The effectiveness of NGO campaigning: lessons from practice

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Development NGOs are devoting more and more time and energy to policy-influence work, yet there has been no corresponding increase in learning about effectiveness.

Until recently, lessons from even the best-known and longest-running campaigns have not been available. The increasing focus on campaigning and advocacy work applies not only to Northern NGOs, but also to those in the South. There are various reasons for this trend, not least changing South–North dynamics. There is, for example:

- growing recognition that, in many cases, Southern NGOs are better placed to carry out project work on the ground, leading operational Northern organisations to look for new roles;
- growing recognition among all NGOs that project work will have limited effects without changes in the structures that cause poverty;
- increasing links between ideas of development and human rights;
- on-going desire for public profile; and
- increasing calls by Southern organisations for Northern NGOs to do more campaign and policy work.

Concurrently, the arenas where NGOs are recognised as having an acceptable policy voice are increasing to encompass governments North and South, multilateral organisations, and the private sector. Frequently, issues are debated in all these different arenas at the same time, and by a growing diversity of actors. With both growing engagement in campaign and policy work, and increasingly complex policy arenas, many NGOs are concerned to gain a better understanding of policy processes and how to intervene in them effectively. They are asking questions about:

- *effectiveness*: how can NGOs effectively campaign in policy arenas?

- *impact*: what difference does such campaigning make, especially for those on whose behalf NGOs seek to campaign?
- *relevance*: is the campaigning relevant to the poor?
- *assessment*: how can NGOs assess whether this work is effective and making an impact?

The research project on which this paper is based set out to examine these issues through studying and comparing two case studies of long-running campaigns: the promotion of breastfeeding in Ghana and the campaign against the use of child labour in the carpet industry in India. The emphasis on looking at what international campaigns meant for people on the ground led to both case studies being based in the South. Both are campaigns that have met with considerable success, allowing the authors to analyse both their development from their early beginnings to significant change in practice, and the factors that contributed to their success. Both focus on corporate or industrial activity, since industry is an increasingly important target of NGO campaigns, and taken together cover influence on many different levels of the private sector: large transnational corporations, medium-size importers, nationally owned exporters, and the micro-scale, represented by individual loom-owners and market-women. These are all part of the chain of production and make the campaigning work indicative of a wide range of industrial activity. The case studies also showed the influence that NGOs may have in other arenas, for example on international bodies or on governments.

The research was undertaken during 1997–98 in collaboration with NGOs in India and Ghana. All research partners were intimately involved in one of the campaigns, which allowed access to files, activists, and beneficiaries. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with diverse stakeholders, including those directly affected, activists, industry, government, and international representatives. Interviews were supplemented by secondary sources such as newspaper clippings and documentary evidence. Workshops in both countries allowed opportunity for feedback and cross-checking or triangulation.

This paper introduces the two case studies, analyses them, and then presents the overall insights that arose from the research project.

The promotion of breastfeeding in Ghana

The babymilk campaign is a long-established international campaign with significant direction given by Northern NGOs campaigning

against large Northern corporations. Research in Ghana was carried out in collaboration with the Ghanaian Infant Nutrition Action Network (GINAN), a national organisation which is a member of both the Infant Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) and the World Alliance on Breastfeeding Action (WABA).

Coordinated work on the issue of breastfeeding in Ghana began in 1987, after a Ghanaian doctor noticed the negative results of a donation of free samples of infant formula to health clinics. He formed GINAN and pressed the government to take action. Work on the control of marketing of breastmilk substitutes initially progressed fairly quickly, with a code committee functioning within a year and a Ghanaian code drafted by 1989 (although this is still waiting to become law, owing to bureaucratic delays). GINAN has also been monitoring the marketing of breastmilk substitutes in Ghana, using the international code as the benchmark.

The promotion of breastfeeding was given attention next: health workers were trained, and Ghana became involved in UNICEF's Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative, and in the celebration of World Breastfeeding Week started by WABA. More recently, work has gone into supporting nursing mothers through training women from the community as breastfeeding counsellors. These counsellors are then encouraged to support other women by setting up mother-to-mother support groups, or working through already active women's groups. GINAN have also trained a group of market-women, as they are the major distributors of infant formula in Ghana. Not only have many trained market-women stopped selling infant formula, they also advise women visiting the market on the benefits of breastfeeding.

The work on promoting and protecting breastfeeding continues to evolve and develop, with activists facing new challenges (Chapman 1999). Nevertheless, the campaign has achieved considerable impact at many different levels: the Ministry of Health and many health workers are now aware of the issue, and breastfeeding is included in the plan of action for health; a draft bill on the marketing of substitutes is awaiting passage through Parliament; current marketing practices are being monitored and violations reported internationally; and there are approximately 40 mother-to-mother support groups. These factors have led to exclusive breastfeeding rates increasing from 8 per cent at four months in 1996 to 18 per cent at six months in 1998.

Most importantly, although direct causal links are hard to establish, and many other factors have played a part, infant mortality has fallen

from 82 deaths/1000 live births in 1978 to 66 deaths/1000 live births in 1993 (Government of Ghana 1993). Diarrhoea among children under two years of age has also dropped from 36 per cent in 1988 to 22 per cent in 1993 (*Daily Graphic*, 15 December 1997).

Despite the impressive achievements, there is still a long way to go. Many Ghanaian mothers still give their infants inappropriate foods, and the Ghanaian code is not yet law.

The campaign against the use of child labour in the carpet industry in India

Research in India was carried out in collaboration with the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS) and the Centre for Rural Education and Development Action (CREDA).

The campaign against the use of child labour in the carpet industry in India (primarily in the State of Uttar Pradesh) was strongly influenced from the outset by Indian NGOs and was targeted at a local industry, although Northern NGOs, consumers, and importers played critical roles, because the industry is a major exporter.

The campaign within India had its roots in work on the issue of bonded labour, from which a focus on bonded carpet-children developed. This narrow focus was instrumental in getting international media attention. The campaign later widened out to include all children working illegally in the carpet industry, and then to a call for universal primary education.

The campaign used many different strategies. It started in 1983 with raids to free bonded children, which still continue. Around 1990, a consumer campaign, promoted by SACCS and German NGOs, was started in Germany, one of two main destinations for Indian carpets. This sought to educate consumers about the plight of children used in the production of hand-knotted carpets. At the same time, the Harkin Bill was pending in the USA, threatening to legislate against the import of goods made with child labour. These two pressures prompted talk of a labelling system. Initially this was discussed between the government-promoted Carpet Export Promotion Council (CEPC), NGOs, and the industry. However, the CEPC and industry represent-atives from the larger companies ultimately dropped out. The talks nevertheless led to the formation of the Rugmark labelling scheme in 1994, whereby looms are subject to surprise inspections, and a guarantee is given that a particular carpet is made without the use of illegal child labour. The Rugmark labelling scheme was followed soon after by various other (rival) labelling schemes.

Simultaneously, locally based NGOs which were working on social welfare and education in the carpet-weaving area also started to focus on the issue of child labour in the carpet industry. Work at the grass-roots included mobilising communities against child labour and empowering them to demand schools. One strategy used by CREDA is to train volunteers within villages who then serve three purposes:

- checking who replaces children removed from the looms;
- keeping a village-wide vigil to prevent children entering the labour market; and
- creating village-level Child Labour Vigilance Committees, 200 of which now take responsibility for primary-school enrolment, watching out for agents seeking to recruit child labour, and liaison with the district administration on the issue.

Since 1983, a great deal has been achieved. NGOs have worked with the judiciary and government officials to enforce existing laws; they have been able to threaten export markets sufficiently to bring about some changes in industry without actually implementing a boycott; they established the labelling scheme (Rugmark) as a constructive outcome for the consumer campaign; and they have also had a significant impact at the grassroots and on the emergence of civil society. Above all, there is some evidence of a reduction in child labour in the industries and areas targeted, although it is debatable whether there has been a reduction in the level of child labour overall. The work, however, is nowhere near finished. There has been a backlash from sections of the industry: many looms have been relocated away from mobilised villages or inspection; others have nominally become 'owned' by the weaver, allowing the family's children to work legally.

This campaign has helped to move forward the debate on child labour as a whole. It has fed into work on carpet-children in other countries and work on other industries in India, such as the production of firecrackers and footballs. It has also contributed to the Indian campaign for universal primary education.

Analysis

The nature of a campaign

The case studies demonstrate that the nature of campaigns is not straightforward. A campaign may have been running for many years and have unclear origins, having grown out of work on other issues, other campaigns, people's personal commitment and experience, or

disasters and opportunities. It may evolve to focus on other issues, lead into new campaigns on related issues, alter its demands, grow, narrow, or widen at different times.

Campaigns can work at the international, national, and grassroots levels, within each of which they may be targeted at different actors. Work at different levels may be carried out by different organisations working independently of each other, whose approaches may sometimes clash, with gains at one level working against progress at others. In other campaigns, and at other times, work at different levels comes together to produce an effect greater than the sum of the parts.

Active groups may continually move into and out of the campaign. Some organisations will resonate with the Zeitgeist and take off and grow; later the same ones may decline or split, leading to a multiplicity of new actors, with different approaches and ideas. Institutions may retain the same name but change their nature or their approach, or they may lose key individuals who leave to establish new institutions, possibly working on related issues.

Most campaigns are based on an oral history which contains a range of multiple and conflicting perspectives. An effective campaign is based on stories and the extent to which these are accepted by different parties. Heroes or heroines are created, whose actions and exploits become mythologised, and so serve to motivate supporters.

Thus, an essential characteristic of campaigns is their fluidity, though this dynamism creates difficulties in assessing and managing them. Campaigns cannot be understood as a linear, mechanistic, or logical sequence. Neither can they be grasped at one time in their entirety. Nevertheless, insights can be gained by looking at campaigns from a variety of perspectives.

What makes a campaign effective?

Reviewing the way in which the campaigns developed over time, and the different levels and arenas in which they were engaged, we can form a better understanding of the factors that have contributed to their effectiveness.

In campaigning against industry, NGOs can use the threat of disrupting markets as a powerful weapon. A consumer campaign featured in both case studies. The Indian carpet industry was particularly vulnerable to such action, being a prominent exporter of a luxury good with a limited main market and a small group of exporters and importers. The consumer campaign was coupled with the threat of a

boycott and international legislation, which effectively persuaded segments of the carpet industry to enter into dialogue with the NGOs. In Ghana, the boycott was a feature of the international campaign, rather than being directly tied to the national one.

However, though both campaigns were selected because of their focus on corporate practices, mapping them showed that the focus had not always been on industry. In the Indian case, the campaign's focus shifted considerably over the years, yet fundamentally it remained the same campaign with mainly the same actors. At times, its focus narrowed to achieve a clear campaign message; at others it widened to reflect the real complexity of the issue. Similarly, the campaign on breastfeeding started with a narrow focus on the marketing of breast-milk substitutes, but later widened to include many issues related to infant feeding, the promotion of breastfeeding, and supporting mothers within the community. Thus, many of the lessons which emerged apply also to policy change and effectiveness on a wide range of issues.
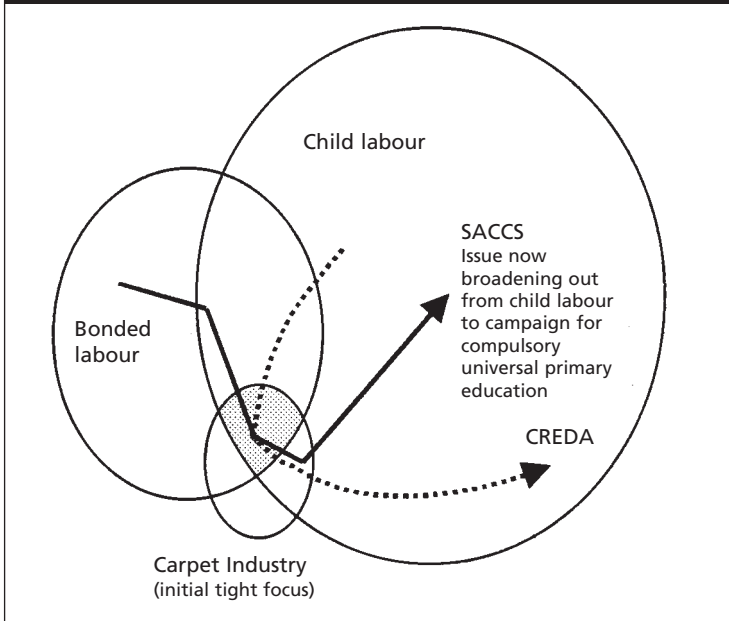
Figure 1 shows how two organisations involved in the campaign against child labour in India changed their focus during its course. Here, the international campaign really took off when activists within India started to focus narrowly on bonded child labour in the carpet industry. However, this led to some inappropriate responses on the ground, such as schools reserved exclusively for ex-weavers (who are nearly all boys).

The timeline

The effectiveness of NGOs in influencing policy is rarely dependent on a single event or campaign. Instead, there is a cumulative effect of campaigning over time which may lead to precipitative moments which have a major impact in terms of change in policy and practice.

As already described, campaigns are not linear and do not have defined beginnings and ends. Nevertheless, a linear model can be useful in drawing out the different stages of their evolution, though it is stressed that this is only a partial model. This can be conceptualised in the timeline shown in Figure 2. The line starts at the point where the issue is put on the agenda and reaches a plateau at the time of real change in practice. This is a process, so each stage is unlikely to be completed before the next begins. As a result, the role of NGOs adapts, with more possibilities and avenues opening up as the issue emerges, but few likely to be discarded. Likewise, while the diagram portrays progress towards the goal as a smooth, upward path, real life is not so

Figure 1: Shifting focus of child labour campaign

Child labour

SACCS
Issue now broadening out from child labour to campaign for compulsory universal primary education

CREDA

Bonded labour

Carpet Industry
(initial tight focus)

simple: progress will go faster at some times than at others, and may stall or even reverse. It is also likely that the campaign is at different stages of the timeline at different levels (for example, international and national) and in different locations.
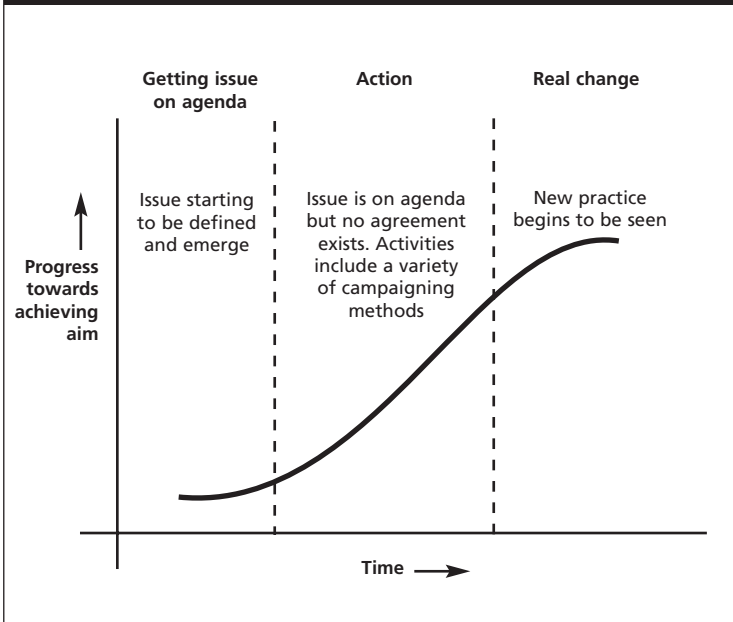
This framework focuses attention on the long timescale needed to achieve real change. Understanding where the campaign is in terms of how the issue itself is developing can also help in planning which types of action are most useful when, and what sort of success is realistic in the short term.

Concurrent work is needed at different levels and in different arenas

The case studies were selected as examples of campaigns against private-sector actors, in one case large corporations based in the North, in the other dispersed decentralised production in the South. What is clear from both is that it is not enough to target private-sector actors alone in order to bring about the change that the campaigns seek to achieve. Instead, work has to be conducted at many different levels and, within these, in different arenas in order to target other groups (UN bodies, officials, the judiciary, market-traders, health-workers, parents,

Figure 2: The policy timeline

| | Getting issue on agenda | Action | Real change |

Progress towards achieving aim

Issue starting to be defined and emerge

Issue is on agenda but no agreement exists. Activities include a variety of campaigning methods

New practice begins to be seen

Time →

villagers, etc.) This in turn may lead to a broadening of the campaign (for example, from child labour to education, from marketing of breastmilk substitutes to promotion of better health for babies).

The levels and the components that have proved most helpful in moving the campaigns forward are shown in Table 1. Working at all these levels is an immense challenge. In both case studies, the work started in only a few of the arenas, mainly at national or international level, expanding as the timeline progressed; it is not necessary to work in all of the arenas simultaneously. The challenge is to select the arenas which will be most effective in moving the timeline forward at different times, and to link up with appropriate organisations that can work effectively at other levels.

Collaboration

It is clear that no one organisation can effectively campaign at all the different levels, which often require very different attitudes, strategies, and skills. To achieve this complex mix of work, different types of organisations are needed. In particular, a campaign may not exclusively resort to 'outsider' strategies, with NGOs campaigning against their targets, or 'insider' strategies, with NGOs working together with, for

Table 1: What is helpful at different levels		
Level	**Arenas**	**What is particularly helpful**
International	• international NGOs • multilateral organisations • national governments • consuming public • voting public • industry	• existence of international codes, legislation, and conventions • active international campaign • consumer activism
National/regional	• national government • regional government • judiciary • public opinion • national NGOs • industry	• progressive legislation upholding rights • legal pressure points (e.g. Supreme Court) • history of social activism and NGO activity • aware population • labelling systems • independent monitoring
Grassroots	• communities • grassroots NGOs • families • individuals	• active civil-society organisations • aware population • active individuals

example, government agencies to bring about change. Outsider or insider strategies may be more effective for moving the campaign forward when targeting different groups at different times. This makes it extremely difficult for individual NGOs to act effectively in all the different arenas at all times. NGOs in the two campaigns studied adopted a mix of outsider and insider strategies, although the overall strategy of each NGO remains characterised predominantly by one or the other.

Collaboration between different organisations can therefore help in moving the campaign forward. Even without formal collaboration, a variety of NGOs working with different strategies in different arenas is helpful. However, this can also lead to conflicts, and collaboration is particularly difficult among NGOs pursuing very different campaigning styles and strategies, something which can actually undermine the

progress of the campaign. Likewise, as more players become involved, co-operation becomes more complex.

The study identified three structures for organising collaboration: the pyramid, the wheel, and the web. The pyramid has a co-ordinating secretariat with information flowing up and down to it; the wheel has one or more focal points with information flowing in and out, and also directly between members; in the web no focal points exist, and information flows to and from all organisations in roughly equal quantities. Table 2 shows the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Legitimacy

All the actors in a campaign, both the NGOs and their targets, spend time and energy establishing and maintaining their legitimacy and contesting that of their opponents. This is often essential for the NGOs, in terms of campaigning successfully and raising adequate resources. For example, the three NGOs covered in the case studies have all derived significant benefits from being regarded as legitimate collaborators by some public bodies (for instance, government departments, the judiciary, professional associations) or international NGOs and donors, although not by others. At the same time, the pressure on organisations to show results can lead them to exaggerate their own importance. The desire of NGOs to establish their own legitimacy can thus create tensions in collaborating with other NGOs, especially if they are competing for funds.

Most NGOs draw on a variety of bases for legitimising their campaigning work. All are likely to be challenged by opponents of their position. The possible consequences of different bases are examined in Table 3.

Individuals and mobilising the people

In both cases, individual champions played a key role in campaigning. Specific individuals were crucial to the process at both the national and grassroots levels. These were people with a flair for motivating others, who combined a social conscience with strategic vision on how to promote the issue. In both cases, they were particularly important at the national level in getting the issue on to the agenda and at the grassroots level in ensuring real change.

Thus, individual motivation is a key driving force, but the motives are varied. Some may make the issue their life's work or crusade out of strong moral conviction; others may be in it for a short period before moving on to another issue which appears more pressing.

Table 2: Advantages and disadvantages of different structures of collaboration		
Structure	**Advantages**	**Disadvantages**
Pyramid	• dynamic • quick to act • can speak with authority of many member organisations • can mobilise a lot of people • helps to get access to top level of policy	• members may feel loss of identity • strengthening civil society at grassroots may not be given adequate attention • danger of speaking 'for' clients rather than facilitating them to speak for themselves
Wheel	• more independence at the grassroots • good for information exchange and sorting • centres of specialisation in large networks can aid in information sorting	• can be harder to show a united front or common identity • process of change is slow • campaign may miss opportunities for sudden changes in practice
Web	• good for information exchange	• slow to take action • possibly would need to change into a wheel or pyramid before effective campaigning action could be taken

Campaigning organisations provide jobs and security for some, but rely also on much voluntary effort, and it can prove to be dangerous work. Many who are paid for their involvement could have greater financial reward elsewhere but can gain in other ways: there is an excitement in being part of a movement that is attacking the *status quo*, and there are opportunities for travel, profile, and status – and maybe a chance to make a real change. Some leaders become prominent national figures, gaining perhaps personal satisfaction, but also the opportunity for greater influence to achieve change for the better.

At later stages of the campaign, however, a few individuals alone are not sufficient. While in some cases a campaigning NGO itself may

Table 3: Possible consequences of different bases for legitimacy

Legitimisation	Possible consequences
Practice to policy: seeking to influence policy by pointing to practical experience on the ground.	• complex message, difficult communication tool • less open to dispute • works well for grassroots NGOs • can be challenged if NGOs claim to speak for people whom they have not genuinely consulted
Values-based: where NGOs promote a particular value which is widely recognised within society and/or enshrined in international law.	• extremely powerful when combined with pictures and stories and when taps into innate values many people feel • powerful when values are enshrined in international conventions etc. • in countries where values are not universally held, can lead to accusations of selecting values to ensure funds from overseas, especially in professional rather than voluntary organisations • can be challenged for just talking not doing • can be accused of speaking 'for' beneficiaries rather than enabling them to express their own views
Knowledge and research: acting as an expert on a particular issue.	• works well when there is consensus on topic or you have credible allies • particularly useful and relevant for more technically based policy issues • can be open to challenge by views based on alternative research • open to question of who funds/sponsors research or organisation
Through grassroots and other civil-society organisations: legitimise by adhering to and strengthening democratic principles and practice.	• works well at grassroots • necessary for civil-society aims • long-term engagement required • may mean campaigning opportunities missed • possibly weak impact at higher policy levels
Alliances and networks: legitimacy gained from other members of network who gain legitimacy from one of above.	• quickly spreads work to a wide audience • gives strength of numbers • disputes over who 'owns' work • successful alliances often require significant management

be an extension of its leader, providing him or her with the necessary organisational support, the need to mobilise people into a movement around the campaign issue is critical to achieving greater impact at the national and grassroots level. This was particularly apparent in India, which has a long tradition of social movements, where the NGOs have drawn together networks of hundreds of NGOs and activists, which also allows them to organise marches, mass meetings, and popular campaigns. A common value base has been essential for promoting such movements. The Ghanaian case has been less successful in this regard, partly because of the nature of the campaign issue, as well as a weaker tradition of social movements.

A key issue for such campaigning, given the long time-scale for achieving real change, is how to continue to mobilise people for that length of time. Giving them an active role, recognising their contributions, developing practical tools to allow concrete changes, and recognising successes along the way are all important for this.

Narrow focus

There is growing concern that although NGOs are successfully addressing single issues, they find it harder to address wider ones. This study shows how a narrow focus can be extremely effective in getting an issue formulated and ensuring concrete progress. Such a focus need not hinder the issue widening out at a later stage, for example from marketing of breastmilk substitutes to promotion of better health for babies, when something more than campaigning and advocacy may be required. The question therefore becomes at what point on the campaign's timeline, and at what level, a narrow focus can be effectively used, and at what point the campaign needs to be broadened to tackle wider issues and causes (see Table 4).

Role of government and judiciary

The case studies show the important role of the State, national law, and international conventions, and highlight the need for market regulations to protect the poor from exploitation. It is crucial that at some point government and the law are involved, in order to:

- get legal frameworks in place, often providing an essential lever for campaigners;
- ensure the law is implemented, although in practice it is often campaigning NGOs that pressurise the government and judiciary to implement the law, occasionally themselves

Advantages	Disadvantages
• moves national and international campaign forwards	• can oversimplify and distract from wider problem, or deeper causes
• works as communication tool	• can target response too narrowly
• makes people distant from situation feel they can do something	• can make involvement of grassroots harder
• helps to identify a target	• can undermine civil society in nascent democracies

demonstrating that it is possible (for example, by conducting raids to free bonded labourers);

- carry out large programmes for which NGOs cannot raise the necessary resources;
- change practice and attitudes in government-run institutions;
- provide a level playing field for all companies; and
- give permanency: laws do not collapse in the way that industry codes of conduct sometimes do.

It is not necessary that every actor is an insider with the government, but some co-operation is needed if a government is to support the aims of the campaign. It is also helpful to recognise that some governments and corporations are actively seeking change; NGOs are only one set of players among many.

In Ghana, the NGOs played a vital catalytic role in introducing new legislation. In India, the NGOs did not have such a significant impact in introducing new laws (which already existed) or policies, although some such changes have occurred, but they have had a great impact in influencing the implementation and interpretation of such policies.

International context

In both case studies, collaboration between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs has been instrumental in moving the campaigns forward. Being a member of IBFAN and WABA has helped to legitimise the work of GINAN, as well as providing channels for sharing and disseminating the information needed. The work in Ghana has also benefited greatly from experience and knowledge gained in similar campaigns in other countries. In India, the national NGOs have benefited from international support, which has facilitated access to international platforms, helped to apply consumer pressure, and provided funds for projects to offer alternatives to the carpet-children.

International conventions have also been useful tools, both for national NGOs and UN agencies, to press for change within the countries. In Ghana, action got going quickly, due to the work that had already been conducted internationally; it was important not only that an international code existed, but also that other countries had already taken positive action on the issue. The international media can also play a big role, with national governments and industry sometimes paying more attention to international coverage than to reports in national newspapers.

However, both case studies also demonstrate the limited role that Northern NGOs can play in bringing about real change in Southern countries. In spite of extensive international campaigning on breast-milk substitutes, nothing happened in Ghana – a prominent African state – until a Ghanaian doctor, who knew nothing about the inter-national campaign, took up the issue of his own accord. Campaigning on child labour in India has been led by Indian NGOs, who persuaded (reluctant) German NGOs to launch a consumer campaign in Germany.

Though Northern NGOs have often provided critical support, they have not been able to engage in mobilising movements and promoting civil society at the grassroots. Particularly in controversial campaigns, such as child labour in the carpet industry, it has been critical to respect national sensitivities. For example, one international backer had to withdraw from a prominent role in the Rugmark labelling scheme when it came under fire for being internationally led.

Campaigns in context

In the two case studies, policy change and advocacy on their own were not enough to bring about real change at the grassroots. For this, significant additional work was needed.

Implementation and monitoring

Achieving policy change is not the end; organisations such as govern-ment or corporations can renege on or ignore policies. Both case studies show the importance of work to ensure that policies and laws are implemented. In Ghana, the international code needs to be constantly monitored, and violations publicised, to ensure that it is abided by. The Indian case study shows how NGOs can play an important role in pushing the judiciary to enforce existing laws and, where these are insufficient, to set up their own initiatives, such as the Rugmark labelling scheme, that build in a monitoring system.

Tools

Campaigning on an issue is not enough if effective tools for making a change are not promoted as well. In the past, legislation or conventions were often seen as the ultimate aim of such work. Now, other tools are also being developed. These include codes of conduct, labelling, and social auditing. These are seen to be appropriate when either national legislation or international conventions do not exist, or are too weak, too broad, or unspecific, or when there is a problem with implementing them through the legal system or government.

However, each tool may also become a cause of conflict, with disagreements on which types should be used and how they should be administered. Opponents may try to use similar tools for their own ends, thus confusing the public. For example, in India there are now competing labelling schemes for carpets, and the labels do not have common standards.

Work at the grassroots

A lot can be achieved in terms of policy change and awareness raising without grassroots involvement; however, such involvement is essential to ensure real and sustained change. In India, without work at the grassroots, the children would have been moved from the carpet industry into other work. In Ghana, without the grassroots work, mothers are likely to continue giving their babies other inappropriate foods, even if breastmilk substitutes were entirely unavailable.

The case studies thus highlight the essential links between policy and project work. International development NGOs first took up advocacy work which drew upon their practical experience on the ground ('practice-to-policy'). This developed into a trend of moving resources from development projects into advocacy, although recently this trend has partly gone into reverse, with NGOs increasingly identifying the need to inform macro-level policy proposals with concrete micro-experiences. The findings of this research close this loop, confirming not only the close links between advocacy and project work, but also the need for long-term work at the grassroots even after policy changes have been achieved; this could be termed policy-to-practice. Campaigning or advocacy work is very valuable, but its effect in isolation is limited.

The role of people at the grassroots is not straightforward; in some cases they are seen just as recipients. Both cases provide examples of where the grassroots have been included not to find out what they

think, but to sell them a message. Thus, the flow of information to the grassroots is often one-way. Mothers are told the 'correct' way to feed their babies; information about the problems they encounter in carrying out the instructions may not be passed in the other direction. In India, villagers are encouraged to value education and to believe that children should not work. However, being a recipient of new ideas does not mean these cannot be valued; once they had assimilated the new ideas, many parents and children became activists in their own right.

The challenge comes when moving towards engagement and empowerment at the grassroots which will develop civil society in a way that also develops its potential influence on many other issues. Work at this level, to change attitudes and behaviour and to build capacity and skills, needs a lot of trust and requires non-hierarchical organisations with close personal contact. These cannot be built quickly. Conversely, change at the grassroots is speeded up and facilitated by work happening at the other levels.

Problems at the grassroots tend to be very complex, often with roots in poverty and isolation; they cannot be solved quickly or with a narrow focus, which can distract from the wider problem and target responses too narrowly (see Table 4). More seriously, a narrow focus can mean that grassroots voices are ignored in the campaign in the desire to move it forward. If the grassroots do not have a sense of ownership in the solutions advocated, they are less likely to co-operate and more likely, to take the India example, to move their child into another industry once one employment opportunity is shut off.

The limitations of the focused approach become particularly apparent when looking at the factors that influence how a child spends its time, or how a mother chooses to feed her baby. The factors that are susceptible to international pressure are only a very small part of the picture but, understandably, tend to be the ones that receive most attention by international NGOs. Many of the factors that influence the child's or the mother's behaviour are only susceptible to pressure or change at the community or grassroots level (Chapman 1999; Chapman and Fisher 1999). However, the case studies show that for changing other factors, national-level work can be quite effective without grassroots involvement at all.

Conclusion

This paper has drawn out lessons about campaigns and about their limitations. It shows how effective campaigns happen at many different levels and may take a long time, showing a potential clash with the short-term campaign strategies of many Northern NGOs. It points out how no one organisation can be active at all the levels, which makes collaboration vital; yet, paradoxically, a few key individuals can make a real difference. It shows that concerns over the narrow focus of many campaigns are justified; yet such a narrow focus can be effective in getting an issue formulated and need not necessarily militate against the campaign widening out at a later stage. It recognises that in the two case studies considerable success has been achieved, but that this was not gained by campaigning alone. Changes in policy are not enough to ensure implementation and change at the grassroots; this requires additional activity such as monitoring, the use of appropriate tools, and also long-term project work.

Acknowledgements

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