

Heroism and ambiguity: NGO advocacy in international policy

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Heroism and ambiguity

NGO policy activism has been widely portrayed in a heroic light. Campaigns to abolish anti-personnel landmines, restrict child labour, enforce marketing codes for infant formula, protect dolphins and whales, and extend political and civil rights have been covered favourably in the media, studied by a handful of political scientists, and even honoured as Nobel Peace laureates.

These campaigns have mobilised moral outrage into political action on topics where the targets are clear, the cause obviously just, and the abuses graphic. Yet the policy victories of NGOs in these areas (like those of States) are often tenuous and difficult to assess in practice, and securing their implementation generally requires continued political pressure.

Because NGO alliances rely on public participation and the mobilisation of values-based action, they need clearly identified opponents and results in order to motivate public action. But campaigns targeting the World Bank, especially on matters of economic policy, often encounter ambiguity and uncertainty. The Bank affirms that it shares NGOs' agenda of poverty reduction, sustainable development, empowerment, and partnership. Have NGOs made a difference to the Bank's economic policy? How can they know?

In 1997 I evaluated a campaign against orthodox structural adjustment policy, carried out between 1994 and 1996 by the London-based development NGO Christian Aid. The campaign, and the evaluation, offer a chance to reflect on these questions and on other issues of

self-governance that face NGOs as they become more prominent political actors.¹ NGO advocates have little record of critically assessing their own impact. Evaluating impact is difficult, and the results are usually ambiguous and debatable, but the process is essential to NGOs' effectiveness and credibility. The article suggests an approach.

NGO advocacy with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is, I believe, ethically essential, substantively important, and politically relevant to the relationship between the international financial institutions (IFIs) and national policy. But there is a danger that NGO advocates and friendly observers could be seduced by the heroic image that they and others have created. I am not arguing that the heroic image needs to be erased, but that NGOs need to adjust to their new prominence and to the political-economic environment in which they operate. This involves adopting a second generation of advocacy strategies, one that places greater emphasis on implementation of policy, on institutional changes at the IFIs, and on national-level strategies.

This paper is organised as follows. The second section examines NGO campaigns and the sources of ambiguity in their evaluation, and introduces a campaign entitled 'Who Runs the World?' (WRTW). The third section focuses on the process of NGO advocacy, drawing lessons from some recent criticism, and from WRTW. The final section returns to the question of impact and uncertainty, and suggests an approach to ongoing NGO evaluation.

A note on the IMF: WRTW targeted the IMF as well as the World Bank, but contact and results at the IMF were slender. Information and opinion from the IMF were hard to obtain: an IMF public-affairs officer observed that the Fund is more centralised than the Bank, and that, for the public, 'all roads lead to me'. This officer himself declined to speak on the record about the campaign. Advocacy with the IMF is an important and difficult effort for NGOs, and this article will not attempt to add to excellent papers by Scholte (1998) and Polak (1998) of the Center of Concern.

Campaigns on economic policy

NGOs have campaigned to influence the World Bank on issues including dam construction, indigenous people's rights, energy policy, micro-credit lending, structural adjustment, human rights, popular participation, gender, and corruption.

Development NGOs have become regular participants in discussions of popular participation and social-sector projects, areas in which they

are considered to have special expertise or delivery capacity that makes it necessary to listen to their concerns. Their substantial and growing efforts to influence the Bank are evaluated less fully and frequently than other NGO activities. Foundations and interested observers have however produced some reviews (Nelson 1995; Fox and Brown 1998; Sogge 1996).

The campaigns of environmental NGOs have had the most visible impact. Alliances and networks originating in struggles to modify or stop particular dam and highway projects have pressed for reforms in sector policies, information disclosure, environmental assessment procedures and accountability mechanisms. NGOs have had particular difficulty in influencing the World Bank on the subject of macro-economic policy. Fifteen years of structural adjustment lending has produced strong dissent from NGOs, both North and South, but the principal impact of their criticism at the Bank has been to help to motivate increased investment in compensatory Social Investment Funds.

NGOs' reform agendas have, in general, succeeded when the agenda or strategy calls for the World Bank to do more – to expand, not curtail, the range of its influence. The Bank has responded to criticism on environmental and social issues by accepting new roles in national environmental planning, project planning, managing the Global Environment Facility, financing pollution abatement, providing training and technical assistance, supporting micro-finance lending, poverty assessments, and post-conflict rehabilitation.

The critique of adjustment lending has usually called for a reduction in the World Bank's role (Nelson 1996). But the critique's most tangible success resulted from NGO support for UNICEF's call for social safety-net programmes to accompany adjustment loans. More fundamental criticism of privatisation, export promotion, and the political impact of the adjustment conditions may have helped to persuade Bank staff to promote wider national 'ownership' of adjustment plans. But the critique has not persuaded any major actor to promote heterodox alternative strategies, and the crisis in Southeast Asia does not appear significantly to have weakened the official consensus on neo-liberal economic strategies.

Economic structural adjustment is an inherently difficult policy area for NGOs to influence. Most economists believe that the best evidence of its impact comes from complex economic models that are outside the expertise of NGO advocates. NGO protests are often viewed as exactly the kind of political pressure that World Bank intervention is meant to

correct: the ability of interest groups to sustain their claim to entitlements from government.

'Who Runs the World?'

Christian Aid's two-year campaign aimed to promote greater accountability and change the nature of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) promoted by the World Bank and IMF, particularly in the Philippines, Jamaica, and Zimbabwe. The campaign coincided roughly with the World Bank's 50th anniversary, and with the appointment of James Wolfensohn as President. Its principal objectives were as follows:

1. to get SAPs changed in some countries and ... influence the design of new SAPs;
2. to make the World Bank and IMF more open and accountable to governments, taxpayers, and the poor;
3. to show that there are people-friendly alternatives to SAPs (Christian Aid 1994).

Many of the campaign's initiatives gained the attention of decision-makers in government or the IFIs. It supported the position of key internal reformers, stimulated the media to pay attention to adjustment and debt issues, mobilised a segment of British public opinion, encouraged parliamentary inquiry and government reporting of its policies and votes in the Bank and the IMF, facilitated other NGO coalitions and initiatives, and helped NGO and church partners in Jamaica, the Philippines, and Zimbabwe to gain increased access to World Bank officials.

Ambiguity

But the campaign's actual influence on World Bank policy and practice is obscured by several sources of uncertainty. The organisation is far from static, and has undergone a major change (in style, at least) since James Wolfensohn became President in June 1995. The relatively slow process of developing and financing new projects creates a 'pipeline' of projects in various stages of development, unequally influenced by new policies (Fox and Brown 1998). Interrelations among the Bank, governments, and the IMF further complicate the picture, and Bank staff members have no incentive to acknowledge that confrontational strategies are effective, even if in fact they are.

Most development NGOs encounter another sort of ambiguity as well: even fierce critics of the World Bank support at least the principle of multilateral development finance, and often the continued funding of the Bank itself. Development NGOs may be more affected in this regard than advocates focused on human rights or environmental issues, whose policy agendas are less likely to include support for multilateral lending.

The large number and loose co-ordination of NGO initiatives further complicates the task of distinguishing effects of various initiatives. NGO advocates are not always in agreement or closely co-ordinated, and there is no certain way to differentiate their various effects. Consider the difficulty in assigning 'credit' for institutional and policy changes made by the Bank in Jamaica, including an NGO liaison role in the Bank mission, the creation of the Public Information Centre (PIC), and NGO representation on the board of the Bank-financed Social Investment Fund (SIF). Participants in WRTW note these changes as results of their efforts, but the first two are also tied to larger trends in the Bank's reorganisation, and the Jamaican regional PIC was initiated by an innovative World Bank Resident Representative.

Monitoring the *process* of NGO advocacy is one partial solution to this problem of uncertainty. This is the focus of the third section of this article.

Process: what can NGOs learn from recent criticism?

Most criticism of NGO advocacy has been aimed at NGOs based in industrial countries, which co-ordinate most network campaigning. The criticism raises the question of how campaigns balance five important sets of variables:

- *choice of political arenas*: balancing national and international advocacy strategies
- *self-governance*: balancing strategic leadership with broad participation
- *mass mobilisation*: balancing mass political strategies with insider approaches
- *strategy*: balancing confrontational and co-operative approaches
- *perspective*: balancing short-term campaign goals and long-term constituency building.

Balancing national and international strategies

A coalition involving international NGOs and NGOs based in the World Bank's borrowing countries must choose and balance strategies that target national governments and international institutions. When NGOs choose strategies that use international organisations to gain influence over governments, they may contribute to shifting key policy decisions (and authority) into international arenas.

Jordan and van Tuijl (1997) outline several distinct types of international campaigns, and distinguish the international, national, and local political arenas in which the actors operate. They show that some campaigns, particularly in politically volatile situations where local participants are at risk, suffer from inadequate communication, co-ordination, and acceptance of risk and responsibility by international NGO partners. Cleary (1995) argues that international NGOs favoured confrontational strategies in several instances in Indonesia, when local interests might have been better served by negotiation.

But these are relatively well co-ordinated campaigns based on environmental issues, and indigenous people's rights and human rights. In advocacy on economic policy, links have tended to be less tightly formed, and participants' lobbying strategies less tightly co-ordinated. Much of the NGO advocacy on adjustment in the international arena has addressed the issues globally or regionally, rather than at a national level. WRTW continued this approach, linking agendas only loosely with Southern partners. WRTW promoted its own agenda for policy change, but the ties between the campaign in the UK and Washington and NGO partners' national agendas were loose and flexible. Local partners defined their lobbying objectives, so much so that there is some inconsistency between the radical rethinking of adjustment called for in WRTW materials, and the more limited efforts for debt relief and changes in the administration of the SIF that were the substance of the lobby effort in Jamaica and the Philippines.

The international campaign, said one member of Christian Aid's staff, was 'partner-informed', not 'partner-directed'. In the Philippines, the Freedom from Debt Coalition focused on the IMF programme, arguing to government and the public that the country needs not IMF direction but a domestically rooted programme of 'fundamental reforms'. Jamaican partners noted three objectives: lobby the Government to recognise the 'social debt' and pursue debt forgiveness; persuade the World Bank and government to compensate 'losers' in the reform process; and press for

expanded citizen involvement in decisions about spending and borrowing. These objectives overlap with Christian Aid's campaign goals, but criticism of the adjustment model itself does not feature in the partners' stated priorities.

Internationalising economic policy

Do international NGO campaigns assign too much importance to the World Bank? Critics within the Bank and others charge that NGOs blame the Bank for social ills that actually result from bad government policy or global economic change. By doing so, it is charged, NGOs can delay the process of calling governments to account for inept, self-seeking, or corrupt practices.

This criticism was levelled at WRTW from its launch. A commentary in the *Financial Times* faulted the campaign's monograph 'Who Runs the World?' for ignoring African governments' responsibility for their countries' economic and social ills. The criticism is a difficult one for international NGOs based in the industrialised countries, who – with few direct routes to influence the governments that borrow from the World Bank – have seized on donor lending and aid policies as among the most effective approaches. The Bank's institutional self-confidence and influence also seem to have invited attack.

Heavy reliance on international solutions, particularly the Bank, has had an effect on the level at which key political battles are fought. By moving some authority over national policy decisions into the international arena, NGOs could actually reduce the significance of local participation by eroding the policy-setting power of borrowing governments. Some environmental safeguards that were proposed to restrain the World Bank's lending for environmentally questionable projects have also expanded the Bank's influence and justified an increasingly intrusive approach to lending and conditionality (Nelson 1996).

NGOs are only secondarily responsible for this internationalising trend: the increased external influence on national decision-making is a product of larger trends. But NGO advocates should carefully weigh any strategies that increase the leverage of international agencies. Aid donors impose demands for accountability on governments – demands that can reduce their effective accountability to their own citizens. Harrigan (1998) argues that IMF and World Bank influence has had this effect in Jamaica.

Liberalisation and privatisation may often be forced on populations where opposition is broad and unheeded. But adjustment plans are not generally any longer programmes foisted on unwilling governments. Substantial support for liberal reforms has grown in most governments, and much government resistance to the IFIs' macro-policy influence now amounts to delaying implementation of agreed-upon loan conditions.

NGO coalitions should give careful consideration to whether a strategic focus on the IFIs reduces the pressure for government accountability. An ongoing global dialogue between NGOs, governments, and the World Bank offers a possible approach to integrating the national and international dialogue. The Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI) is an experiment with nationally based advocacy co-ordinated at the international level. Growing out of Washington-based negotiations with the Bank, SAPRI now involves governments, NGOs, and the Bank in nationally based discussions and investigations of adjustment policy. The international effort is co-ordinated by a committee with NGO representation from every region. National reviews in the participating countries are planned and co-ordinated by joint committees involving NGO and government participants. Reviews have begun in Ghana and Hungary, and are planned in Uganda, Zimbabwe, the Philippines, Ecuador, and Bangladesh.

Advocacy with national institutions and by national interests is likely to become more important in promoting NGOs' agendas. Dialogue with responsible Bank staff in country operational departments is increasingly important, as the Bank expands its country offices' responsibilities, and implementation of hard-won policy changes often requires co-operation by the national authorities that implement projects.

Balancing and integrating mass action and insider lobbying

NGOs, sometimes praised for opening decision-making processes to a flood of popular opinion and local knowledge, also employ strategies that rely more heavily on careful research and documentation, and direct lobbying by NGO staff. Often, advocacy combines strategies that rely on expertise with others that rest on representation. NGOs generally treat these as complementary, and sometimes this is so. But at other times they collide and conflict. Both occurred during WRTW.

Roe (1995) has criticised international NGO advocacy on environmental issues as a debating exercise between members of a 'New Managerial Class', in which NGO professionals debate with other members of the same global class, posted in the international financial institutions. The critique raises the concern that NGO lawyers, scientists, economists, and anthropologists based in the industrial capitals, with class origins and academic training similar to those of the World Bank's staff, can force policy-making processes that are open to their own participation, without assuring access for excluded communities. This charge merits a full review, but my purpose here is solely to touch on how WRTW balanced broad participation with élite lobbying. The campaign relied jointly on staff reporting and lobbying, public actions by Christian Aid's activist members in the UK and Ireland, and initiatives by Southern NGO partners.

Broad-based public advocacy was most effective when it targeted the British government. The grassroots lobby of Parliament won improvements in transparency and accountability, including greater disclosure of the British Executive Directors' work on the boards of the World Bank and IMF. Letters and postcards from constituents appeared to spark a level of interest from MPs that surprised some knowledgeable observers. Christian Aid supporters sent mass mailings of postcards to World Bank and government officials. The strategy benefited in one case from exquisite timing and a bit of luck. British Chancellor Kenneth Clark used a stack of postcards that he received just before a 1996 G-7 Summit to bolster the UK position in favour of IMF gold sales and a generous multilateral debt-relief initiative.

At their best, public and high-level approaches are mutually reinforcing. Sustained public pressure may help NGOs to secure access to ranking officials, and a successful report, press release, or public event that draws media attention can inspire further public confidence and action. Public pressure may lead to a point at which high-level negotiation is necessary to secure the political gains made possible by public actions, as in the debate over multilateral debt relief during 1996. Early in his presidency, Wolfensohn called for a study of the needs and options for multilateral debt relief that led, via tortuous negotiations, to the now-adopted HIPC initiative. When an internal initiative emerged within the World Bank, NGOs' principal task was no longer to persuade management to take the issue seriously, but to shape the initiative. Bank staff who had paid little attention to NGOs' concerns were suddenly open to NGO input on the details of the process.

Public pressure remained important, but shaping the details of the initiative called for a new level of knowledge and analytical skills. NGOs were prepared, despite their relative shortage of macro-economic expertise, by having developed and stated in advance their minimum standards for a multilateral debt-relief initiative.

Broad-based public strategies sometimes have unanticipated, positive effects. Before the World Bank/IMF 1995 Annual Meeting in Madrid, Christian Aid circulated a statement calling for changes in the IFIs' governance and their policies on adjustment and debt. The Declaration was adopted by church groups in Canada and the USA, and thousands of religious leaders had signed on before it was delivered in Madrid. The Declaration helped to energise a fledgling Religious Working Group on the World Bank/IMF in the USA.

Christian Aid's presence at official international meetings during the campaign – Annual Meetings of the Bank/IMF, Copenhagen Social Summit, G-7 Summits – appears to have yielded the campaign's greatest successes with the media. Two-person teams of Christian Aid staff, armed with a newly released report on a relevant topic, were among the most successful of the many NGO representatives present in interjecting alternative perspectives into financial and mainstream press coverage of the meetings. Outspoken NGOs attract media attention in such meetings, and particularly so in the British media when the UK Treasury was the leading government proponent of a new debt-relief proposal.

The reports produced for the campaign were timed for release at these summits, and were directed both to the media and to policy makers. They sought to present issues simply enough to motivate campaigners, but with enough sophistication to avoid demonising the IFIs. Within the Bank, however, the reports were generally viewed as lacking rigour, and treated as public-relations problems.

Media advertisements, too, illustrate the tension between public campaigning and insider influence. The campaign used advertisements to reach the British public, through national and local dailies; and to draw attention to the issues at the time of World Bank Annual Meetings in 1994, through advertisements placed in the *Financial Times*. The advertisements are the best example of the many meanings of 'influence' in the campaign. Some within the World Bank say the advertisements earned Christian Aid a reputation as a 'head-banger', and harmed its dialogue with the Bank, but others acknowledge that the advertisements brought a higher level of attention to the campaign. The advertisements also increased reporters' recognition of the issues and of the campaign.

Balancing and integrating confrontational and co-operative strategies

NGOs have forced the Bank to learn to manage external criticism. Many within the World Bank acknowledge that NGOs' public criticism in the 1980s called the attention of governments and the Bank to serious and neglected issues. But now that NGOs have been admitted to the dialogue, some argue, the high-volume, public critique is at best background noise, at worst a distraction from serious dialogue. Exposure to criticism has raised the threshold of sensitivity: an open letter or public protest that might have attracted much attention at the Bank in 1985 may now be regarded as a routine matter.

Like many public agencies, the World Bank favours dialogue with 'constructive' critics. Balancing confrontational and co-operative approaches involves both co-ordination between different campaigns and initiatives (such as SAPRI and Women's Eyes on the World Bank), and strategic choices within an organisation or network. Does confrontational campaigning compromise co-operative approaches, or strengthen them? Can a single organisation be effective and credible in both kinds of discussion? The experience of WRTW suggests that it can. But maintaining the balance requires careful attention, as demonstrated by Christian Aid's involvement in three more cooperative initiatives.

NGO Working Group on the World Bank

In the early 1990s, Christian Aid was a member of the 26-member NGO Working Group on the World Bank (NGOWG). The NGOWG's meetings with Bank staff have been, since the early 1980s, a forum for its policy dialogue with development NGOs. Discussion is generally collegial and rests on the premise that the NGO and Bank representatives share common aims and need more open discussion to arrive at shared strategies. Some NGO activists have characterised the Working Group as unfocused and unrepresentative.

Christian Aid's representative played a leading role in re-energising the Working Group and encouraging its recent reorganisation, which aims to broaden Southern NGO involvement and facilitate Southern leadership.² The experience of the NGOWG suggests that co-operative strategies may be most effective when backed by broad NGO participation and linked to other, more confrontational, campaigns (Covey 1998).

The Lesotho Highlands Water Project

Christian Aid has worked with the Highlands Church Action Group in Lesotho since 1992 to help to improve the social impact of a major hydro-electric and water-diversion scheme, funded in part by the World Bank. NGOs involved in a global campaign against major dam projects, and against the Bank's role in such projects, are also involved in advocacy.

Christian Aid won high praise from World Bank staff close to the project as a 'credible, professional, engaged critic of the project'. Bank staff implicitly criticise other NGOs whose arguments they characterise as part of a global anti-dam campaign, drawing criticisms from a checklist accumulated elsewhere. Critical campaigning (such as WRTW) may actually increase the effectiveness of such a dialogue. The World Bank's task manager noted that colleagues tended to give attention to measured, 'constructive' comments from Christian Aid, because they thought the NGO had been predisposed to attack the Bank (telephone interview with the author, December 1996).

Appreciation for the 'constructive' dialogue over social policy issues, however, did not prevent the World Bank from proceeding with finance for a new phase of the project, without ensuring that demands for compensation of resettled communities were satisfied.

The politics of aid: a critical constituency

NGOs are among development aid's most consistent advocates, and, at times, aid's most trenchant critics. This position as a 'critical constituency' for aid is considered untenable by some in government and at least a few in the NGO world. One British official succinctly charges that 'the NGOs' message is: "Aid is terrible! And we want more of it!" (interview with the author, November 1996). The issue is a perennial one for NGOs, and, in a period of dwindling aid budgets, WRTW attracted particularly harsh criticism.

Three government and Bank officials told me similar versions of a rather dramatic morality tale of the good and bad NGOs. Oxfam GB and Christian Aid, the story went, held somewhat similar positions on the World Bank before 1994, but Oxfam appreciated the danger that confronted the Bank and particularly IDA (International Development Association), and perceived that NGO advocacy could potentially 'bring down the whole system' (interviews with the author, November 1996). Oxfam emphasised support for IDA as the framework for any criticisms, while Christian Aid launched a highly critical public campaign.

World Bank and British aid officials charged that critical campaigning plays into the hands of opponents of multilateral aid, including those in the US Congress. Officials asserted that criticising adjustment lending undermines efforts, including Christian Aid's own, to build a constituency for aid. (Conversely, one might argue that an NGO's support for aid spending, even when couched in a critique of aid practice, weakens the incentive for official donors to change policy or practice.)

Was WRTW ill-timed, given the perceived crisis of IDA concessional financing? It seems likely that both risks are real: criticism could strengthen opponents of development aid spending, and knowledge that an NGO will ultimately support its government's contributions may weaken an NGO's leverage in pressing for changes. But from the perspective of many NGOs, full, unconditional support for aid spending would be dishonest, while opposition would be counter-productive. Organisations that choose to criticise and conditionally support aid programmes will appear inconsistent at times. They need to be skilful in judging when to emphasise their criticism or support, and they need to cultivate close relationships with more radical NGO critics, in order to avoid undercutting their efforts to press for reforms.

World Bank staff and government officials may not like the criticism, but staff interviewed all affirmed that public campaigning does not diminish their willingness to discuss and learn from an NGO's alternative perspectives.

Short-term campaign objectives and long-term network or coalition building

Like other political activists, NGO campaigners have both short-term and long-term needs and objectives. Their campaigns are urgent, aiming to relieve immediate human suffering and create opportunity. But they also often give attention to the longer-term processes of coalition- and constituency-building for expanded impact.

Christian Aid's work in coalitions during the WRTW period included facilitating and/or hosting roles in the Bretton Woods Project, the Debt Crisis Network, and the NGO Working Group on the World Bank. The early experience of these coalitions suggests three reasons to emphasise such coalition work.

First, coalitions around specific institutions (Bretton Woods Project) or issues (Debt Crisis Network) allow a focus and specialisation by staff that few individual NGOs can afford to maintain. Their specialisation

may better equip NGOs for technical discussions with the World Bank when such dialogue is needed. For NGOs in the UK and Western Europe, effective coalition building helps to compensate for the obvious advantages of access that Washington-based NGOs enjoy.

Second, NGOs can hardly afford to forego potential sources of influence by dividing their efforts on issues such as the IFIs. The World Bank is a skilled participant in dialogue with NGOs and the media. The creation of a new office in London was rightly taken as a sign that the campaign had gained the Bank's attention, but it also calls for a new level of sophistication and unity from NGOs.

Third, building longer-term support from public constituencies may sometimes justify campaign strategies that would not be chosen purely for short-term policy change. Press advertisements and published reports that gain press coverage, for example, can bolster the confidence and enthusiasm of a political constituency, even when the advertisements' direct impact is questionable.

Conclusions and recommendations

The charges that NGOs are not sufficiently reflective and self-critical in assessing the significance and impact of their advocacy (Sogge 1996) have come mostly from sympathetic observers, and should prompt NGOs to more deliberate and consistent assessment of advocacy projects. Results are difficult to discern, but candid self-assessment is important, both to promote effectiveness and to practise transparency. This paper closes with some principles for improved monitoring and assessment.

Work with a model of institutional change

It is difficult to trace and verify impact in a major international organisation. But there is a set of factors that are consistently important for achieving significant policy change, and where change is often at least somewhat easier to monitor and attribute. NGOs can use these factors to sketch a model of the components of change in the target institution. With such a model, advocates can strategise and evaluate their efforts, in part by assessing their impact on the key factors in winning institutional change.

Policy advocates have often noted that there is a process of gaining influence at the World Bank, whose steps include official acknowledgement that an issue is within its scope or mandate; consideration and

adoption of new policy; and implementation by staff and borrowers. Recent developments in the debates over debt and adjustment suggest four key strategic factors in motivating significant policy change: support from senior management, initiative by major shareholders, active internal leadership, and external pressure.³

- *Support from senior management:* Wolfensohn's direction has opened new opportunities in the debt and adjustment debates. The sometimes embattled President has made common cause with the Bank's NGO critics on some issues, and sought their co-operation in funding discussions. Senior management has in the past been able to block consideration of initiatives on debt and adjustment.
- *Initiative by major shareholders:* NGOs are quick to note their own leadership role in some policy areas, but major changes at the World Bank require action by its Governing Board. The USA has championed environmental initiatives and the information-disclosure and inspection-panel reforms, and the UK's leadership on debt was essential to winning consideration for proposals supported by NGOs. NGOs can help to open new space for innovation by staff who share their concerns and priorities, but such change cannot be institutionalised without the Board's assent, and Board action usually requires leadership by one of its major shareholders.
- *Active internal leadership by individuals committed to change:* Such internal leadership was essential in advancing the popular participation agenda within the World Bank, and in the development of the HIPC debt-relief initiative. When such leadership is present, external advocates may devise a mix of strategies that expand the space for new initiatives internally, while maintaining political pressure on senior management and the Board. (Active staff leadership has not been enough to win rapid change in issue areas such as gender equity and family planning (Siddharth 1995; Conly and Epp 1997).)
- *External pressure from NGOs, other observers, and the media:* The kind of pressure needed may vary with the stages of policy change, and the strength and interest of other actors (management, shareholders, internal leadership). Public political pressure that threatens the image of the IFIs appears to be the key factor in establishing an issue as a concern, and remains important at later stages of a successful advocacy effort. At another stage, the pressure may also require the analytical and negotiating skills to engage in discussions over the

details of new institutional and policy alternatives, as in the debate over multilateral debt relief in 1996.

By holding a model such as this one clearly in mind, policy advocates can plan and assess their own efforts, asking how effectively they advance one or more of the essential ingredients of change.

Make the terms and agendas of NGO partnerships clear

It is often assumed that NGO coalitions should speak with a single voice on the details of their target issues, and often this is the appropriate goal. But expectations among NGO partners may sometimes be more flexible, as in WRTW, and it is important that these understandings be as clear as possible among participants. Within a campaign on structural adjustment policy, for example, there is room for different priorities between advocates focused on the World Bank in Washington and advocates focused on national policy in Jamaica or the Philippines.

What is important is that the agreed, shared agenda is well defined and carefully adhered to, so that the coalition is not easily split if government or the Bank co-operates more readily with one participant than with others. International advocates must also be clear and explicit in stating for whom they speak when they advance a criticism or proposal.

Focus on changes in practice and on institutional change at the World Bank

Aspects of the NGO agenda (such as participation, gender equity, poverty reduction, sustainability, or energy efficiency) are being accepted into the World Bank's vocabulary and policy apparatus. NGO advocates have been well aware of the gap between policy and practice, but winning institutional changes in practice has proved difficult.

The next generation of advocacy priorities and strategies should shift emphasis from global-level policy to institutional mechanisms and to the implementation of policy commitments. Tried and tested advocacy methods for winning policy change have been joined by new approaches required at a new juncture. The environment/infrastructure campaign emphasises institutional changes for accountability and transparency, monitors rule revision in the Bank, and presses for the extension of safeguards to loans for private-sector projects. Debt campaigners are monitoring country-by-country implementation of new rules for debt relief, as well as initiating a public campaign for more radical debt relief.

Some adjustment critics are participating in the national-level SAPRI joint review.

Test the model, and strategies, against experience

Political, intellectual, and institutional commitments have led academics and practitioners to focus on demonstrating NGOs' efficacy as political actors, more than to subject the campaigns to rigorous review. But a more rigorous and candid review of advocacy strategies and impact would benefit NGOs, by helping them to identify effective strategies, and by demonstrating their commitment to the principles of transparency and accountability.

As NGOs attract more attention as political actors in international arenas, they can expect more critical review. They will do well to initiate and encourage such studies themselves.

Be attentive: influence flows both ways

The World Bank has accepted the legitimacy of NGOs' participation in policy discussions and its own obligation to respond to NGO and civil-society interventions. The Bank, in turn, uses its liaison with NGOs skilfully to signal its affiliation with aspects of the NGOs' agenda. The World Bank now presents itself as the leader among major donors in areas such as public participation, social safety nets during economic reform, debt relief, and involuntary resettlement. Some NGO advocates tirelessly point out the limits of the Bank's practice in these areas, but they have learned that a reputation is sometimes more easily won than substantive change.

NGOs themselves are also influenced through their interaction with major donors. Planned, deliberate co-operation in even a single component of a World Bank-financed project is often a major undertaking for an international NGO or its country or regional office, and for national or sub-national NGOs. Critics of the Bank have long recognised that NGOs which accept major support for project work or participation in a conference or committee may open their priorities and practices to its influence.

But the same is true of participation in a policy dialogue, even when NGOs imagine themselves to be the agent of change and the World Bank the target. The political realities of the institution and its political environment can shift NGOs' agendas towards the politically feasible, and the content of the Bank's contributions to the discussion can

influence NGO conceptual frameworks as well. NGOs should take care to assure that such change is deliberate and in line with their own mission and commitments. Without careful attention, the Bank's expanding 'partnerships' with a variety of civil-society organisations will only accelerate the already rapid homogenisation of organisations and strategies in the development industry.

Notes

1 This article draws on the author's evaluation report (Nelson 1997), in which references to interviews and personal communications may be found (available from Christian Aid, PO Box 100, London SE1 7RT).

2 Christian Aid participated in the NGOWG as a representative of the Association of Protestant Development Organisations.

3 This line of thinking was suggested by Justin Forsyth, then of Oxfam International.

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