

**Transnational Civil Society Coalitions and the World Bank:  
Lessons From Project and Policy Influence Campaigns<sup>1</sup>**

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**October 2000**

**Working Paper No. 3**

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## **Introduction**

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

Recently, the WTO's debacle in Seattle led the Economist to trace those civil society protests in part back to the "50 Years is Enough" Campaign against the World Bank and IMF in 1994. The Economist proceeded to congratulate the Bank for its subsequent effort,

supposedly successful, to demobilize and “coopt” its NGO critics. The Economist observed that

“From environmental policy to debt relief, NGOs are at the center of World Bank policy. Often they determine it. The new World Bank is more transparent, but it is also more beholden to a new set of special interests.”<sup>2</sup>

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

While it is true that, since 1994, the IMF, MAI and the WTO superceded the Bank on some protesters’ lists of top targets, many other advocacy groups and social organizations – especially those closer to the ground and further from the global media spotlight -- remain deeply concerned with the issue of how to get the World Bank to live up to its social and environmental reform commitments.<sup>3</sup>

The analytical challenge implicit in the Economist’s assessment is how to disentangle co-optation from substantive concessions, while recognizing that the difference is often in the eye of the beholder. There is, moreover, a basic contradiction in the Economist’s assessment: if NGOs really did determine World Bank policy, that would suggest that they have much more influence than the term “co-optation” implies. For example, if NGOs really did determine World Bank policy, then it would be difficult to explain why

more than half of the Bank's 1999 lending went to structural adjustment for the first time ever (a category of loan inherently far removed both from civil society levers of influence, as well as the Bank's own social and environmental reform policies). Even at the level of specific infrastructural investments -- which offer critics more tangible targets -- the World Bank continues to propose new projects that directly subsidize huge transnational corporations to carry out likely environmental disasters, as in the case of Exxon and the Chad-Cameroon pipeline.<sup>4</sup> Also in 1999, an international debate exploded over the discovery that the Bank was planning to fund a project called "China Western Poverty Reduction," which turned out to threaten ethnic Tibetans. In spite of the Bank's well-known, sophisticated NGO engagement, involving extensive operational collaboration, policy consultations and enlightened discourse, in the Tibet case the institution unknowingly stumbled over one of world's most influential indigenous rights campaigns. The resulting mobilization was almost as intense as the previous "peak" of anti-Bank protest back in the early 1990s, leading to widespread press coverage, unusual "no" votes by the US and German representatives on the Bank's board, high-level international diplomatic tensions with China, imprisonment and serious injury to NGO investigators, an ongoing investigation by the Bank's official Inspection Panel and possible suspension of the project.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time as powerful elements within the World Bank continue to ignore its own environmental and social reforms, in some sectors and in some countries, civil society actors perceive the Bank's enlightened discourse as an important partial opening,

especially under regimes that are even less enlightened than the World Bank. Moreover, at least some controversial projects that once would have sailed through the approval process are now subjected to greater scrutiny in the design phase, both internally and externally. The Bank's involvement in post-conflict situations also creates opportunities for constructive leadership, as in the case of East Timor. The overall result is a highly uneven, patchwork quilt pattern of partial reforms combined with entrenched resistance to change. In brief, transnational campaigns continue to challenge the World Bank, they have had some degree of influence. In the process, with their long track record, they have sought to build ever more balanced partnerships between Northern and Southern civil society actors.

This paper explores these patterns by drawing on a series of case of transnational coalition efforts aimed at influencing World Bank policies and projects studies, carried out over the last eight years under the auspices of the Institute for Development Research.<sup>6</sup> The paper seeks to extract from those cases lessons about successful influence efforts. More particularly, the paper will focus on two questions:

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

## **The Transnational Coalitions Study**

This study explores critical factors embedded in complex, long-term campaigns. We chose to develop in-depth case studies and then compare those cases to see what sorts of patterns emerged. The cases were written by individuals close to events on the ground with access to both the grassroots populations involved and decision makers at the World Bank and other agencies. Four cases focused on coalition efforts to influence specific development *projects*--a geothermal plant in the Philippines, a natural resource management project in Brazil, petroleum and land legislation linked to structural adjustment in Ecuador, and a dam in Indonesia.<sup>7</sup> Four other cases focused on coalition efforts to shape Bank *policies* on critical issues--indigenous peoples, water resources management, resettlement of populations ousted by projects, and information and inspection panel policy.<sup>8</sup> Tables 1 and 2 summarize major features of the project and policy cases.

**Table 1: Project Reform Campaigns**

| Projects and Key Actors   | Critical Events in Alliance Evolution   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Kedung Ombo Dam, Indonesia (1984 94)</b><br/> <i>GRO</i>: Oustees, students<br/> <i>NGO</i>: Local and national legal aid; other local and national poverty and environment NGOs<br/> <i>BO</i>: International NGO Group on Indonesia (INGI)<br/> <i>INGO</i>: members of INGI from Northern countries</p>  | <p>Most families were not aware of relocation plans until the dam was almost finished. Then some families asked local and national legal aid NGOs for help getting more compensation for their land. Some suits were eventually successful, but the Government invalidated the judgments. INGI began to lobby the World Bank via its international members in 1988. Popular protests by students and religious groups supported oustees after dam completion in 1989. INGI meetings with the World Bank led to government attacks on INGI for "washing dirty linen" in public. The government did make other land available to oustees. The Bank and other international actors agreed to avoid future "Kedung Ombos".</p>  |
| <p><b>Mt. Apo Thermal Plant, Philippines (1987 93)</b><br/> <i>GRO</i>: Indigenous peoples groups; local farmers.<br/> <i>NGO</i>: local, regional, national networks; Legal Resources Center.<br/> <i>BO</i>: PDF (Philippine Development Forum); BIC (Bank Information Center).<br/> <i>INGO</i>: Environmental Defense Fund; Columban Fathers; Greenpeace.</p> | <p>Indigenous groups and farmers began to organize local, regional and national networks to challenge the project in 1987. Elders of local tribes swore to defend Mt. Apo to "the last drop of blood". Local coalitions built links to INGOs and the PDF. Two Bank missions drew contradictory conclusions about the project. In 1989, the Philippine Development forum of NGOs and INGOs agreed to lobby the Bank on Mount Apo. The GoP (Government of the Philippines) certified project for environmental compliance in spite of protests. National "solidarity conferences" among NGO networks agreed to emphasize indigenous rights and carefully monitor lobbying of PDF. PDF lobbying helped the World Bank reject the government's environmental impact assessment, and GoP withdrew loan request. In 1993, further solidarity conferences set strategies for lobbying export-import Banks.</p> |
| <p><b>Planaflo Natural Resources, Brazil (1989 95)</b><br/> <i>GRO</i>: Rubber tappers, farmers<br/> <i>NGO</i>: Local and national NGOs and networks (e.g., IAMA, CNS, IEA, and others).<br/> <i>BO</i>: Rondonia NGO Forum,<br/> <i>INGO</i>: EDF, World Wildlife Federation, others</p>  | <p>INGOs (such as Environmental Defense Fund) protested lack of local participation in initial design in 1989, in part because few GROs were organized in the region. The Bank suspended the project until the Rondonia NGO Forum was created to enable local and international (but not national) NGOs to participate in project decisions in 1991. It became clear that state agencies would violate loan terms in spite of the Forum, and Forum protests carried little weight. The Forum requested that the Bank suspend disbursement in 1994 and asked the Inspection Panel to review the project in 1995. Planaflo accepted as case by Bank Inspection Panel that year.</p>   |
| <p><b>Ecuador Structural Adjustment, Ecuador (1986 94)</b><br/> <i>GRO</i>: Indigenous peoples (IP) groups; environmental groups<br/> <i>NGO</i>: CONAIE (IP federation); Accion Ecologica<br/> <i>BO</i>: Ecuador Network, BIC (Bank Information Center)<br/> <i>INGO</i>: Rainforest Action Network; Oxfam; CAIA</p>  | <p>The Federation of Indigenous Peoples (CONAIE) mobilized IP groups. In 1990 it helped organize an uprising against structural adjustment. In 1992 it allied with NGOs to challenge World Bank and government oil extraction initiatives which threatened indigenous groups. Negotiations with the Bank and the government altered the oil law. In 1994 CONAIE led a national "Mobilization for Life" coalition against a proposed land law which threatened access to communally-held lands and paralyzed the country. CONAIE created the Ecuador Network with INGOs to influence Bank policy-making. Eventually, negotiations with government leaders and agribusiness interests produced a more acceptable land law and a larger policy role for CONAIE in the future.</p>  |

*Note*: *GRO* means Grassroots Organization; *NGO* means Local or National NGO; *BO* means Bridging Organization; *INGO* means International NGO.

**Table 2: Policy Reform Campaigns**

| Policies and Key Actors  | Critical Events in Alliance Evolution   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Indigenous Peoples Policy (1981 92)</b><br/> <i>GROs:</i> Indigenous peoples (IP) and environment movements in many countries<br/> <i>NGOs:</i> Linked to project alliances<br/> <i>INGOs:</i> International Survival, IWGIA, Cultural Survival.<br/> <i>WB:</i> Social scientists; IP policy supporters</p>   | <p>In 1981, indigenous groups at the Chico River in the Philippines won their first victory over a Bank dam project, leading to an initial Bank policy protecting indigenous rights in its projects. IP problems in Bank projects were highlighted in a series of projects (Polonoereste, Transmigration, etc.) and by the Bank's 1987 five-year review of environmental policies. Active local movements lobbied Bank projects successfully over the next five years. INGOs supporting indigenous peoples did not develop a common front, but GROs were quite successful in influencing local projects. The Bank's 1991 policy statement opened the door to further indigenous challenges.</p>   |
| <p><b>Resettlement Policy (1986 94)</b><br/> <i>GROs:</i> Oustee movements in many projects<br/> <i>NGOs:</i> Allies of oustees like Narmada Bachao Andolan<br/> <i>INGOs:</i> Narmada Action Council, International NGO Group on Indonesia<br/> <i>WB:</i> Resettlement Review Task Force</p>   | <p>The Resettlement Policy Review was in part inspired by the revelations of the Morse Commission about the controversial Narmada project. An internal team was authorized to assess implementation of the resettlement policy in Bank projects to respond to external campaigns. The review indicated that compliance with the Bank's 1986 policy was running at about 30 percent in the first five years. It improved rapidly under external and internal scrutiny, though the review team had to fight a "guerilla war" to get good information from reluctant task managers. Intense internal bargaining over the final report culminated in early publication in 1994 to forestall threats of leaks by external advocates.</p>   |
| <p><b>Water Resources Management Policy (1991 93)</b><br/> <i>GROs:</i> Not involved<br/> <i>NGOs:</i> 50 volunteered to provide input to policy discussions;<br/> <i>INGOs:</i> International Rivers Network; Environmental Defense Fund<br/> <i>WB:</i> Operations and Engineering staff</p>   | <p>In 1991, Bank staff organized a workshop for government officials on revising water resource management policy. NGOs were not invited, but INGOs collected comments from more than 50 NGOs. The Bank agreed to consult with NGOs and received substantial inputs. The INGOs found it difficult to maintain NGO interest in the policy process. Bank officials decided against further consultations, in part because of internal pressures to shape policies by economic considerations. Ultimately, the INGOs lobbied with Executive Directors to affect the policy. Though the policies adopted did include some NGO recommendations, the initiators were disappointed in the necessity for a retreat to advocacy.</p>   |
| <p><b>Information and Inspection Panel Policy (1989 95)</b><br/> <i>GROs:</i> Not directly involved<br/> <i>NGOs:</i> Narmada, IDA-10 Campaign activists.<br/> <i>INGOs:</i> EDF; BIC; other Bank Reform Campaigners; Fifty Years is Enough<br/> <i>WB:</i> Allies of more disclosure policy<br/> <i>Others:</i> Congressional Committee; US, Japan, Europe EDs.</p> | <p>The Bank has always limited access to project information. The struggle over the Narmada Dams and the criticisms of the internal Wapenhans Report set the stage for many Bank reforms. The alliance among INGOs, NGOs and GROs which carried out the Narmada and the IDA-10 replenishment campaigns pressed the Bank for policies making more project information available at early stages and for an Inspection Panel to investigate project abuses. With allies from within the Bank and the US Congress, the alliance successfully lobbied for the new policy with threats to withhold future funding. The new panel was immediately asked to investigate the proposed Arun III Dam In Nepal. Its report raised serious questions about the Dam, and the new Bank President canceled the project soon after entering the office.</p> |

*Note:* GRO means Grassroots Organization; NGO means National NGO; INGO means

International NGO; *WB* means World Bank staff; *Others* means other alliance participants.

These cases are reported and compared in considerable detail elsewhere<sup>9</sup> (Fox and Brown, 1998). In this paper we present some important lessons suggested by those detailed analyses. The next two sections present and illustrate eight lessons, four concerning coalition impacts and four concerning coalition organization and accountability. Then we comment briefly on the implications of these lessons for future international coalitions to influence global institutions and policies.

### **Lessons about Coalition Impacts**

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

#### ***Lesson 1: Make the campaign fit the target. Different goals require different kinds of coalitions.***

We found that different patterns of coalitions emerged to deal with different issues. For some coalitions, the dominant issue was moderating or undoing harmful impacts of specific Bank projects on grassroots communities. In the Philippines, for example, the coalition challenged the building of a geothermal power plant threatened indigenous peoples' sacred ancestral lands as well negative environmental impacts. In Ecuador, an

agricultural development program involved legislation, which threatened the communal lands of indigenous peoples. The new land law, passed with support from multilateral development banks as well as agribusiness interests, made it likely that communally held lands would become vulnerable to sale for commercial development. In both cases, the transnational coalition was spearheaded and sustained by grassroots movements that were directly threatened by the projects, together with national NGO allies who in turn sought international support. Because these campaigns were essentially the international wings of already-existing national movements, we, called them *national problem coalitions*.

In other settings, the campaign coalition was primarily concerned with Bank failures to live up to its own policies. While impacts on local constituents were evidence of Bank failures, the primary target was reform of the Bank itself. In Brazil's Planaflo case, for example, international NGOs challenged the Bank's failure to ensure local participation in the natural resources management project in a setting where grassroots groups were not yet sufficiently organized to mount a credible protest on their own initiative. Similarly, the campaign to expand public access to information on Bank projects and to create an institutional channel for responding to charges of noncompliance with reform policies as initiated and pressed by coalitions led by international NGOs, in part because they had the technical policy skills, political influence with donor governments, and the organizational resources to maintain pressure across many projects, in spite of not having immediate stakes in each. Such *transnational advocacy networks* can articulate principles, formulate alternative policies, and press for improved implementation and systemic reform over

long periods of time and across many local instances of abuse.

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

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

policy-makers who resist reforms.

***Lesson 2: Open up the cracks in the system. Assess targets for leverage in terms of institutional politics and potential allies.***

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

In actuality, the Bank, like many other large institutions, includes staff with a wide range of political and social perspectives. In all the cases in this study, some Bank staff strongly favored reforms advanced by external coalitions, and those coalitions often benefited from the advice, information and support given by internal actors. The most effective campaigns built coalitions among progressive groups in many different institutions. The campaign against the Philippines geothermal plant, for example, found that different Bank departments involved in the project had made conflicting recommendations for handling the indigenous peoples' lands. In that case, the struggle among different constituencies within the Bank was an important asset to the external campaign. Identifying sympathetic actors within the Bank can help coalitions understand issues as they are perceived within the Bank, recognize plausible alternatives given Bank

priorities, and build the internal support needed to implement reforms.

From the point of view of internal reformers, contacts with or even the existence of external coalitions concerned about an issue may strengthen their ability to deal with internal resistance to reform. When senior management threatened to suppress the resettlement review as excessively controversial, the possibility that external challengers might publish early drafts eventually compelled publication—to avoid the embarrassment public accusations of a “cover-up” of Bank failures to implement its own policies.

Institutional change in an agency like the Bank is almost inevitably partial and slow, but these cases demonstrate that internal reformers often depend significantly on the existence of external pressure and scrutiny.

It should also be recognized that in certain issue areas, both internal reformers and external pressure groups clearly lack the leverage needed to outweigh very influential interest groups and their donor government allies. For example, the contrast between NGO impact on the Bank’s environmental and social policies and its sharply increased emphasis on structural adjustment and financial sector bailouts is quite notable.

***Lesson 3: Impact comes in different forms. Recognize multiple forms of success and the tradeoffs among them.***

It is easy for coalition members to focus on a few campaign goals--change the policy, stop the project, enhance the resettlement program--to measure success. Such criteria,

however, obscure important complexities and possibilities. In these campaigns, "success" definitions often shifted over time as new strategies came into play or new actors joined the fray. The more effective coalitions recognized that the campaigns could succeed or fail on several dimensions--including strengthening local organizations, building links for future campaigns, increasing awareness and skills for policy influence, evolving strategies and tactics for policy participation, shaping public awareness of critical issues, and encouraging target institution reforms--in addition to shaping specific project and policy outcomes.

Campaigns which do not succeed in direct influence may still be considered to have had significant impact when measured by more indirect indicators. The campaign to stop the implementation of Indonesia's Kedung Ombo dam was too late to stop the dam; even the successful court challenge to inadequate compensation policies was voided by the government. On the other hand, the campaign enhanced the reputation of the association of national and international NGOs that lobbied the Bank and donor governments on the issue. The network of national and international NGOs that participated in the campaign built relationships and capacities that served them well in subsequent campaigns. The campaign also led to informal commitments by several donor agencies to avoid such projects in the future--"No more Kedung Ombos."

Making good judgements about tradeoffs among objectives may require a broad historical and societal perspective. In the Philippines, for example, the campaign to stop the Mount

Apo thermal plant focused on the project's violation of the rights of indigenous peoples, in part because that issue was, at the time, more publicly visible and politically potent than the parallel concerns of farmers and environmentalists. While some environmentalists and farmers disagreed with the decision to de-emphasize their interests and grievances, the focus on indigenous people's rights helped to mobilize support from national indigenous networks and their allies at a time when their concerns were at the center of political attention—and so helped raise widespread awareness about the Mt. Apo issue.

***Lesson 4: Create footholds that give a leg up to those who follow. Propose institutional arrangements that enable future civil society influence.***

The interests of grassroots constituencies are often focused on the direct impacts of projects, but changes in policies and other institutional arrangements may have more impacts in the long run. Project campaigns focus on specific issues affecting particular countries. Combinations of project campaigns may focus on institutional arrangements that affect many future activities.

Changes in Bank policies, for example, reshape the institutional context within which project managers operate. Many transnational campaigns have been focused on establishing or refining the organizational policies that guide Bank projects. The adoption of a new policy does not guarantee its implementation, of course—a reality that has been amply demonstrated by the review of compliance with the resettlement policy.

But the existence of a policy standard does create leverage when external coalitions can demonstrate that Bank projects have failed to comply with it. Bank staff have become sensitized to the embarrassment created by failures to meet their own policies. Thus project compliance with the resettlement policy improved dramatically as it became clear that the review process was going to make non-compliance highly visible. So promoting policies that protect indigenous peoples or resettled populations can create leverage for confronting future abuses.

Campaigns promoting pro-accountability institutional arrangements may have even bigger impacts. Information policies that make project information available early in the project cycle can enable early challenge of problematic programs. It is much easier to influence projects in the design stage than it is to revise them after a variety of national and international interests are vested in project completion. Influence at early stages is difficult if no information is available, however. Institutional arrangements for wider and earlier sharing of project information are essential to early action. Altering policies and institutional arrangements that govern information availability can enrich options for future campaigns.

### **Coalition Organization and Accountability**

Transnational coalitions often span great differences in cultural backgrounds, economic wealth and political power. Rubber tappers in Brazil and indigenous farmers in the Philippines can be as organizationally distant from the Washington-based leaders of the Environmental Defense Fund as they are from World Bank policy-makers. For coalitions

to be effective over years of under-resourced struggle, they need to build shared strategies, bonds of trust, and recognition of each others' resources which can sustain collective action in spite of the conflicts and misunderstandings inherent in the gaps that separate them. This study also asked how transnational coalitions could be organized to enable mutual influence and accountability in spite of these differences. The results of this analysis are briefly described in the next four lessons.

***Lesson 5: Leveraging accountability requires specifying 'accountability to whom.'***

***Broad social bases enable credible representation and local voice.***

Transnational coalitions are sometimes initiated by grassroots movements seeking to pursue their goals through international linkages. The Ecuador Network, for example, was initiated by the federation of indigenous organizations that led the national campaign against the new Ecuadoran land law. But it is more common for grassroots constituencies to be poorly connected with each other, and consequently to have difficulty in speaking to powerful opponents with a united voice.. In the Indonesian and Brazilian cases, for example, few credible voices emerged to speak for grassroots interests. Transnational coalitions often seek to represent grassroots interests to national and international decision-makers, but have difficulty in establishing exactly which voices are genuinely representative of local constituencies.

These cases suggest that coalition organizers are wise to find or foster horizontal linkages

among constituencies in order to enable credible local voices. Where social capital, in the form of grassroots federations, already exists, as in the Philippines and Ecuador cases, the coalition can build on genuine local representation. The local, regional, and national coalitions and shared decision-making in the Philippines enabled ongoing consultations with indigenous interests to maintain coalition legitimacy. In Ecuador, the coalition of indigenous groups was seen as providing genuine representation to the majority of their members. In other situations, a coalition with genuine grassroots representation may depend on local organization building. In the Brazil case, for example, an alliance of local NGOs and grassroots groups did not emerge until relatively late in the project, although the Rondonia NGO Forum became an important actor in subsequent years.

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

***Lesson 6: Power and communication gaps within civil society need bridges. Build interorganizational "chains" to connect organizationally distant partners.***

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

In our cases, coalitions seldom depended on bonds across such great organizational distances. More common were organizational “chains” of relatively short links that spanned great organizational distances. Thus, in the Philippines coalition, the elders of the indigenous groups connected horizontally with local NGOs, church groups and other local network members, and vertically with the regional indigenous leaders and regional campaign representatives. Those regional representatives, in turn, were connected vertically with the national network. National network representatives worked with members of the Philippine Development Forum, a Washington-based group of Philippine and international NGOs concerned with Philippines development. The resulting chain spanned the smaller gaps from local to regional to national to international--more manageable organizational distances than the gap from local to international.

In addition to building new links for these chains, in these cases coalitions built in part on previously existing social capital. The national to international link in the Philippines

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

***Lesson 7: The internet is not enough to build trust across cultures. Face-to-face negotiations can clarify goals, strategies, responsibilities and accountability.***

Coalitions evolve over time in response to external and internal forces. At the outset, most transnational coalitions are loosely organized around shared values and visions rather than detailed strategies and responsibilities. But policy influence campaigns often require systematic articulation of goals, development of strategies and plans, and agreement on how to implement those plans. Without agreement on who is responsible for what, it is difficult to hold one another accountable, or even to know how or where influence might be exerted to shape coalition activities.

Transnational coalitions are by definition geographically dispersed, and consequently face

difficulties in negotiating shared expectations. To some extent, modern information technology enables interactive decision-making. The coalition to reform the information and inspection panel policy made extensive use of electronic communications. But there is no substitute for face-to-face negotiations in creating trust and mutual influence in these coalitions. Members of the Narmada Action Council report that “visits to the Valley” were essential to building their relationships and strengthening their commitment to the campaign. The director of the Philippine Development Forum attributed her loyalty to the indigenous elders to her personal contacts with them. Face-to-face engagements among key individuals shape the coalition's social capital, influence patterns and membership.

***Lesson 8: Small links can make strong chains. Individuals and small organizations linking larger actors wield great influence.***

The most visible actors in these cases are national governments, large international institutions and social movements composed of thousands of members. The stakes involve millions of dollars, thousands of lives and scores of countries. Given the stakes, it is striking what pivotal roles a few key individuals and organizations play in bridging the chasms that separate many of the actors.

The effectiveness of transnational coalitions depends on trust and mutual influence among individuals and organizations along the chain. Conflicting pulls and incentives

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

### **Transnational Coalitions and Global Influence**

When we began this study more than eight years ago, very little had been published on the roles of transnational coalitions in shaping global policies. In the last five years, the research available on this topic has grown very rapidly.<sup>10</sup> Coalitions are essential to civil society organizations seeking to influence events beyond the ordinary scope of small, often disenfranchised locally-based actors. But building trust and understanding across gaps of wealth, power and culture does not come easily to civil society leaders, who are more accustomed to influencing those who share their values, aspirations and expectations. The "David and Goliath" encounters between civil society coalitions and

the World Bank described in this paper suggest that civil society actors can have wider influence, if they can build bridges across their differences, understand their institutional targets, and learn from failures and successes.

One of the most important lessons of the World Bank campaign experience for other civil society efforts to hold powerful transnational actors accountable points to a shifting North-to-South center of gravity. In the early years of the Bank campaigns, Southern coalition partners provided the credibility while Northern NGOs had the media influence and political clout with donor governments that turned out to be critical for extracting commitments to environmental and social policy reform. These policy reforms set important benchmark standards, but have proven to be limited in terms of their capacity to change what the World Bank and its national government partners actually do in practice most of the time. Reform promises from the World Bank are no substitute for democratizing nation-state development aid strategies in both North and South.

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

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was initially prepared for the Conference on NGOs in a Global Future, University of Birmingham, January 10-13, 1999. It has been revised for publication in this volume. It is based on the research reported in Jonathan Fox and L. David Brown, The Struggle for Accountability: The World Bank, NGOs, and Grassroots Movements, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998. The authors are grateful to the C.S. Mott Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Social Science Research Council for their support of this research.

<sup>2</sup> This quote is from “Citizen's Groups: The Non-Governmental Order,” Economist, Dec. 11, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> For example, broad-based civil society networks in Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia and India continue to focus significant attention on the World Bank.

<sup>4</sup> In this case, embarrassing internal memos revealed that the Bank's senior environmental policymakers planned a deliberate greenwashing strategy. See Paul Brown, “World Bank Pushes Chad Pipeline,” The Guardian, October 11, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> For details, see [www.econet.apc.org/ciel/](http://www.econet.apc.org/ciel/) and [www.bicusa.org](http://www.bicusa.org)

<sup>6</sup> The Institute for Development Research (IDR) undertook these studies as part of a program of research on the roles of civil society organizations in shaping national and international policies. The results of these studies are available at [www.jsi.com/idr](http://www.jsi.com/idr).

<sup>7</sup> For the project studies, see Antoinette, Royo, “The Philippines: Against the Peoples' Wishes: The Mt. Apo Story,” in Jonathan Fox and L. David Brown, op. cit., 1998, pp. 151-180; Margaret E. Keck, “Planaflo in Rondonia: The Limits of Leverage,” in Jonathan Fox and L. David Brown, op. cit., 1998, pp. 181-218; Kay Treakle, “Ecuador: Structural Adjustment and Indigenous and Environmentalist Resistance,” in Jonathan Fox and L. David Brown, op. cit., 1998, pp. 219-264; and Augustinus Rumansara, “Indonesia: The Struggle of the People of Kedung Ombo,” Jonathan Fox and L. David Brown, op. cit., 1998, 123-150.

<sup>8</sup> For the policy studies see Andrew Gray, “Development Policy—Development Protest: The World Bank, Indigenous Peoples, and NGOs,” in Jonathan Fox and L. David Brown, op. cit., 1998, pp. 267-302; Deborah Moore and Leonard Sklar, “Reforming the World Bank's Lending for Water: The Process and Outcome of Development a Water Resources Management Policy,” in Jonathan Fox and L. David Brown, op. cit., 1998, 345-390; Jonathan A. Fox, “When Does Reform Policy Influence Practice? Lessons from the Bankwide Resettlement Review,” in Jonathan Fox and L. David Brown, op. cit., 1998, pp. 303-344; and Lori Udall, “The World Bank and Public Accountability: Has Anything Changes,” in Jonathan Fox and L. David Brown, op. cit., 1998, pp. 391-236.

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<sup>9</sup> See L. David Brown and Jonathan Fox, “Accountability within Transnational Coalitions,” in Jonathan Fox and L. David Brown, op. cit., 1998, pp. 439-484 for an comparative analysis of coalition dynamics across the eight cases. See Jonathan Fox and L. David Brown, “Assessing the Impact of NGO Advocacy Campaigns on World Bank Projects and Policies,” in Jonathan Fox and L. David Brown, op. cit., 1998, pp. 485-551, for an analysis of the impacts on the Bank.

See, for example, Margaret Keck & Kathryn Sikkink, Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; Jackie Smith, Charles Chatfield & Ron Pagnucco (eds), Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics, 1997; John Boli and George M. Thomas (eds), Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875; Sanjeev Khagram, James Riker and Kathryn Sikkink, Reconstructing World Politics, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming; and Sanjeev Khagram, Dams, Development and Democracy, XXXXX forthcoming.