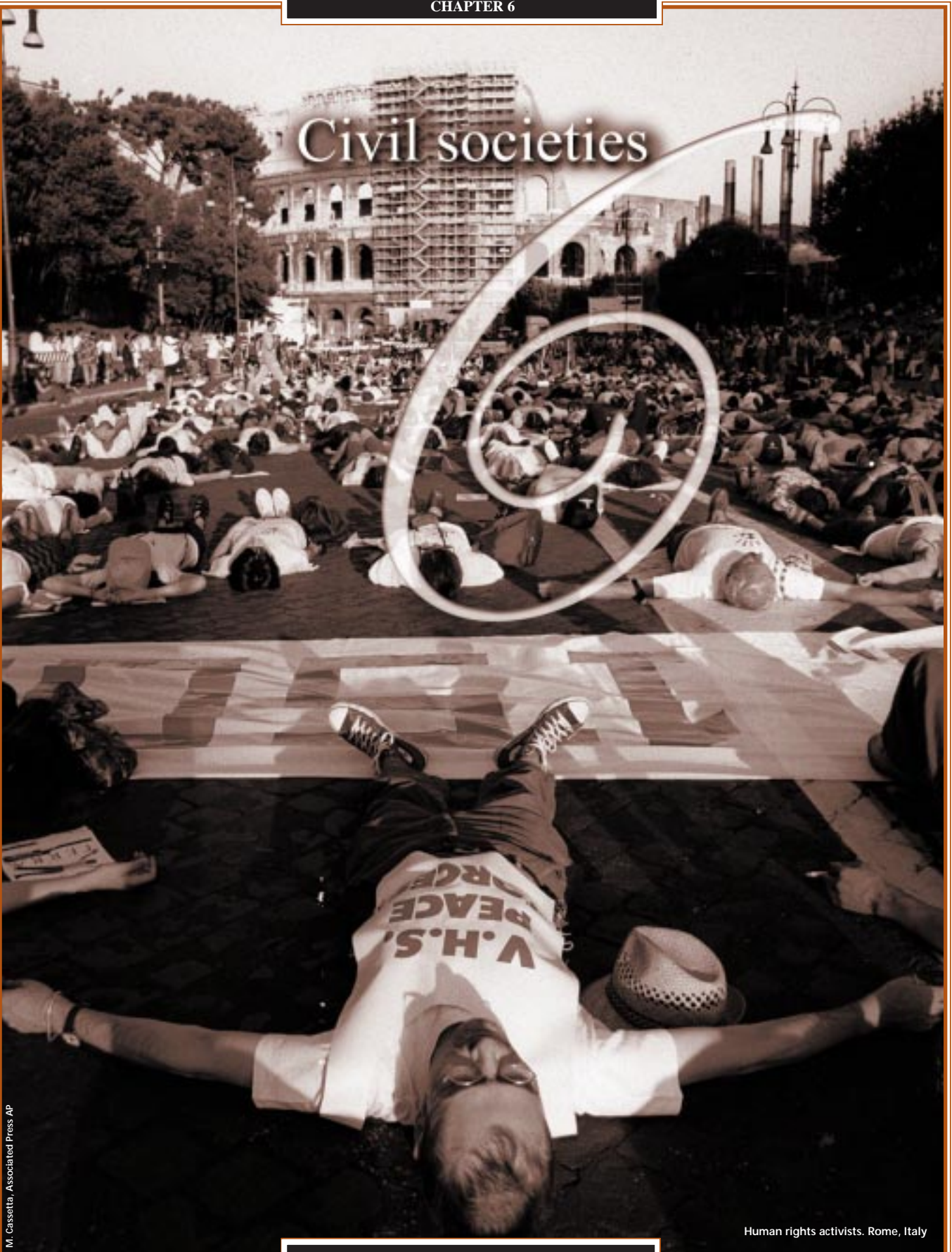


Civil societies



M. Cassetta, Associated Press AP

Human rights activists. Rome, Italy

People are banding together to influence state policy and have a stronger voice in the international arena. They are building new partnerships and employing new tactics for dealing with globalization and its risks. The results of their actions have been mixed.

The Social Summit, like many other international gatherings before and since, placed a lot of trust in civil society. This is a rather amorphous category covering myriad groups that belong neither to government nor to the profit-making private sector. A civil society organization (CSO) could therefore be anything from a community-based organization (CBO), like a village savings group, to an international trade union federation (box 6.1). Confusingly, civil society also includes non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—which sound as though they could be identical, but are actually a subset of CSOs. NGOs are understood to be the larger and more professionalized CSOs that aim to deliver benefits not to their own members but to the wider community.

As social and political conditions mutate over time, so do the components of civil society and the ways in which they link up and interact. Many would argue that today there is even an international civil society, reflecting the special concerns, habits and cultural norms of the people who come together at international gatherings or who take international collective action.

The industrialized countries have a long tradition of CSOs. The United States, for example, has an estimated two million. In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the situation has been very different. Their all-encompassing states left little room for such organizations. But with the transition to democracy,

CSOs have proliferated: by 1995 there were thought to be around 100,000. Developing countries also have huge numbers of CSOs. Brazil, for example, has some 100,000 church-based CSOs; and India is thought to have over one million grassroots groups. But reliable numbers are hard to obtain: by various estimates, the Philippines has either 21,000 CSOs or 60,000. Then there is the category of international CSOs—defined in statistical terms as those that operate in three or more countries. Between 1990 and 1995 these are thought to have increased from 10,000 to 20,000.

Not all the organizations of civil society are truly civil. Some groups have decidedly anti-social aims. This chapter discusses those CSOs that are seeking to influence the path of social development positively through service delivery; through various forms of partnership; and through advocacy at the international level. These are three areas where CSOs have achieved a high profile in the 1990s.

Civil society and service delivery

Some CSOs, like trade unions, have a long history in the field of social policy. What is different today—particularly in developing countries—is the extent to which governments and aid agencies expect NGOs to provide social services, either independently or in collaboration with the state. The organizations most likely to be involved are non-governmental development organizations—NGDOs. While NGDOs tend to operate differently from governments, they form a very heterogeneous group—and have evolved in different ways depending on the local context.

- **Latin America**—Many NGDOs emerged as a reaction to military regimes and were often linked to trade unions, peasant organizations, popular movements and the Catholic Church, which afforded them protection in an era of commitment to liberation theology. They were among the first to receive bilateral aid from

Box 6.1 – A glossary of civil society terms

- **Civil society organizations (CSOs)**—These are groupings of individuals and associations, formal and informal, that belong neither to government nor to the profit-making private sector.
- **Non-governmental organizations**—NGOs are often and mistakenly equated with civil society. In fact, they are only the most visible tip of the civil-society iceberg. They work in a broad spectrum of fields, from humanitarian aid, to human rights promotion, to environmental protection. NGOs may or may not be membership organizations.
- **Non-governmental development organizations**—NGOs that specialize in channelling development funds are often called non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs). Some work at the international level channelling aid from North to South—such as Oxfam, Save the Children, World Vision, CARE, Caritas and Novib. Most Southern countries have their own NGDOs. These too can be extremely large and influential: some of the better-known include the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and the Orangi Pilot Project in Pakistan. Unlike many Northern organizations, Southern NGDOs engage directly with other local-level civil society entities in carrying out development projects or in mobilizing the local population.
- **Community-based organizations**—CBOs are the invisible mass of the CSO iceberg under the NGO tip. CBOs are typically membership organizations whose constituency—both activists and beneficiaries—resides within a recognizable geographic entity, such as a neighbourhood, a village or a district. CBOs may or may not be formally constituted or legally recognized. They include neighbourhood associations, tenants' associations, women's clubs, parent-teacher associations, burial societies, micro-credit circles and community kitchens. CBOs rely mainly on the voluntary contributions of labour and material resources of their members—though they may also receive funds from NGOs.
- **Advocacy NGOs**—These do not usually have individual members. More often they are professionally staffed, or they second staff from like-minded entities wishing to expand their voice through a collective effort, as in a federation of labour unions or neighbourhood associations. Their constituents may be spread over neighbourhoods, urban or rural districts, regions or even across international boundaries. They provide services to their members, such as research and training, information gathering and dissemination, and advocacy. The most common forms of advocacy NGOs are chambers of commerce and federations of CBOs. At the international level, they include the International Council for Social Welfare, Amnesty International, and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.
- **Interest group associations**—These include associations of professionals, such as lawyers or doctors or architects. They also include producer and consumer co-operatives, and associations for business executives or retired persons. The CSOs in this category that have the most comprehensive mandate are the trade unions, whose primary function is to protect the interests of their members at the workplace. The most important distinction between trade unions and NGOs is that trade unions consist of dues-paying members who can hold the organization to account, while NGOs are usually answerable, formally, only to themselves.

those donors who opposed military governments. NGOs thrived even more during the democratic era, as donors looked for ways of consolidating democracy and channelling aid through non-state agencies. Some also benefited from structural adjustment, since donors were keen to include them in the operation of social funds—intended to mitigate the social costs of structural adjustment programmes.

- **Sub-Saharan Africa**—Here NGOs arose in a very different context. They emerged in the 1960s and 1970s when governments, engaged in nation building, promoted self-help schemes such as the Kenyan Harambee. These were essentially community-based organizations that were heavily influenced by both government and the ruling party. NGOs grew more rapidly in a few multi-party states like Senegal than in one-party states like Tanzania. Even so, not all were indigenous; many were connected with Northern NGOs, and particularly with the churches. The number of NGOs increased markedly in the 1980s in response to economic crisis and the weakening of the state. They have continued to proliferate in recent years as a result of aid flows to Africa, political liberalization and retrenchments of civil servants who must look for alternative employment.

- **Middle East**—The Middle East has a history of peasant organizations, co-operative movements and trade unions, often with links to the state or ruling party; but NGOs were traditionally few in number. During the past two decades this situation has changed dramatically, with the rise of Islamist movements and urban-based NGOs. Some Islamist movements have contributed directly to social welfare by providing services such as health care, education and financial aid. They have also contributed indirectly: other religious or secular organizations, including state institutions, feel obliged to compete for support by implementing social programmes in favour of the

poor. In addition to many religious welfare associations, other types of NGOs have proliferated since the 1980s—in response to public sector restructuring, foreign funding and a broad political consensus on the important role they can play. They include NGOs managed by middle-class professionals and those with strong links to the state, such as the Egyptian Community Development Associations or the Iranian Foundation of Dispossessed.

- **Asia**—Here the situation is more diverse. On one hand, countries like India have a strong tradition of philanthropy and voluntary action. On the other, communist states like China and Viet Nam have little perception of civil society, let alone NGOs. Different again are countries like Thailand and the Philippines, which are closer to the Latin American model—many NGOs emerged in response to civilian or military dictatorships, so their leaders tend to be very politically aware. With democratization, many have shifted their focus from human rights to social and environmental concerns. The end of international isolation saw a sharp increase in NGO activity in Cambodia in the 1990s. Bangladesh proved to be a special case. The circumstances of the country's birth in 1971 nurtured NGO leaders determined to operate on a large scale to meet the needs of their new nation. Bangladesh now has the largest indigenous NGOs in the South.

- **Transition countries**—Here NGOs remain something of an unknown quantity. Organizations that sound similar in function to NGOs—such as national women's organizations—were in the past actually agencies of the state. Some countries, such as Hungary, have seen new organizations emerge, in certain cases recalling previous expressions of civic organization. But in most countries they are very underdeveloped. NGOs are highly restricted in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan; and in Russia some are even suspected of being mafia fronts.

While NGOs have proliferated in many

countries, their influence on government policy has been limited. This is partly the result of their limited capacity. Organizations like Oxfam and World Vision in the Northern countries often have extensive research departments whose experience and skills equal—and sometimes surpass—those of government departments. But few NGOs in developing countries can afford such investment. Many Southern NGOs have gathered valuable expertise in specific areas—such as environment, gender, debt, micro-credit and landmines—but most are not involved in setting the broad framework and standards for social policy.

Where they do have a more consistent impact is through service delivery at the local level. A few decades ago, NGOs in developing countries got most of their funds from NGOs in Northern countries. Today, however, they are also likely to receive funds from their own governments, as well as from bilateral and multilateral aid agencies. Current estimates suggest that NGOs disburse annually about \$13 billion, of which official development assistance accounts for 50 per cent—up from less than 30 per cent a decade ago.

As discussed in chapter 4, this reflects the new public management philosophy—shrinking the state and passing more responsibility to the supposedly more efficient private sector, including NGOs. This is now taking place on a significant scale. Half of the World Bank's projects now involve NGOs at the implementation stage, and by the mid-1990s, NGOs disbursed approximately 15 per cent of total public development aid.

Nevertheless, the balance between public and private provision varies greatly according to local circumstances. In Latin America and in India, the state is still the major service provider; NGOs are junior partners. In many African countries, NGOs have become important providers—sometimes co-ordinating with the state, sometimes not. Where there

are complex political emergencies—as in Afghanistan, Somalia and southern Sudan—water supply and health care are often entirely in the hands of international NGOs.

How good are NGOs as service providers? A number of recent impact studies permit some general, and not entirely positive, conclusions.

- **Reaching the poorest**—Most NGO projects do reach the poor, though not necessarily the poorest. There is still little evidence, however, that NGOs are intrinsically better at reaching the poor than state services.
- **Poverty reduction**—NGO projects in health, education and water supply alleviate poverty in the communities where they operate, but generally they do not significantly reduce it.
- **Coverage**—The scale of operations is limited and the coverage patchy. Moreover, NGOs are often not very good at co-ordinating with each other or with the state.
- **Quality**—There is little evidence that NGOs provide better-quality services than the state. What seems to matter more is which of the two has more money.
- **Technical capacity**—NGOs perform better in sectors and sub-sectors where they have built up expertise—as in delivering local-level services. They have considerable capacity for innovation, experimentation and flexible adaptation of projects to suit local needs and conditions. They are less successful at more complex interventions such as integrated rural development.
- **Cost-effectiveness**—There is little evidence that NGOs are inherently more cost-effective than the state. Small projects may be more efficient than larger ones, regardless of who is running them. One comparative study in India, for example, found that the costs of NGO and state health services were broadly similar.
- **Policy direction**—One of the major concerns about relying on NGOs for service provision is that they cannot provide a broader frame-

work for action. Only a government can develop clear policy and regulation in fields like health and education.

What is needed is an effective combination of state and NGDO services. Ideally, governments should be in a position to establish the overall policy framework and provide most of the funding for services, while NGDOs can bring additional creativity and strong community links. In India, for example, the government gives grants to NGDOs to provide services for indigenous peoples. In Bolivia, the government has funded NGDOs to implement its community water supply programmes.

THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF NGDOS

The NGDO sector is significantly different from what it was 20 years ago. The number of organizations has mushroomed to take advantage of new funding. These organizations are often established and staffed by middle-class managers. Some may bring sorely needed professional skills. At the same time, some NGDO personnel are simply seeking employment or a stepping-stone to a higher position.

Increased professionalism is apparent in the way NGDOs are working together internationally, regionally and nationally in coalitions and networks. This has enhanced their collective strength to influence policy and mobilize resources. In Latin America, for example, some 50 leading NGDOs from 20 countries are members of the Latin American Association of Promotion Organizations (ALOP). This association facilitates exchange of information, formulates development strategies, promotes integrated projects and represents NGDOs in international fora. In Cambodia, the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia has served an important role in information exchange, co-ordination of NGDO activities and ensuring that the opinions of NGDOs are heard in some government and donor decision-making processes.

Today, a much smaller proportion of organizations would describe themselves primarily as advocates for the poor or oppressed. Many NGDOs have had to step aside from campaigning, simply to survive. International donors who in the past might have supported radical organizations as a way of covertly eroding the power of repressive states are now seeking more prosaic service providers. The resulting emphasis on contract-type funding tends to decrease NGDO appetite for advocacy and campaigning—as well as their capacity for innovation. The emergence of democratic governments has also siphoned off some of the more politicized NGDO personnel. In South Africa, for example, most of the leaders from the South African NGO Coalition (SANCO) moved into government service or the private sector when the ANC took power.

This should not be cause for too much dismay. Grassroots movements obviously need to adapt to democracy. With many major political and legal objectives satisfied, they switch to more material functions. At the same time, they transform themselves from movements into organizations—with all the corresponding financial pressures and the temptation to introduce hierarchies and be less responsive to individuals and communities. This seems to have happened to some of the best-known people's movements in Latin America, such as Chile's Interregional Mapuche Council (CIM) and Brazil's Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST). Both are effective organizations, but they seem tamer than before.

NGDOS AND THE INTERNATIONAL AID SYSTEM

Whether for service delivery or other development activities, international donors are increasingly turning to NGDOs. They believe the latter can do things that government organizations cannot. They also want the NGO ethos to pervade official aid programmes. Unfortunately,

the reverse appears to be happening: NGOs are becoming dependent on foreign donors and are tempted to mirror donor policies, thus losing much of their value and character. This tends to fragment local civil society into those groups that will simply accept contracts—and do as they are told—and the more awkward ones that want to change things to meet locally expressed needs and priorities.

Instead of developing a shared long-term vision of improvements for society as a whole, donors and NGOs often end up with a “projectized” approach to aid. This makes the work of the latter easier to insert into the framework of international bureaucracies—and it frequently implies imposing the same uniform, logically framed approach for almost every intervention.

If progressive NGOs are to survive and make a useful contribution to development, they will need more encouragement from donors. Donors should allocate funding less on the basis of their particular project priorities and more on the characteristics of the organizations they support. There are three questions they could ask. First, does the NGO represent an authentic response to community needs, or is it simply adapting to funding fashions? Second, is the NGO concerned above all with meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups, or is it just working in its own organizational or pecuniary interest? Third, does it give a voice to those who would otherwise not be heard? International funding can help exemplary organizations that meet these criteria to survive, and engage in criticism and advocacy.

Donors can also help by recognizing the strengths of NGOs and working to reinforce them. Donors admire these organizations for their ability to work creatively and flexibly, yet may give them little opportunity to exercise those strengths. An evaluation of two projects in Nepal and Ghana, which were part of a larger World Bank-funded water and sanitation scheme, revealed, for example, that the local

implementing organizations received blueprints showing how the system was to be constructed. They were prohibited from adapting the design to local conditions or exploring with community members the construction and maintenance procedures that might have encouraged them to take fuller ownership of the project.

Creativity requires independence and—just as important—permission to make mistakes and adapt. A creative learning process that would contribute new insights to development problems and solutions would thus require a network of independent organizations—adequately and non-conditionally funded—capable of self-analysis and communication. The experimental nature of such organizations might limit their immediate impact, but their cumulative impact over the longer term could be considerable.

STATE VERSUS NGO PROVISIONING

Donors and governments should be cautious when employing NGOs as alternative providers of public services. Their limitations have been mentioned earlier. NGOs tend to have an uneven reach, are inconsistent in quality, and offer sporadic coverage. Just as state-run services may be susceptible to patronage politics, NGOs too are open to accusations of favouritism—particularly when members work in their own communities.

But probably the most important issue is accountability. If NGOs are to fill gaps left by the state, they must have clearly defined responsibilities and their work must be overseen. They must be held accountable for their activities in a clear and concrete way. Beneficiaries can play a role in this process—making demands and requiring transparency. But in the last analysis NGOs must be accountable to the state, which has ultimate responsibility for the quality of subcontracted services.

Nevertheless, there can be advantages to employing NGOs for service delivery. Indeed, in some cases, this may be the only way in

which services can be provided to the poor. Such involvement also offers NGOs the opportunity to steer provision in a more progressive direction. Even if they are not determining policy, the way they implement it will often determine the outcome. The paradox is that as NGOs become increasingly institutionalized and oriented toward service delivery contracts, some are becoming less interested in taking advantage of this political space to benefit the poor.

Another danger of involving NGOs in service provision is that of setting NGOs against the public sector. Some donors and governments are now using NGOs as a lever to dislodge public sector employees and to informalize their work—having it carried out instead by a “flexible” labour force that commands few benefits and no job security. Sometimes this is financially more efficient, sometimes not. In any case, immediate efficiency gains have to be set against possible long-term erosion of the standards of public service. As the government withdraws, it may reduce its capacity to formulate effective strategies or to monitor or evaluate the outcome.

Precarious partnerships

Increasingly, NGOs and community-based organizations are providing services in collaboration with government—through “partnerships”. Most governments and donor agencies now stress the role of partnerships as an essential element of good governance. But the language of partnership is often distorted. Key aspects of genuine partnership—like mutual respect, equitable sharing of benefits and balanced power relations—are often absent. This applies as much to the relations of civil society organizations with government as it does to relations with donors. It is also evident in relations between Northern and Southern NGOs.

In many instances, partnership means giving NGOs too much to do with too few resources.

One case, which illustrates the dilemmas and trade-offs that affect NGO-government partnerships in the health sector, is that of the Swaziland Schools HIV/AIDS and Population Programme (SHAPE). This activity was originally a government programme funded by CARE International. It was only registered as an NGO after the Ministry of Education declined to run the project. Initiated in response to the mounting prevalence of HIV/AIDS, SHAPE performs a large array of preventive activities, mostly based in secondary schools. SHAPE has found itself caught in inter-sectoral rivalries between the Ministries of Health and Education with which it works. In practice, this relationship means that both ministries slough off responsibility for virtually all HIV/AIDS education and outreach services—and their co-ordination—onto the NGO’s shoulders. It also means that the government guards its revenues for purposes that it apparently regards as more important than sexual and reproductive health.

In addition to being overburdened, NGOs working in partnerships may find themselves less able to criticize the government. In some cases this may be the result of co-optation; but frequently, closer personal ties prompt a change of tactics—from public criticism to quiet diplomacy.

CSO-LOCAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships involving local governments, NGOs and community-based organizations proliferated in the 1990s. A number of national legislatures, including Bolivia, Colombia and India, have enacted laws to enable community-based organizations to take their place in official organs of local government. And municipal authorities themselves have been legalizing and promoting greater participation of CSOs in governance.

Despite the increase in CSO-local government partnerships, long-lasting collaboration

in most developing countries appears to be rare. Studies of such partnerships in some major Third World cities have highlighted various constraints. First, this kind of collaboration faces the same difficulties that affect the wider society—trying to build new structures in an often hostile environment, affected by economic adjustment and political instability. There is also the risk of political violence, which can deter individuals who would otherwise participate in public-spirited activities. This was evident in Lima in the early 1990s, when the guerrilla group Sendero Luminoso attacked a number of community leaders.

The scope and quality of partnerships may also depend on the party in power. Some impressive results have emerged in recent years through a new variety of participatory schemes put in place by left-leaning municipal and state governments. In Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil and Kerala in India, state and city budgets have been formulated on the basis of extensive local-level consultations involving residents, community organizations, politicians and bureaucrats. These cases demonstrate the value

of backing grassroots activism with strong support from political parties and trade unions.

More commonly, institutional support for community-based organizations is likely to come from NGOs. They can serve an important intermediary role between community organizations and local or central government, acting as mediators or conduits for information. They can also support community-level organizations with training, contacts and, sometimes, funding. But the NGOs carrying out such roles are relatively few and overstretched, and often have short time horizons. In Mumbai, for example, with four million people living below the poverty line, there are only three NGOs that are widely recognized to provide a comprehensive range of support activities, including advocacy (box 6.2).

Successful partnerships often depend on the ability of intermediate NGOs to enable multiple grassroots organizations to work together or to come together themselves in coalitions. Through collective strength, CSOs can exert stronger claims on the state and international donors, and muster the resources needed to

Box 6.2 – The need for intermediate organizations in Mumbai

In Mumbai there is a high demand for NGOs that can support community-based organizations. One well-known NGO, YUVA, has 11 full-time professional staff members with a small number of volunteer assistants. These people support some 50 grassroots organizations in communities that have a total population of roughly 250,000. They mentor and act as a sounding board for CBO issues and plans, provide technical inputs, and offer financial and administrative training. Roughly 60 per cent of YUVA's budget comes from abroad.

In the past, some of these functions might have been served by local trade unions. But employment in textile mills, formerly the largest employers in Bombay, has been decimated, and the unions are moribund. Most of the CBOs and other grassroots groups therefore turn for help to religious associations, neighbourhood political bosses, employers, slum lords or even criminal groups.

If CBOs were to be properly served, there should be not three but approximately 23 intermediate organizations—one for each of the city's wards.

implement projects. In Lima, this has been an important feature of community action. But here, as elsewhere, local governments are sometimes ambivalent about working with civil society groups (box 6.3). They may see them as competing for resources or political patronage that would otherwise go to the local authority.

When local authorities see the rapid proliferation of civil society groups, they may also be concerned about their representativeness, accountability and ambitions. Many local governments take an instrumental view of participation. Thus they welcome community and volunteer groups that can provide labour and material inputs. And if they see that their top-down project will go ahead only if it has a façade of democratic decision making, they will open their doors a little. But local authorities are often fearful of genuine participation—or may simply not know how to interact with community groups, or have insufficient funds to do so. A municipal official in Mumbai, for example, remarked that it would be impossible

for rank-and-file municipal employees to work smoothly with CBOs—lower-level bureaucrats had too little training and had worked for too long by rules learned by rote. And even when functionaries begin to adapt, there is the problem of rapid staff turnover. Local authorities are often less stable partners than their community counterparts—regularly shaken up by changes not only in staffing but also in leadership and policy.

COMMUNITY AND GENDER TENSIONS

Conflicts within organizations, and between men and women, threaten the success of many partnerships and CSO activities. Both NGOs and the community organizations with which they work must struggle to live up to their democratic ideals. And like all other human groups, they are vulnerable to infighting, splits and realignments. In Mumbai, for example, the NGO Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA) was working with a grassroots organization to resolve a long-standing dispute

Box 6.3 – Partnerships in Lima

The vigorous tradition of grassroots organizations in many of Lima's districts has spawned innovative collaboration with local authorities. Organizations with many different—and sometimes conflicting—interests have learned to work together.

In northern Lima, for example, women's CBOs and local NGOs worked with district governments to improve nutrition, sanitation and public health. In eastern Lima, neighbourhood associations, community kitchens and mothers' clubs from a set of contiguous neighbourhoods formed a committee to engage in social and economic planning with the express purpose of formulating projects that were in the best interest of the larger community—not just of specific neighbourhoods. In southern Lima, a retail merchants' association, along with community organizations, NGOs and the municipal government of Villa El Salvador, developed the infrastructure and supply links necessary to prevent hoarding, price gouging and other forms of corruption in the marketing of food.

All of these initiatives ultimately broke down or fragmented, so that far less was achieved than participants had hoped for. Although they illustrate the potential of local actors, they also show that success and sustainability depend on multiple factors, both internal and external to community organizations. The role of local government has been particularly important.

between two low-income groups of tenants on public land. YUVA eventually terminated the relationship after the grassroots organization diverted more of its energy to political activity and was also accused of fraud. In order to continue working on the tenants' case, a number of people formed another community organization that is now collaborating with YUVA.

In many informal urban settlements, the primary managers are women. In addition to their responsibilities as care-givers and income earners, they also participate in community work. Yet in many societies and cultures, men persistently undermine their position and prevent them from acquiring equal status as community members. In northern Lima, for example, women drawn from the District Organization of Self-Managed Community Kitchens managed the municipal slaughterhouse in the Comas district. Male workers continuously sabotaged their efforts until the federation lost its contract. In São Paulo, some of the most successful examples of land invasion and collective housing construction were also the causes of frequent marital disputes and even divorces. In two well-known cases—Apuanã Community and Residents Association of Vila Arco Iris—women with children were the primary contributors to community organization and building campaigns that lasted several years. Some husbands saw this as too great a sacrifice and left their spouses, only to return after the deserted spouse had received her apartment or house.

Such tensions can also split higher-level organizations. The failure of the Nairobi-based Central Organization of Trade Unions to accept the demand by its own women's wing to put reproductive issues on the labour agenda was the last of a decade's-worth of rebuffs by the male leadership of the union. The women's wing had no choice in 1993 but to form a separate union. KEWWO, the Kenya Women Workers Organization, is the result of their

efforts. While successful in creating a space for advocacy of women's issues within Kenya's union movement and in the larger society, KEWWO remains outside the traditional union structure. Nevertheless, recognition by—and assistance from—the ILO may eventually change this situation.

Civil society and international advocacy

Another area in which civil society organizations have achieved greater prominence in the 1990s is international advocacy. Leaving aside specific campaigns designed to change certain activities of international business, the strategy through which CSOs have exerted most pressure is through engagement with international organizations, primarily the United Nations and the international financial institutions. Today most UN bodies and IFIs have formal consultative mechanisms to canvass CSO opinions.

CSOs AND THE UN

CSOs do not generally participate in formal decision making at UN meetings. The ILO (which is composed of trade unions and employers' organizations, as well as governments) and UNAIDS (which has representatives from organizations of people living with AIDS on its Governing Council) are exceptional in this regard. But CSOs do affect the terms of the debate. They have helped place a number of issues firmly on the UN agenda: gender, participation, the environment, and a broader view of rights and development. And they have amplified their influence through well-planned information and media campaigns. This is particularly evident in human rights and other areas where CSOs are free to present politically controversial information that intergovernmental agencies cannot formally handle themselves.

In the 1990s, civil society also achieved greater recognition at the apex of the UN system.

A group of some 1,500 CSOs have official accreditation to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This permits them to sit in as observers and offer comments in many UN decision-making processes—although they do not have any decision-making power, and indeed could not within this intergovernmental structure.

Since the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, in Stockholm, most UN gatherings have had CSOs running parallel events as well as lobbying at the main

conference. By the time of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, CSOs were participating extensively in all aspects of preparation for the conference and its follow-up, and the commitments and programmes of action from most of these gatherings bear CSO fingerprints. Thus in the preparatory process for the Social Summit, CSOs debated and provided alternatives to every key phrase in the draft documents. Many of these were ultimately rejected—such as the implementation of the Tobin Tax, aspects of the 20/20 initiative, and a more rig-



Jorgen Schjorv, Stockholm

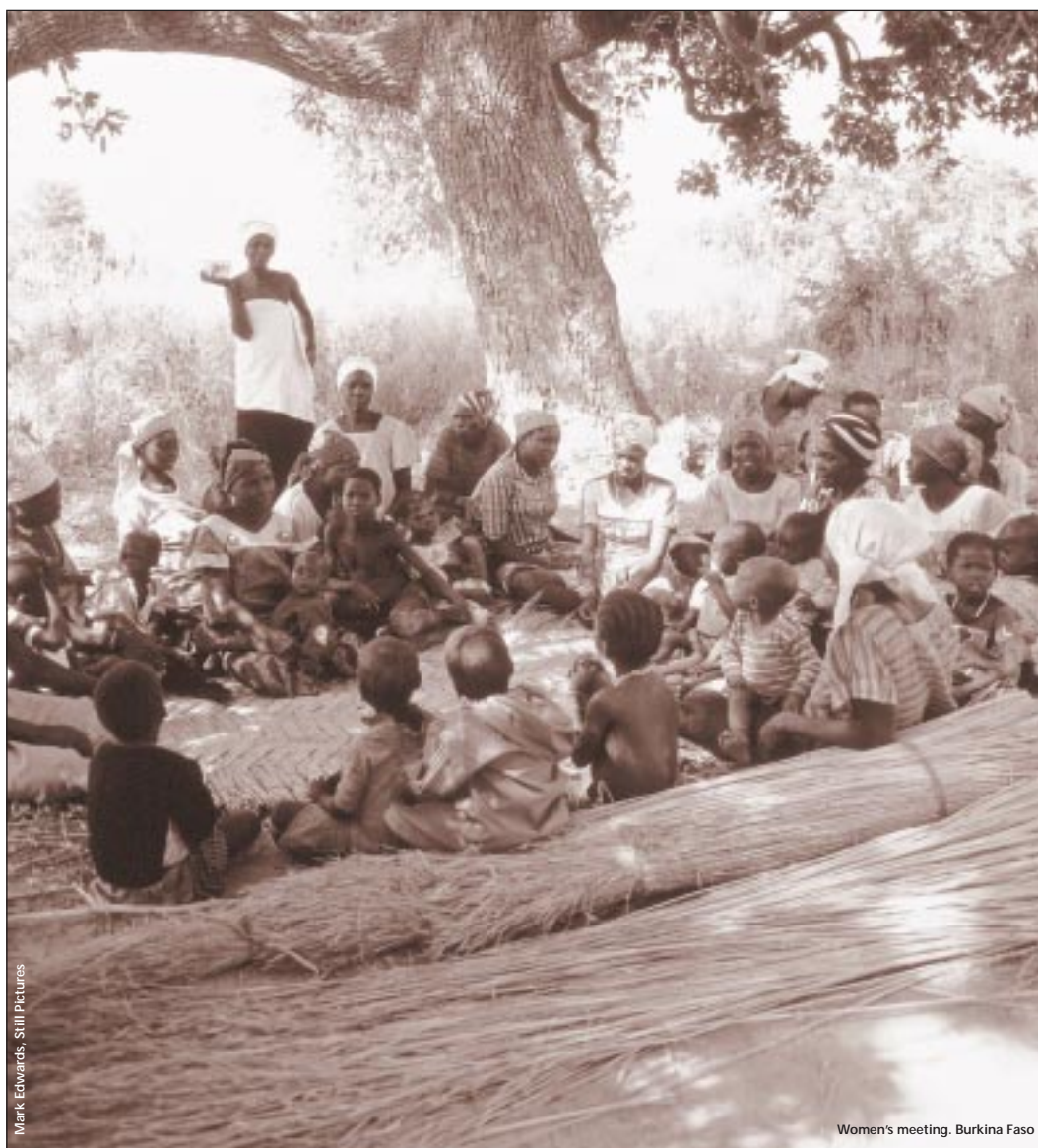
Village meeting, Bhutan

orous commitment to increasing development assistance; but these ideas reappeared anyway in an Alternative Declaration signed by more than 600 NGOs.

Should civil society organizations have more formal status in the General Assembly? This issue resurfaced during preparations for the various five-year follow-ups to the UN conferences of the 1990s—the series of “plus five” General Assembly Special Sessions. CSOs were virtually excluded from Vienna Plus Five, but there seems to be more progress in the cases

of Rio, Copenhagen and Beijing.

The possibilities for a CSO role in the Security Council beyond that of invited consultation have only begun to be addressed. In 1996, the Chilean Permanent Representative to the UN noted that the Security Council increasingly deals with disputes in which the parties are not states but groups or factions. Given the growing role and presence of civil society bodies, he argued that the Council could incorporate their inputs; and he suggested that for this purpose the Security Council should



Mark Edwards, Still Pictures

Women's meeting, Burkina Faso

organize a regular “consultative window”. In February 1997, he was able to convince the Security Council to hear presentations by CARE, Oxfam and Doctors Without Borders on the humanitarian aspects of the crisis in the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

Some NGOs can also claim to have achieved policy change. The international human rights movement, for example, can point to its role in the creation of the post of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the move to establish human rights as a core issue throughout the UN.

CSOs AND THE WORLD BANK

The international agency that has received the most sustained criticism from CSOs is the World Bank. From protests against individual projects to the blanket condemnation expressed by the Fifty Years Is Enough campaign, the World Bank has been subjected to closer scrutiny than any other international organization.

This is largely because of the vast scale and high profile of World Bank operations. Its role in structural adjustment lending from the 1980s onward has affected hundreds of millions of people around the world. The organization has also acquired a reputation for arrogance and secrecy.

Since much of the Bank's work has profound environmental implications, it inevitably has drawn the attention of environmental activists working with NGOs in a number of high-profile campaigns. A combination of political lobbying, mass media campaigning, and direct grassroots action eventually hit the mark, contributing to significant changes in the environmental policy of the institution. The cancellation in 1994 of the World Bank's support for the Narmada Dam in India, followed in 1995 by withdrawal from the Arun III Dam project in Nepal, were among key moments. At the same time, the Bank has been forced to concede greater access to project information

and to other means of holding the organization accountable. It has also agreed to establish an in-house review mechanism known as the Inspection Panel. Not all of this has been due to NGO pressure. Reformers inside the World Bank had been pushing in the same direction. Even so, their hand has been strengthened by vocal external criticism.

But while civil society activism has undoubtedly had an impact on certain target issues and projects, it has not yet shifted the World Bank's basic frames of reference—or its economic rationale for project decisions. Although the Bank now has over 270 staff members with environmental expertise, their department remains demoralized, fragmented and largely powerless. At best, there are now patches of green.

The women's movement has also had some impact on Bank activities. The institution now has a Gender Analysis and Policy Group and a Gender Sector Board. And it has diverted some resources to women's health and education, and to improving access to micro-credit. On the surface, the Bank appears to take gender equity concerns seriously. But many CSOs remain sceptical. They see far too few of their gender-related concerns addressed substantively in Bank policy.

The Bank's method of interacting with women's networks remains seriously flawed. This is evident even in the most feminist sector of the Bank, the Health, Nutrition and Population Division. The Bank's purpose has not been genuinely to incorporate gender-sensitive advice and analysis: instead it tries to involve CSOs on the Bank's terms. Thus while there are CSO members in Bank consultative groups (including the Gender Consultative Group), they are appointed as individuals, not as representatives of social movements or even of organizations.

Nonetheless, the Bank has offered more recent, and possibly significant, openings to CSOs. It has, for example, invited CSOs to

participate in the assessment of its Country Assistance Strategies and in the Structural Adjustment Programme Review Initiative Network. Launched in 1997 in response to NGO pressure, this involves the World Bank, governments and civil society organizations in reviews of structural adjustment programmes in eight countries (box 6.4).

Some World Bank officials believe the initiative has for the first time created real openings for meaningful dialogue. But there have been problems. SAPRIN staff members complain that the lack of consistency of lower-level Bank management in implementing the commitments made to SAPRIN has caused tensions. They also want SAPRIN to include a wider range of countries, including emerging markets. From outside the Bank there are other concerns. It remains to be seen whether the changes in Bank procedures resulting from SAPRIN will be anything other than cosmetic, and whether decision making between Bank and country-level government officials will involve more democratic accountability. Such negotiations often continue to take place

behind closed doors, without the elected representatives of affected groups.

Changes in the World Bank's stance on many issues represent some limited success for CSOs. But as relations between the Bank and some organizations of civil society grow closer, new issues arise. One is the familiar danger of co-optation. The more CSOs work in close consultation with, or under contract to, the World Bank, the more they risk being granted pseudo-influence.

This problem becomes more general as the Bank decentralizes and creates new offices at the national level. More than 70 NGDO specialists now work in the Bank's field offices; and national CSOs have often been happy to use the World Bank as an ally in struggles with their own governments. Indeed, the Bank can use its great power to insist that governments channel international funds toward civil society organizations. This may sometimes be useful, but it compromises the ability of those CSOs to monitor the Bank. While working as insiders may promote useful initiatives, more fundamental change in both national and

Box 6.4 – Adjusting structural adjustment

One of the most ambitious attempts to challenge the World Bank and make it reconsider its development model has been SAPRIN—the Structural Adjustment Programme Review Initiative Network, which itself is a product of NGO pressure on the World Bank. SAPRIN, which was launched by the Bank and NGOs in 1997, attempts to review the impact of structural adjustment programmes on social development. It involves participatory reviews of SAPs in 12 countries. Eight of these—Bangladesh, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ghana, Hungary, Mali, Uganda and Zimbabwe—involve the national government, the Bank and civil society organizations. In four others—Canada, Honduras, Mexico and the Philippines—similar consultative exercises are being organized by civil society organizations themselves.

One of the basic tools of SAPRIN has been the holding of national fora: five in 1998 and seven in 1999. These are to be followed by field research involving Bank and civil society participants, who will examine the “hows” and “whys” of adjustment impacts. The findings will be fed back into a second round of national meetings. As of end-1999, some 1,500 CSOs were participating in the network.

Bank policy will probably only come from persistent, objective external criticism.

CSOs AND THE INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

CSOs have also been interacting with the regional development banks, though not traditionally on such antagonistic terms. Here many of the initiatives have come from the banks themselves, rather than as a result of CSO pressure. A case in point is the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Headquartered in Washington, DC, the IDB's structure and operations parallel those of the World Bank, although its loan portfolio covers only Latin America and the Caribbean.

The IDB's declared interest in working more closely with civil society organizations emerged following a conference in 1994. Some CSOs hoped that this would lead to creation of a new fund to which they could have direct access. But the IDB, like other development banks, is composed of governments. CSOs who want to obtain support must be associated with government initiatives. Their influence must be asserted both through affecting government policy—speaking out as citizens in favour of or

against certain propositions—and through forming part of specific projects requested by governments and funded through the international banks.

Therefore the IDB sought to incorporate CSOs into the mainstream of its lending to governments. In 1995–96 it held a series of consultations that brought civil society groups more systematically into discussions on national development agendas. These meetings were intended both to build greater capacity among CSOs and to foster greater consensus between CSOs and governments.

By the late 1990s, the IDB had approved loans involving CSO participation in five Latin American countries—Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala and Venezuela (box 6.5). Their total monetary value was \$138 million, less than 3 per cent of the IDB's total portfolio. But because the bank has committed itself to the goal of channelling 50 per cent of all loans to the social sector, this amount may increase quickly.

It is clear that if CSOs are to take advantage of this opening, they need to be more assertive and to weigh in more intelligently. This will mean getting to know the key people in the

Box 6.5 – Community development for peace in Guatemala

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has been trying to work more closely with civil society organizations. In October 1996, the IDB met in Panajachel, Guatemala, with 100 people to examine how CSOs could participate more fully in Guatemalan government programmes. Those present included NGOs, indigenous community organizations, entrepreneurs, micro-entrepreneurs and philanthropists. One project they looked at in considerable detail was Community Development for Peace (DECOPAZ), a fund of \$50 million for community projects in the Peace Zone—the northern and western departments of Guatemala that suffered most during the civil war.

This IDB loan to the government is in fact managed primarily by community-based CSOs, with technical assistance from specialized development agencies and NGOs, in collaboration with municipal governments. The affected communities control implementation of social policy and, to a lesser degree, the design of successive stages of the projects.

IDB and in the governments, and also becoming more familiar with the bank's project cycle, so they can make timely, strategic and tactical interventions.

CSOs AND THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY BODIES

The World Trade Organization (WTO), and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) are treaties that bind signatory countries to follow a set of norms applied to international trade and investment. These have a narrow intent; and any positive or negative impacts on the environment, social development or even on growth are presumed to be incidental.

Decisions are taken by member countries. Each has one vote, although the countries with greatest economic clout have the most influence. Advocacy groups are formally excluded from debates, negotiations and decision making. But they are never far away. Transnational corporations have always circled around the meetings. CSOs, on the other hand, have largely been excluded and have protested their culture of secrecy.

In recent years the situation has been changing. In the case of the North American Free Trade Agreement, civil society organizations in the three countries concerned, Canada, Mexico and the United States, began organizing in the early 1990s to inform themselves and their constituencies of NAFTA's probable economic and social impact. One of the most influential coalitions was the Hemispheric Social Alliance. While it was ultimately unable to defeat NAFTA, its coalitions in the three countries gained recognition for their alternative approaches to the free trade agenda and for their repertoire of direct lobbying, legislative engagement and public action.

CSO organization around NAFTA also has had other repercussions—altering international alliances in the labour movement and

establishing campaigns in support of unionization, worker safety and human rights, particularly in Mexico. Thus at the 1998 Santiago Summit of the Americas, there was a large assembly of trade unions and federations along with events sponsored by indigenous, women's, environmental, church, ethnic and development associations and agencies.

In terms of achieving policy change, however, one of the most significant events for international CSOs was the sinking, or at least the temporary submersion, of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). Discussions on this treaty started at the OECD in 1995. The MAI aimed to establish ground rules for foreign direct investment—primarily to ensure fair treatment for transnationals wishing to invest anywhere in the world. NGO critics began to campaign on the issue in 1996, condemning it as a corporate charter that would allow TNCs to ride roughshod over national sovereignty—particularly over labour standards, environmental protection and public service delivery. Campaigns took off in many OECD and developing countries, uniting environmental, development and human rights CSOs—as well as consumer organizations, trade unions, church groups and even associations of local authorities.

OECD negotiators, who had expected to work quietly to finalize the treaty in 1997, found they had an increasingly unpopular mission. Changes of government in France and the UK also made their life more difficult, and the treaty was effectively set aside when France withdrew from negotiations in October 1998. At the end of 1998, the OECD officially announced that negotiations had been abandoned.

The MAI also probably signalled the coming of age of the Internet for the hundreds of pressure groups that used e-mail to communicate with each other and set up Web sites to spell out the potential costs of the MAI. OECD negotiators may have understood the MAI in



narrow economic terms; but when it came to the social and political ramifications, they were clearly outmanoeuvred. Their ability to work in secrecy was undermined: a draft of the MAI appeared on an NGO Web site and was rapidly circulated. In future, it will be difficult not to involve CSOs and other civil society actors in any follow-up negotiations.

The experience of civil society organization against the MAI was employed to good effect in campaigns against the WTO. Trade negotiations under the GATT never attracted the glare of the global spotlight. But the third

Ministerial Conference of the WTO in November 1999 in Seattle was to be very different.

A number of things had changed. First, the developing countries were less pliant. They realized they had been short-changed in the GATT rounds and demanded fairness—particularly, greater access to industrialized country markets. Second, America and Europe were already in dispute over such issues as bananas and beef hormones, and were in no mood to compromise. The long-lasting dispute over the WTO leadership also slowed down any efforts to prepare the ground for agreement.

In the public mind—as expressed by the CSOs—the more fundamental problem was that the WTO was a secretive and powerful entity whose rulings could effectively override agreements reached in other international fora—particularly on the environment. According to the WTO, it was not the organization's job to enforce environmental and labour agreements. Nevertheless, it had at its disposal trade sanctions—among the most effective international weapons short of missiles. This means that the WTO, which is not even a UN organization, is probably the second most powerful institution after the UN Security Council—and yet it makes its rulings essentially in private and with limited participation of the poorest countries.

Not surprisingly, the world's CSOs, most of which were already deeply disturbed by many aspects of globalization, seized on the WTO as a target. Prior to the meeting, nearly 1,200 CSOs from 87 countries signed a statement that called for a fundamental reform of what they saw to be a flawed and undemocratic organization. By the time of the meeting in Seattle, tens of thousands of people were jamming the streets—anarchists, trade unionists, environmentalists and human rights activists. Other large rallies were held simultaneously in cities all over the world.

These demonstrations did not themselves scupper the talks that organizers had hoped would launch a new round of international trade negotiations. The talks were already foundering long before the meeting started. But vivid news reports from the “battle of Seattle” will profoundly influence the atmosphere for all future multilateral trade negotiations.

THE FUTURE FOR INTERNATIONAL NGO MOBILIZATION

Mobilization against the WTO was the culmination of a series of successes for international campaigns. The Jubilee 2000 coalition on debt

and the campaigns against landmines, the MAI and genetically modified food—as well as campaigns against companies such as Nike, Shell or Nestlé—have raised the prospect of a new era of radical and effective protest. This may be over-optimistic. But at least there are signs of fundamental change in the ways such campaigns work.

One of the most important changes is the quality of the technical information that is available. The data and analysis on debt produced by Jubilee 2000 were strong enough to keep finance ministers on the defensive, and the same was true for the MAI and the WTO. Much of this is generated and disseminated by smaller campaigning organizations such as the Transnational Resource and Action Center, through its online magazine, *Corporate Watch*; but international CSOs like Oxfam and the WWF have skilled and respected teams of analysts, who not only develop well-argued criticisms but also have clearly worked-out alternative strategies of their own. This has now been combined with Web sites that can be used not just to transmit technical data but also to present the information in a format that can be understood by a wide audience.

The Internet has also helped activists with many different interests, scattered around the globe, to co-ordinate their activities. These alliances may melt away as rapidly as they appear. At present, it is probably safe to say that these are contingent tactical groupings that enable national organizations to establish links with those in other countries.

What happens next depends on the reaction of governments and international organizations. Probably they will start to absorb some of the key players, particularly the technical analysts, into official processes—an approach the World Bank has long used to good effect. This can be seen either as a new step toward broadening the range of views within international organizations or as a defensive tactic of co-optation.

Intelligence, energy and rights

The diversity of CSOs, and the multiplicity of levels at which they operate, make it difficult to draw general conclusions about their future prospects. CSOs have had many partial successes. In service delivery, they have often reached communities and groups hitherto neglected by state services. Project design and implementation can also benefit from their attention to participation, innovation, local needs and social relations. But there is no systematic evidence to suggest that civil society is a more effective delivery agent than the state. It should not be regarded as a substitute for basic universal services.

Internationally, CSOs have discovered effective ways to shake the foundations of the global economic order. Some have called the emergent CSO formations a global civil society. That probably overstates the case. What has emerged is a raucous and intelligent combination of research, idealism and cheap technology, now armed with human rights law. With this combination of energy, technology and development experience, they now have a voice that governments, corporations and international agencies ignore at their own peril.