups; local farmers            NGO: Local, regional, national networks; Legal Resources Center            BO: Philippine Development Forum (PDF); Bank Information Center (BIC)            INGO: Environmental Defense Fund (EDF); Columban Fathers; Greenpeace</p>	<p>Indigenous groups and farmers began to organize local, regional, and national networks to challenge the project in 1987. Elders of local tribes swore to defend Mt. Apo to “the last drop of blood.” Local coalitions built links to INGOs and the PDF. Two Bank missions drew contradictory conclusions about the project. In 1989, the Philippine Development Forum of NGOs and INGOs agreed to lobby the Bank on Mount Apo. The Government of the Philippines (GOP) certified the project for environmental compliance in spite of protests. National “solidarity conferences” among NGO networks agreed to emphasize indigenous rights and carefully monitor lobbying of PDF. PDF lobbying helped the World Bank reject the government’s environmental impact assessment, and the GOP withdrew its loan request. In 1993, further solidarity conferences set strategies for lobbying export-import Banks.</p>
<p>Planaflo Natural Resources, Brazil (1989–1995)            GRO: Rubber tappers; farmers            NGO: Local and national NGOs and networks (e.g., Instituto de Antropologia e Meio Ambiente [IAMA]; National Council of Rubber Tappers [CNS]; Instituto de Estudos Amazonicos [IEA]; and others)            BO: Rondônia NGO Forum,            INGO: EDF; World Wildlife Federation; others</p>	<p>INGOs (such as the Environmental Defense Fund) protested the lack of local participation in the initial design in 1989, in part because few GROs were organized in the region. The Bank suspended the project until the Rondônia NGO Forum was created to enable local and international (but not national) NGOs to participate in project decisions in 1991. It became clear that state agencies would violate loan terms in spite of the forum, and forum protests carried little weight. The forum requested that the World Bank suspend disbursement in 1994 and asked the Bank Inspection Panel to review the project in 1995. Planaflo was accepted as a case by the panel that year.</p>

(Table 4.1 Continues)

**Table 4.1 Continued**

Projects and Key Actors	Critical Events in Alliance Evolution
<p>Ecuador Structural Adjustment, Ecuador (1986–1994)            GRO: Indigenous peoples (IP) groups; environmental groups            NGO: Federation of Indigenous Peoples (CONAIE); Accion Ecológica            BO: Ecuador Network; BIC            INGO: Rainforest Action Network; Oxfam</p>	<p>The Federation of Indigenous Peoples (CONAIE) mobilized indigenous peoples (IP) groups. In 1990 it helped organize an uprising against structural adjustment. In 1992 it allied with NGOs to challenge World Bank and government oil extraction initiatives that threatened indigenous groups. Negotiations with the Bank and the government altered the oil law. In 1994 CONAIE led a national “Mobilization for Life” coalition against a proposed land law that threatened access to communally held lands and paralyzed the country. CONAIE created the Ecuador Network with INGOs to influence Bank policymaking. Eventually, negotiations with government leaders and agribusiness interests produced a more acceptable land law and a larger policy role for CONAIE in the future.</p>

Note: GRO means grassroots organization; NGO means local or national NGO; BO means bridging organization; INGO means international NGO.

and four concerning coalition organization and accountability. Then we comment briefly on the implications of these lessons for future international coalitions to influence global institutions and policies.

### Lessons About the Impact of Coalitions

It is clear that influencing an institution like the World Bank is not a short-term, low-investment process. Making a difference requires a sustained, cohesive coalition capable of gathering and analyzing information relevant to Bank activities, making that information available to key actors, and mobilizing many sources of influence. The analysis of these cases suggests the first four lessons about effective transnational coalitions.

*Lesson 1: Make the campaign fit the target.* We found that different patterns of coalitions emerged to deal with different issues. For some coalitions, the dominant issue was moderating or undoing harmful impacts of specific Bank projects on grassroots communities. In the Philippines, for example, the coalition challenged the building of a geothermal power plant that threatened indigenous peoples’ sacred ancestral lands as well as the surrounding environment. In Ecuador, an agricultural development program involved legislation that threatened the communal lands of indigenous peoples. The new land law, passed with support from multilateral development banks as well as agribusiness interests, made it likely that communally held

Table 4.2 Policy Reform Campaigns

Policies and Key Actors	Critical Events in Alliance Evolution
<p>Indigenous Peoples Policy (1981–1992)</p> <p>GROs: Indigenous peoples (IP) and environment movements in many countries</p> <p>NGOs: Linked to project alliances</p> <p>INGOs: International Survival; International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA); Cultural Survival</p> <p>WB: Social scientists; IP policy supporters</p>	<p>In 1981, indigenous groups at the Chico River in the Philippines won their first victory over a Bank dam project, leading to an initial Bank policy protecting indigenous rights in its projects. IP problems in Bank projects were highlighted in a series of projects (Polonoereste, Transmigration, etc.) and by the Bank's 1987 five-year review of environmental policies. Active local movements lobbied Bank projects successfully over the next five years. INGOs supporting indigenous peoples did not develop a common front, but GROs were quite successful in influencing local projects. The Bank's 1991 policy statement opened the door to further indigenous challenges.</p>
<p>Resettlement Policy (1986–1994)</p> <p>GROs: Affected villager movements in many projects</p> <p>NGOs: Allies of villagers like Narmada Bachao Andolan</p> <p>INGOs: Narmada Action Council; International NGO Group on Indonesia</p> <p>WB: Resettlement Review Task Force</p>	<p>The Resettlement Policy Review was in part inspired by the revelations of the Morse Commission about the controversial Narmada project. An internal team was authorized to assess implementation of the resettlement policy in Bank projects to respond to external campaigns. The review indicated that compliance with the Bank's 1986 policy was running at about 30 percent in the first five years. It improved rapidly under external and internal scrutiny, though the review team had to fight a guerilla war to get good information from reluctant task managers. Intense internal bargaining over the final report culminated in early publication in 1994 to forestall threats of leaks by external advocates.</p>
<p>Water Resources Management Policy (1991–1993)</p> <p>GROs: Not involved</p> <p>NGOs: Fifty volunteered to provide input to policy discussions</p> <p>INGOs: International Rivers Network; Environmental Defense Fund</p> <p>WB: Operations and engineering staff</p>	<p>In 1991, Bank staff organized a workshop for government officials on revising water resource management policy. NGOs were not invited, but INGOs collected comments from more than fifty NGOs. The Bank agreed to consult with NGOs and received substantial input. The INGOs found it difficult to maintain NGO interest in the policy process. Bank officials decided against further consultations, in part because of internal pressures to shape policies by economic considerations. Ultimately, the INGOs lobbied with executive directors to affect the policy. Though the policies adopted did include some NGO recommendations, the initiators were disappointed in the necessity for a retreat to advocacy.</p>

(Table 4.2 Continues)

Table 4.2 Continued

Policies and Key Actors	Critical Events in Alliance Evolution
<p>Information and Inspection Panel Policy (1989–1995)</p> <p>GROs: Not directly involved</p> <p>NGOs: Narmada; IDA-10 Campaign activists</p> <p>INGOs: EDF; BIC; others</p> <p>WB: Allies of More Disclosure</p> <p>Others: U.S. Congressional Committee; U.S., Japanese, and European executive directors of the World Bank</p>	<p>The Bank has always limited access to project information. The struggle over the Narmada dams and the criticisms of the internal Wapenhans Report set the stage for many Bank reforms. The alliance among INGOs, NGOs, and GROs that carried out the Narmada and the IDA-10 replenishment campaigns pressed the Bank for policies making more project information available at early stages and for an inspection panel to investigate project abuses. With allies from within the Bank and the U.S. Congress, the alliance successfully lobbied for the new policy with threats to withhold future funding. The new panel was immediately asked to investigate the proposed Arun III dam in Nepal. Its report raised serious questions about the dam, and the new Bank president canceled the project soon after entering office.</p>

*Note:* GRO means grassroots organization; NGO means national NGO; INGO means international NGO; WB means World Bank staff; the category Others refers to other alliance participants.

lands would become vulnerable to sale for commercial development. In both cases, the transnational coalition was spearheaded and sustained by grassroots movements that were directly threatened by the projects, together with national NGO allies who in turn sought international support. Because these campaigns were essentially the international wings of already-existing national movements, we called them national problem coalitions.

In other settings, the campaign coalition was primarily concerned with Bank failures to live up to its own policies. While impacts on local constituents provided evidence of Bank failures, the primary target was reform of the Bank itself. In Brazil's Planaflo case, for example, international NGOs challenged the Bank's failure to ensure local participation in the natural resources management project in a setting where grassroots groups were not yet sufficiently organized to mount a credible protest on their own initiative. Similarly, the campaign to expand public access to information on Bank projects and to create an institutional channel for responding to charges of noncompliance in reform policies succeeded in part because the involved NGOs concerned had the technical and policy skills, political influence with donor governments, and the organizational resources to maintain pressure across many projects. Furthermore, these NGO networks succeeded in spite of not having immediate stakes in each project. Such

*transnational advocacy networks* can articulate principles, formulate alternative policies, and press for improved implementation and systemic reform over long periods of time and across many local instances of abuse.

In still other cases, coalition leadership came from within the Bank, as internal reformers worked with external groups to review Bank experience and articulate alternative policies. In the review of the resettlement policy, for example, an internal team designed and implemented a review that resulted in massive resistance from internal constituencies committed to preserving their autonomy. The existence of strong external coalitions that supported the internal review made it possible for that team to challenge powerful, entrenched interests in the review and ultimately to publish a very searching report despite the resistance. In essence, such *internal reform initiatives* make use of the special knowledge and access of insiders to marshal evidence and articulate plausible reforms.

Coalition tactics need to be defined in the context of their goals and targets. When the focus is controlling project damage or shaping implementation on the ground, the local actors to whom both the World Bank and international NGO critics should be accountable are often relatively clear-cut. When the focus is on articulating the broader policies that will shape future Bank interactions with grassroots actors, international NGOs, with their policy knowledge, media savvy, and lobbying skills, tend to play more prominent leadership roles. Where the target is fundamental change in Bank priorities or institutional arrangements, internal reform alliances, which unite internal staff holding special knowledge with sources of external leverage, may be needed to influence Bank policymakers who resist reforms.

*Lesson 2: Open up the cracks in the system.* It is easy to think of the World Bank and other large actors as monolithic institutions that present united fronts to external challengers. This assumption can focus coalition attention exclusively on allies outside the Bank. But these cases suggest that failure to engage with potential allies who emerge from intra-institutional politics can be a costly mistake.

In actuality, the Bank, like many other large institutions, includes staff with a wide range of political and social perspectives. In all the cases in this study, some Bank staff strongly favored reforms advanced by external coalitions, and those coalitions often benefited from the advice, information, and support given by internal actors. The most effective campaigns built coalitions among progressive groups in many different institutions. The campaign against the Philippines geothermal plant, for example, found that different Bank departments involved in the project had made conflicting recommendations for handling indigenous peoples' lands. In that case,

the struggle among different constituencies within the Bank was an important asset to the external campaign. Identifying sympathetic Bank staff can help coalitions understand issues as they are perceived within the Bank, recognize plausible alternatives given Bank priorities, and build the internal support needed to implement reforms.

From the point of view of internal reformers, contacts with, or even the existence of, external coalitions concerned about an issue may strengthen their ability to deal with internal resistance. When senior management threatened to suppress the resettlement review as excessively controversial, the possibility that external challengers might publish early drafts eventually compelled publication to avoid public accusations of a cover-up of Bank failures to implement its own policies. Institutional change in an agency like the Bank is almost inevitably partial and slow, but these cases demonstrate that internal reformers often depend significantly on the existence of external pressure and scrutiny.

It should also be recognized that in certain issue areas, both internal reformers and external pressure groups clearly lack the leverage needed to outweigh influential interest groups and their donor government allies. For example, the contrast between NGO impact on the Bank's environmental and social policies and its sharply increased emphasis on structural adjustment and financial sector bailouts is quite notable. While Bank policies now officially encourage the empowerment of the poor, gender-sensitive policy design, and the greening of industry, most of its funding now goes to conventional macroeconomic policy-based lending.

*Lesson 3: Impact comes in different forms.* It is easy for coalition members to focus on a few campaign goals—change the policy, stop the project, enhance the resettlement program—to measure success. Such criteria, however, obscure important complexities and possibilities. In these campaigns, definitions of “success” often shifted over time as new strategies came into play or new actors joined the effort. The more effective coalitions recognized that the campaigns could succeed or fail on several dimensions, including strengthening local organizations, building links for future campaigns, increasing awareness and skills for policy influence, evolving strategies and tactics for policy participation, shaping public awareness of critical issues, and encouraging target institution reforms, in addition to shaping specific project and policy outcomes.

Campaigns that do not succeed with direct influence may still be considered to have had significant impact when measured by more indirect indicators. The Indonesian campaign to defend the rights of villagers affected by the Kedung Ombo dam did not take off until the project was already well under way and the campaigners' legal strategy won court decisions that the government managed to ignore. This was a classic case of an

advocacy campaign that extracted very limited tangible concessions for those most directly affected but had important indirect effects by making subsequent international funding for Indonesian dams much less likely in the future. On the other hand, the campaign enhanced the reputation of the association of national and international NGOs that lobbied the Bank and donor governments on the issue. The network of national and international NGOs that participated in the campaign built relationships and capacities that served them well in subsequent campaigns. The campaign also led to informal commitments by several donor agencies to avoid such projects in the future.

Making good judgments about tradeoffs among objectives may require a broad historical and societal perspective. In the Philippines, for example, the campaign to stop the Mount Apo thermal plant focused on the project's violation of the rights of indigenous peoples, in part because that issue was, at the time, more publicly visible and politically potent than the parallel concerns of farmers and environmentalists. While some environmentalists and farmers disagreed with the decision to de-emphasize their interests and grievances, the focus on indigenous people's rights helped to mobilize support from national indigenous networks and their allies at a time when indigenous concerns were at the center of political attention—and so helped raise widespread awareness about the Mt. Apo issue.

*Lesson 4: Create footholds that give a leg up to those who follow.* The interests of grassroots constituencies are often focused on the immediate impact of projects, but changes in policies and other institutional arrangements may have significant effect in the long run. Individual project campaigns focus on specific issues affecting particular countries. It's important to remember, however, that a combination of campaigns may add up to a force that changes institutional arrangements affecting many future activities.

Changes in Bank policies, for example, reshape the institutional context within which project managers operate. Many transnational campaigns have been focused on establishing or refining the organizational policies that guide Bank projects. The adoption of a new policy does not guarantee its implementation, of course. This reality has been amply demonstrated by the review of compliance with the resettlement policy. But the existence of a policy standard does create leverage when external coalitions can demonstrate that Bank projects have failed to comply with it. Bank staff have become sensitized to the embarrassment created by failures to meet their own policies. Thus project compliance with the resettlement policy improved dramatically as it became clear that the review process was going to make noncompliance highly visible. So observers, activists, and project staff can create leverage for confronting future abuses by promoting policies that protect indigenous peoples or resettled populations.

Campaigns promoting accountability may have even bigger impacts. Policies that make project information available early in the project cycle can enable early challenge of problematic programs. It is much easier to influence projects in the design stage than it is to revise them after a variety of national and international interests are vested in project completion. Influence at early stages is difficult if no information is available, however. Mechanisms for wider and earlier sharing of project information are essential to early, and thereby meaningful, project revision. Of course feedback also helps institutions to enrich future campaigns.

### Coalition Organization and Accountability

Transnational coalitions often span great differences in cultural backgrounds, economic wealth, and political power. Rubber tappers in Brazil and indigenous farmers in the Philippines can be as organizationally distant from the Washington-based leaders of the Environmental Defense Fund as they are from World Bank policymakers. For coalitions to be effective over years of under-resourced struggle, they need to build shared strategies, bonds of trust, and recognition of each other's resources, all of which can sustain collective action in spite of the conflicts and misunderstanding inherent in the gaps that separate them. Our study also asked how transnational coalitions could be organized to enable mutual influence and accountability in spite of these differences. The results of this analysis are briefly described in the next four lessons.

*Lesson 5: Leveraging accountability requires specifying accountability to whom.* Broad social bases enable credible representation and local voice. Transnational coalitions are sometimes initiated by grassroots movements seeking to pursue their goals through international links. The Ecuador Network, for example, was initiated by the federation of indigenous organizations that led the national campaign against the new, probusiness Ecuadoran "land-development" law. But it is more common for grassroots constituencies to be poorly connected with each other and consequently to have difficulty in speaking to powerful opponents with a united voice. In the Indonesian and Brazilian cases, for example, few credible voices emerged to speak for grassroots interests. Transnational coalitions often seek to represent grassroots interests to national and international decisionmakers, but they have difficulty in establishing exactly which voices are genuinely representative of local constituencies.

These cases suggest that coalition organizers are wise to find or foster horizontal connections among constituencies in order to enable credible local voices. Where social capital, in the form of grassroots federations,

already exists, as in the Philippines and Ecuador cases, the coalition can build on genuine local representation. The local, regional, and national coalitions and shared decisionmaking in the Philippines enabled ongoing consultations with indigenous interests to maintain coalition legitimacy. In Ecuador, the coalition of indigenous groups was seen as providing genuine representation to the majority of their members. In other situations, a coalition with genuine grassroots representation may depend on local organization building. In the Brazil case, for example, an alliance of local NGOs and grassroots groups did not emerge until relatively late in the project, although the Rondônia NGO Forum—founded in 1991 as an umbrella organization of NGOs and grassroots organizations to encourage the World Bank and Brazilian government to pursue sustainable development policies—became an important actor in subsequent years (Rodrigues 2000).

While grassroots voices are often particularly difficult to mobilize, similar problems may affect the participation of other coalition members. The effort to shape policy on water resource management, for example, found it difficult to mobilize national NGOs, given the expense of transportation and the lack of immediate impacts of policy decisions. Ironically, the press to keep directly affected constituencies involved in the coalition comes in part from the Bank. Bank staff have frequently challenged civil society coalitions for not representing real grassroots constituencies, and so pressed transnational coalitions to attend to their own legitimacy and accountability.

*Lesson 6: Power and communication gaps within civil society need bridges.* Coalitions across geographic, cultural, economic, and political differences may require substantial investments in order to build the mutual influence and trust that enables a quick and cohesive response to changing circumstances. The challenge of building such relationships between a Washington-based lobbyist and a Brazilian rubber tapper, separated by language, economic fate, political perspective, and cultural values, may be formidable. Constructing and maintaining such transnational social capital can be difficult and expensive, but it is central to creating and maintaining effective coalitions.

In the cases we studied, coalitions seldom depended on bonds across such great organizational distances. More common were organizational “chains” of relatively short links that spanned great organizational distances. Thus, in the Philippines coalition, the elders of the indigenous groups connected horizontally with local NGOs, church groups, and other local network members and vertically with the regional indigenous leaders and regional campaign representatives. Those regional representatives, in turn, were connected vertically with the national network. National network representatives worked with members of the Philippine Development Forum, a Washington-based group of Philippine and international NGOs.

The resulting chain spanned the smaller gaps from local to regional to national to international—more manageable organizational distances than the gap from local to international.

In addition to building new links for these chains, in these cases coalitions built in part on previously existing social capital. The national to international link in the Philippines coalition, for example, was the Philippine Development Forum, a pre-existing network of national and international NGOs. Likewise, the link between Indonesian national NGOs and international actors was provided by the Indonesian NGO Forum for International Development (INFID), a pre-existing forum of large Indonesian NGOs and international actors that support them. The nucleus of the national to international coalition on the information and inspection panel policy drew on relationships built during the international campaign against the Narmada dam in India. These chains, once forged, can be used for other purposes. Investments in such linkages may be productive long after their initial impetus has passed away.

*Lesson 7: The Internet is not enough to build trust across cultures.* Coalitions evolve over time in response to external and internal forces. At the outset, most transnational coalitions are loosely organized around shared values and visions rather than detailed strategies and responsibilities. But policy influence campaigns often require systematic articulation of goals, development of strategies and plans, and agreement on how to implement those plans. Without agreement on who is responsible for what, it is difficult to hold partners accountable, or even to know how or where influence might be exerted to shape coalition activities.

Transnational coalitions are by definition geographically dispersed; consequently they face difficulties in negotiating shared expectations. To some extent, modern information technology enables interactive decision-making. For instance, the coalition to reform the information and inspection panel policy made extensive use of electronic communications. But there is no substitute for face-to-face negotiations in creating trust and mutual influence in these coalitions. Members of the Narmada Action Council report that visits to the valley were essential to building their relationships and strengthening their commitment to the campaign (Udall 1998). The director of the Philippine Development Forum, meanwhile, attributed her loyalty to the indigenous elders to her personal contacts with them (Royo 1998). Face-to-face engagements among key individuals shape the coalition’s social capital, influence patterns, and membership.

*Lesson 8: Small links can make strong chains.* The most visible actors in these cases are national governments, large international institutions, and social movements composed of thousands of members. The stakes involve millions of dollars, thousands of lives, and scores of countries. Given these



stakes, it is striking what pivotal roles a few key individuals and organizations play in bridging the chasms that separate many of the actors.

The effectiveness of transnational coalitions depends on trust and mutual influence among individuals and organizations along the chain. Conflicting pressures and incentives can easily pull apart coalitions, and coalitions are difficult to reassemble once disintegrated. The Narmada Action Council, composed of a small number of organizational representatives from Northern countries as well as key leaders in India, coordinated lobbying activities around the globe that eventually played a central role in forcing the Bank's reluctant withdrawal from the Narmada dam project. Some of the council's members then acted as the nucleus for the campaign to reform the Bank's policies on information and inspection panels. In effect, a virtual organization of less than twenty people played a central role in reshaping the institutional characteristics of the world's most influential development organization. In this way, key individuals and organizations—acting as bridges in a global network—can have influence wildly disproportionate to their wealth or formal power.

### Transnational Coalitions and Global Influence

When we began this study in 1992, very little had been published on the roles of transnational coalitions in shaping global policies. Between 1995 and 2000, however, the research available on this topic grew rapidly.<sup>9</sup> Coalitions are essential to civil society organizations seeking to influence events beyond the ordinary scope of small, often disenfranchised, locally based actors. But building trust and understanding across gaps of wealth, power, and culture does not come easily to civil society leaders, who are more accustomed to influencing those who share their values, aspirations, and expectations. The David-and-Goliath encounters between civil society coalitions and the World Bank described in this chapter suggest that civil society actors can have wider influence if they can build bridges across their differences, understand their institutional targets, and learn from both failure and success.

One of the most important lessons of the World Bank campaign experience for other civil society efforts to hold powerful transnational actors accountable points to a shifting North-to-South center of gravity. In the early years of the Bank campaigns, Southern coalition partners provided the credibility while Northern NGOs had the media influence and political clout with donor governments critical for extracting commitments to environmental and social policy reform. These policy reforms set important benchmark standards but have proven to be limited in terms of their capacity to change what the World Bank and its national government partners

actually do in practice most of the time. Reform promises from the World Bank are no substitute for democratizing nation-state development aid strategies in both the North and the South.

More generally, whether the issue is Bank reform, human rights, or corporate accountability, local-global partnerships can be quite successful at “damage control,” or at extracting *promises* of reform. But then what? Tangibly changing the ways powerful institutions actually behave requires more than campaigns. Only by bolstering local, national, and transnational capacities to monitor, target, and impose sanctions for noncompliance with reform commitments can coalitions translate their apparent campaign victories into sustained accountability.

### Notes

1. This quote is from “Citizen’s Groups: The Non-Governmental Order,” *Economist*, 11 December 1999.
2. For example, broad-based civil society networks in Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, and India continue to focus significant attention on the World Bank.
3. In this case, embarrassing internal memos revealed that the Bank’s senior environmental policymakers planned a deliberate greenwashing strategy. See Paul Brown, “World Bank Pushes Chad Pipeline,” *The Guardian*, 11 October 1999.
4. For details, see the NGO Center for International Environmental Law web site at <http://www.ciel.org> and the NGO Bank Information Center web site at <http://www.bicusa.org>.
5. The Institute for Development Research undertook these studies as part of a program of research on the roles of civil society organizations in shaping national and international policies. The results of these studies are available online at <http://www.jsi.com/idr>.
6. For the project studies, see Antoinette Royo, “The Philippines: Against the Peoples’ Wishes: The Mt. Apo Story,” in Fox and Brown 1998, pp. 151–180; Margaret E. Keck, “Planaflores in Rondônia: The Limits of Leverage,” in Fox and Brown, 1998, pp. 181–218; Kay Treacle, “Ecuador: Structural Adjustment and Indigenous and Environmentalist Resistance,” in Fox and Brown, 1998, pp. 219–264; and Augustinus Rumansara, “Indonesia: The Struggle of the People of Kedung Ombo,” Fox and Brown, 1998, 123–150.
7. For the policy studies see Andrew Gray, “Development Policy—Development Protest: The World Bank, Indigenous Peoples, and NGOs,” in Fox and Brown, 1998, pp. 267–302; Deborah Moore and Leonard Sklar, “Reforming the World Bank’s Lending for Water: The Process and Outcome of Developing a Water Resources Management Policy,” in Fox and Brown, 1998, pp. 345–390; Jonathan A. Fox, “When Does Reform Policy Influence Practice? Lessons from the Bankwide Resettlement Review,” in Fox and Brown, 1998, pp. 303–344; and Lori Udall, “The World Bank and Public Accountability: Has Anything Changed,” in Fox and Brown, 1998, pp. 391–236.
8. See L. David Brown and Jonathan Fox, “Accountability within Transnational Coalitions,” in Fox and Brown, 1998, pp. 439–484 for a comparative analysis of coalition dynamics across the eight cases. See Jonathan Fox and L.

David Brown, "Assessing the Impact of NGO Advocacy Campaigns on World Bank Projects and Policies," in Fox and Brown, 1998, pp. 485–551, for an analysis of the impacts on the Bank.

9. See, for example, Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Smith, et al. (eds.) 1997; Boli and Thomas (eds.), 1999; Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, *Reconstructing World Politics*, forthcoming; and Khagram, *Dams, Development and Democracy*, forthcoming.

## 5

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## Information, Location, and Legitimacy: The Changing Bases of Civil Society Involvement in International Economic Policy

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*Paul Nelson*

The successes of NGOs in challenging the exclusive right of states to govern the international system have produced significant policy changes and a revised political landscape. NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) are acknowledged and often consulted by international organizations in a wide range of policy fields, notably development, relief, environment, and human rights. These consultations have been highly visible at the international financial institutions (IFIs)—the World Bank Group, the regional development banks, and, to a much more limited extent, the International Monetary Fund (IMF). With these successes, particularly at the World Bank, have come new challenges for the NGOs concerned, who struggle daily with issues of coordination, governance, accountability, learning, and political strategy as well as with choices about organizational priorities. The stakes are high, because civil societies are being formed and reshaped, and their global and regional links are being created in the process of their advocacy and other work. Will civil society organizations become empowering, emancipatory vehicles for influential participation in the wealth and the decisionmaking of the planet, or will they reproduce existing lines of authority and inequality?

In the wake of the 1999 Seattle Ministerial meetings of the World Trade Organization (WTO), charges have intensified that much of the NGO agenda is, like the agendas of consumer organizations and organized labor, an agenda of societies in the global North. Commentators and some participants ask how networks are representative of concerns in the South, to whom they are accountable, and whether their continued location in the capitals of the industrialized world is consistent with their global claims. Responses to these concerns, including organizational changes in the self-

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Published in the United States of America and elsewhere in 2001 by  
Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.  
1800 30th Street, Boulder, Colorado 80301  
www.rienner.com

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### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Global citizen action / edited by Michael Edwards, John Gaventa.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-55587-968-3 (alk. paper)—ISBN 1-55587-993-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Political participation. 2. Direct action. 3. Globalization. I. Edwards, Michael, 1957— II. Gaventa, John, 1949—

JF799.G586 2001

323'.042—dc21

2001019070

Printed and bound in the United States of America

⊗ The paper used in this publication meets the requirements  
of the American National Standard for Permanence of  
Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1984.

5 4 3 2 1

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