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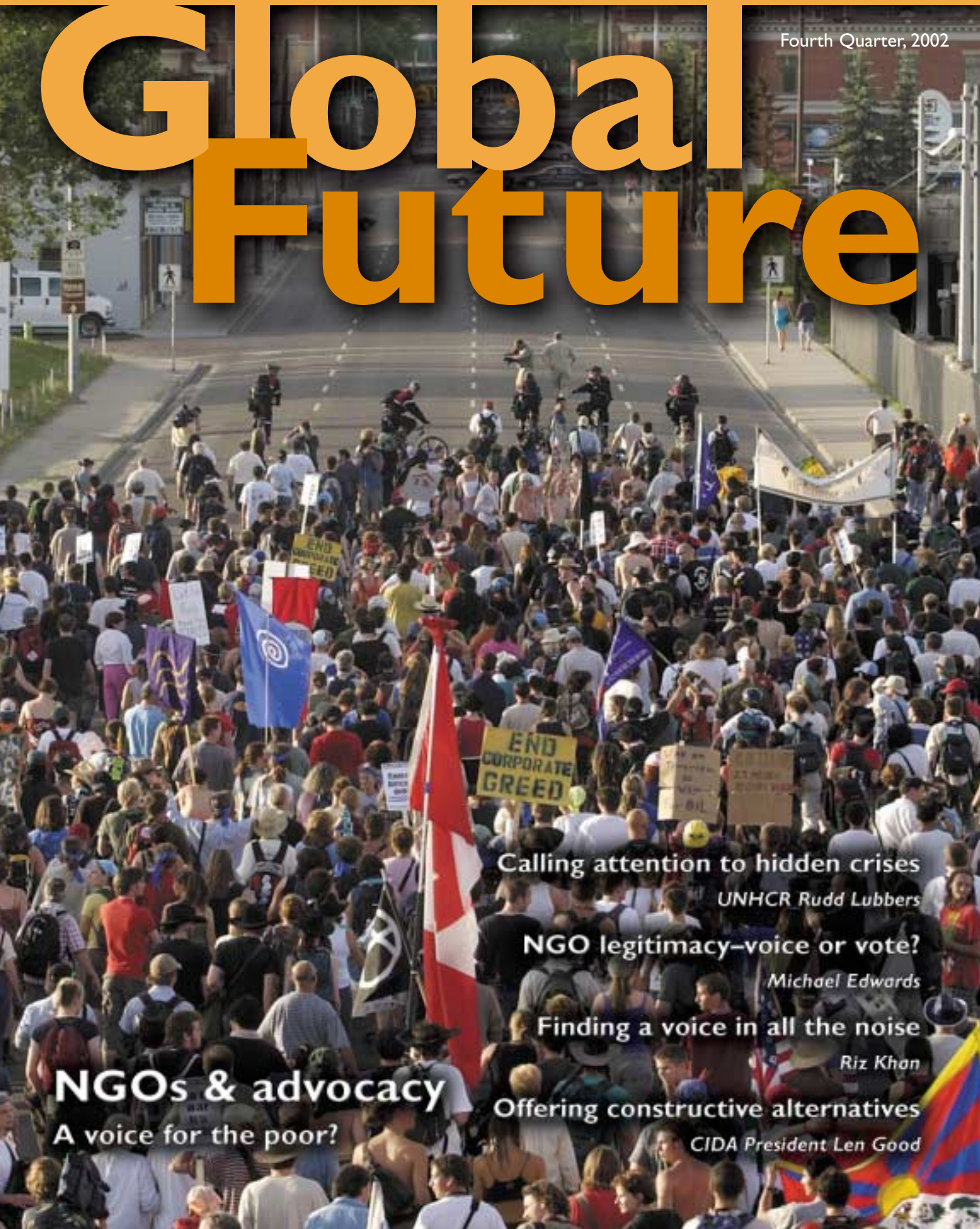
Global Future

Fourth Quarter, 2002



NGOs & advocacy

A voice for the poor?

Calling attention to hidden crises

UNHCR Rudd Lubbers

NGO legitimacy–voice or vote?

Michael Edwards

Finding a voice in all the noise

Riz Khan

Offering constructive alternatives

CIDA President Len Good

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Why try?

ALL NGOs–even if they would seem to be advocates for the poor–have agendas of their own.

So claims Eduardo Nunes on page 21 of this issue. Nunes, director of Strategy and Policy for World Vision Brazil, goes a step further, suggesting that it could be argued that NGOs cannot truly speak for the poor. (Read his full text and you'll discover he's not entirely critical of NGOs–after all, he works for one.)

Given what Nunes suggests, one could ask, what's the point of trying?

As even Nunes and other contributors to this issue have found, despite daunting challenges, endless meetings, and often baffling global summits, advocacy work *is* making a difference, even for the poor.

Anti-Slavery International's Child Labour Advocacy Officer Pins Brown points to the impact ASI–the world's oldest human rights organisation–has had since it was founded in 1839, and continues to have today.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Rudd Lubbers says that public advocacy–especially with the weight of media focus behind it–can have enormous impact on the plight of refugees and displaced persons.

And Richard Bennett, General Secretary of the UK-based international development network, BOND, says that even groups with widely diverse interests, when focused on global poverty and injustice, can have profound impact.

Doing advocacy may not always bring about desired results–and even when it does, the process can be painfully slow. But the alternative, as one contributor puts it, is a one-dimensional approach to development that loses sight of the broader context in which the poor seek to overcome poverty. ■

— *Randy Miller*

COVER PHOTO BY NICK DIDLICK (C) REUTERS 2002: PROTESTERS MARCH DURING A 'TAKE BACK THE STREETS' DEMONSTRATION OUTSIDE A G-8 SUMMIT DELEGATES RECEPTION IN DOWNTOWN CALGARY ON JUNE 25.

Calling attention to hidden crises

Rudd Lubbers

OVER THE PAST DECADE, a number of changes have occurred in the way the United Nations in general, and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in particular, conducts public advocacy on behalf of refugees. Especially now, in our information age, advocacy has become the norm rather than the exception.

Agencies like UNHCR–which depend almost entirely on voluntary contributions for funding–are well aware of the need for a public profile and a recognisable name. Media and advocacy skills–once unknown in the UN–are an absolute must today.

Public advocacy through the media can be a powerful tool in educating citizens and informing and influencing decision-makers on refugee and asylum issues. It can also help in countering all-too-common misperceptions and myths about refugees and asylum seekers.

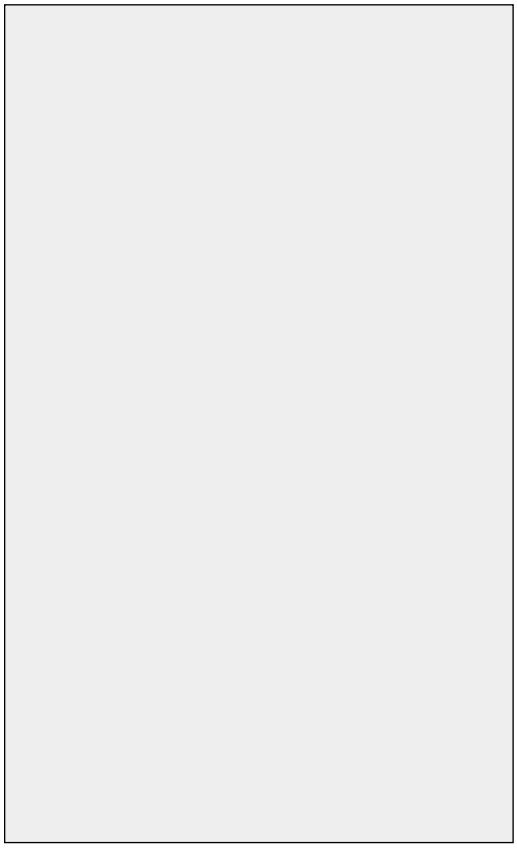
But while most would agree that public advocacy work is essential, there is also some concern that humanitarian agencies have become too publicity-driven. Some critics say agencies are too often focusing their efforts on high-profile humanitarian crises while neglecting more complex issues and longer-term challenges.

Dramatic relief operations

Indeed, it is relatively easy to attract media coverage during dramatic emergencies, such as the Bosnia war, the 1994 Rwanda crisis or, more recently, the post-September 11 Afghan crisis. As a rule, dramatic relief operations that grab the world's attention are also very well funded. In the mid-90s, UNHCR's budget was at an all-time high as the agency tackled a succession of high-profile crises.

Human suffering and drama, as well as high-visibility relief work, such as life-saving relief convoys and airlifts, make natural stories for news media, particularly television. The huge leap in broadcasting technology over the past several years has created a global culture of live television. The world's most dramatic humanitarian crises are now brought real-time into the living rooms of millions of people worldwide.

JACKY NAEGELEN, (C) REUTERS 2002



During the 1994 refugee crisis in eastern Zaire, as a cholera epidemic of medieval proportions decimated people fleeing from neighbouring Rwanda, world television networks showed people dying on the streets of the town of Goma. For three weeks, the sleepy, provincial town on Lake Kivu was the world's most famous dateline. Shocked and outraged, donors rushed in to help with airplanes, infrastructure, personnel, goods and cash.

Earlier that year, the scenes of carnage from the Sarajevo outdoor market mortar attack, which killed 68 people, caused world outrage and forced NATO to impose an artillery-free zone around the city, giving the Bosnian capital a few months' reprieve from terrifying daily artillery attacks.

In many situations, heavy media coverage has undoubtedly helped humanitarian causes. But one problem with world television is that it is Western-run and Western-oriented. What often determines the amount of coverage is the extent of North American or European involvement in, or understanding of, a crisis. In Africa, it often takes a crisis of biblical proportions, such as what we saw during the Rwanda crisis, to attract coverage.

But for every Rwanda, Bosnia or Afghanistan, there are dozens of other refugee situations that go largely unnoticed. One of our major challenges today is trying to draw attention to these so called 'forgotten' crises, including protracted refugee situations that have dragged on for years with no apparent solution in sight. Afghanistan, for example, was a forgotten crisis until the September 11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent allied intervention against the Taliban regime. Virtually overnight,

Public advocacy through the media can help counter misperceptions about refugees and asylum seekers.

DARREN WHITESIDE. (C) REUTERS 2002

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Rudd Lubbers talks with Afghan Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah Abdullah in Kabul.

Afghanistan–including more than 3.5 million Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries–was firmly back in the public spotlight.

However, few crises get this kind of sudden surge in political or military interest by the West. In most cases, it is extremely difficult to draw the world's attention to protracted situations that seem hopelessly stalemated–and ultimately boring to the media. As a rule, a brief, two-week war gets more attention than a conflict that is in its tenth year, with no end in sight.

Watchful eye

Sometimes, however, we can make a difference. UNHCR was able to draw world attention to the desperate plight of hundreds of thousands of refugees in West Africa in early 2001, during my first mission as High Commissioner. Under the watchful eye of several media, we began by gaining access to trapped refugees, then opening safe passage for them, then contributing to efforts to convince Sierra Leone's RUF rebels to end the violence and prioritise safe access to and safe passage for refugees. Public awareness and concern over their plight–together with efforts by the entire UN team–helped resolve what had seemed an impossible situation.

Informing the public on such complex issues requires a sustained global advocacy programme.

Equally if not more challenging is public advocacy on behalf of refugee rights in a world that has become increasingly indifferent or even hostile toward asylum seekers. At times, asylum issues become themes of party politics or election campaigns. This is especially true in today's Europe, where the distinction between refugees and economic migrants has become dangerously blurred. This confusion over so-called 'mixed flows' of migrants and refugees–as well as over realistic solutions–has to be clarified since it threatens the very institution of asylum. Informing the public on such complex issues requires a sustained global advocacy programme.

Unlike some non-governmental organisations or human rights groups, UNHCR cannot simply criticise governments without offering some real solutions. This often means that we have to strike a delicate balance between defending refugee rights and acknowledging that there is indeed a problem that needs to be addressed. If successful, everyone benefits in the end. ■

Rudd Lubbers is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

NGO legitimacy–voice or vote?

Michael Edwards

DISCUSSIONS of global governance don't get very far these days without someone raising the 'L' word-'legitimacy'–usually in a veiled attack on non-governmental organisations (NGOs), who are supposed to lack this precious commodity, and therefore have no right to participate in global debates. By contrast, governments are supposed to possess huge amounts of legitimacy because they are 'elected.' (You can see I'm talking theoretically!) Such critiques are simplistic but influential.

Are the critics right? It's no exaggeration to say that the future of global citizen action–and therefore global governance–rests on finding clear and convincing answers to this question.

Over the past ten years, NGOs have helped to change the language of debates around issues such as debt relief, monitor global agreements in areas such as forest certification and child labour, and negotiate new regimes like the Ottawa Treaty on landmines. In the process, they have challenged the assumption that governments represent the public interest, and questioned the ability of representative democracy to manage the complex political demands of pluralistic societies. Criticisms of NGO legitimacy are really echoes of a wider debate about different forms of democracy, but they ignore the fact that direct and electoral politics tend to complement rather than displace each other at local and national levels.

Voicing an opinion is the bedrock of participatory democracy (we used to call it 'freedom of speech'), and those who speak out do not need to be formally representative of a constituency. Accountability to a constituency, on the other hand, is the bedrock of representative democracy, requiring formal procedures like elections to ensure that decisions are fairly reached. Participatory democracy is the natural territory of NGOs, whereas representative democracy is the natural territory of governments. But both are needed if politics is to function in the public interest. Without sustained public pressure, governments rarely fulfil the promises they make on election day. But without elections, it is difficult to reconcile the different interests and agendas that exist in civil society.

This is just as true at the global level. The problem is that few political structures exist at the global level to balance these different forms of democracy, and this makes it easier for NGOs to cross the boundary between advocacy and representation, or 'voice' and 'vote', in their international advocacy work. The result may be gridlock, or chaotic policy-creation processes open to manipulation by the loudest and strongest groups–a problem already seen in the special interest politics of industrial democracies like the United States, and international negotiations like the Genoa G8 Summit last year.

Validating claims

Where does that leave us on the 'L' word? Legitimacy is generally understood as the right to be and do something in society, a sense that an organisation is lawful, admissible and justified in its chosen course of action. But there are many ways to validate these claims–through representation (if NGOs have a formal membership that can hold leaders accountable for the positions they take), through competence and expertise (if NGOs are recognised as bringing valuable knowledge and skills to the table by other legitimate bodies), through the law (if NGOs comply with non-profit legislation, regulation, and effective oversight by their trustees), and through the moral claims of NGOs to promote the public interest, or at least be in sympathy with large segments of public opinion. Usually, NGOs derive their legitimacy from a mix of all four.

Therefore, NGOs do not have to be member-controlled to be legitimate, but they do have to be transparent and accountable for their actions if their claims to legitimacy are to be maintained, and it is here that significant room for improvement remains. If legitimacy is claimed through representation (even in the broad sense of public opinion), NGOs must be able to show who it is they represent, and how. If it is claimed through expertise, they must be able to show how their positions have been derived, and what depth of rigor has been used. But conflating different forms of legitimacy for different groups–as the critics do–confuses the debate and increases the likelihood that criticisms will be used to exclude rather than structure the involvement of dissenting voices.

Any NGO is entitled to voice an opinion, so even if global networks lack fully democratic systems of governance and accountability, the increasing voice of civil society adds an essential layer of checks and balances into the international system, and helps to ensure that excluded views are heard. Negotiating a treaty, however, is a very different matter, when formal rules are needed to structure decision making by elected governments. Problems of legitimacy are not, therefore, a justification for turning back the tide of global citizen action, but they are a challenge to structure it in ways that combat, rather than accentuate, existing social, economic and political inequalities. This is the real challenge for NGOs in the century to come. ■

Michael Edwards is Director, Governance and Civil Society, for the Ford Foundation in New York. His books Future Positive, Global Citizen Action, and NGO Rights and Responsibilities explore the debate on NGO advocacy in more detail.

Campaigning for education

Anne Jellema

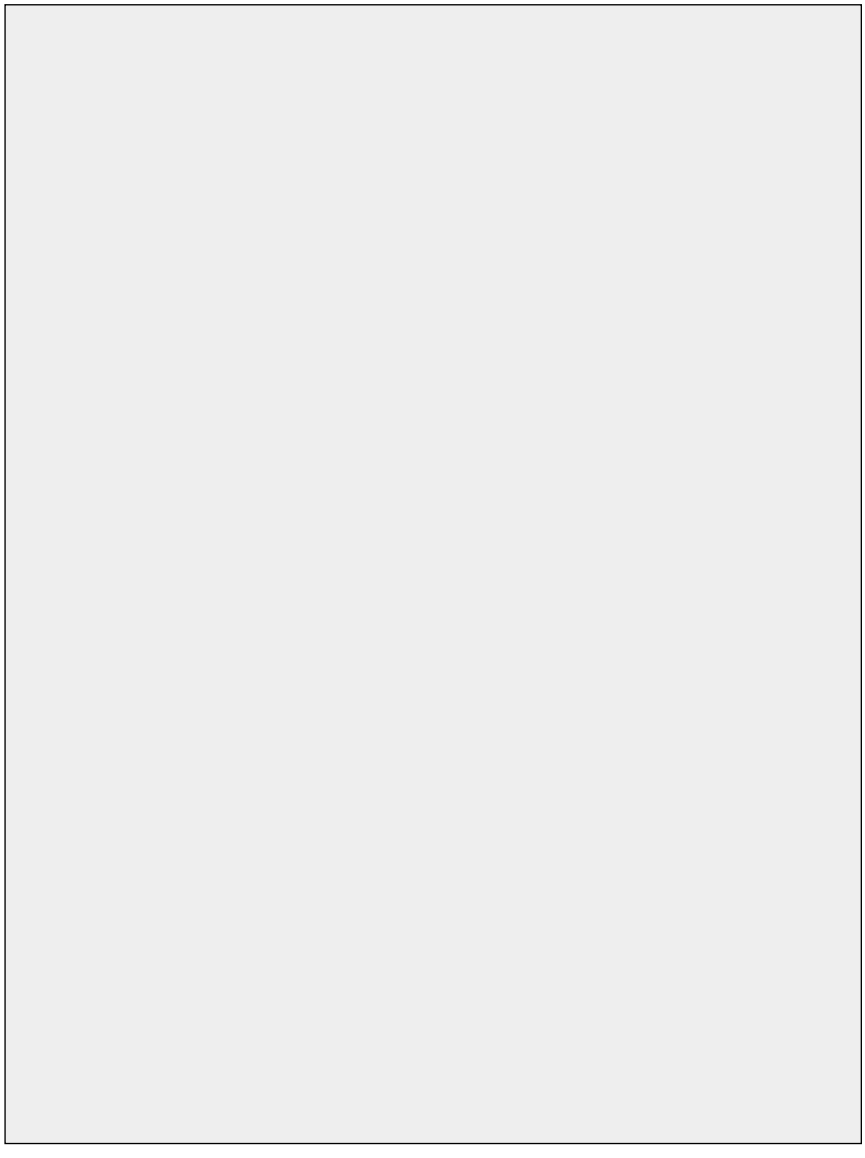
AS A CAUSE, education is cursed with too much support. This may sound paradoxical, but issues such as debt, landmines, apartheid and the environment show that it is often easier to campaign against something bad than to advocate for something good. However, the only public figure whom I have ever heard to suggest that education is not a good thing was a brave junior minister from an unnamed Southern African country, who livened up a UNESCO meeting last year when he congratulated Pakistan on its success in developing a nuclear arsenal whilst maintaining nearly 50% illiteracy. This proved, he said, that education is overrated.

Such outbursts aside, take a string of platitudes on the value of education, perhaps a line about relevance and quality, add a cliché or two on partnerships and progress, plus a goal or two that no one seriously intends to meet, and you have summarised the average international or regional forum on education.

It was out of sheer frustration with such complacency that the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) was formed in late 1999. At the decade's start, world governments had given their high-minded endorsement to the Jomtien Declaration, calling for universal primary education by the year 2000 and an 'expanded vision' of basic education that includes lifelong learning opportunities as well as formal schooling. But one year before the 10-year follow-up to Jomtien, some 125 million children were still out of school, and aid to education had actually fallen over the course of the decade. Nevertheless, world leaders were still blithely repeating the rhetoric of Jomtien, even as they prepared to gather in Dakar to postpone the Jomtien goals by another 15 years.

One year before the 10-year follow-up to Jomtien, some 125 million children were still out of school.

GUANG NIU, (C) REUTERS 2002



Civil society failed

If civil society organisations were honest with themselves, they would have had to admit that they had also contributed to the failure of the Jomtien effort. Despite a solid record in providing valuable and sometimes innovative services on the ground, civil society as a whole had failed to live up to its responsibility to act as a watchdog to governments and the international community. We had not been a thorn in the side of the powerful, pushing tirelessly for the rights of the poor to quality education. We had not been united around a common message, nor had we been able to influence the policy agenda by formulating convincing proposals of our

JASON REED. (C) REUTERS 2002

own. We had even failed to equip ourselves with the basic knowledge and skills that we needed to monitor implementation of the Jomtien promises. Few of us, for example, understood how government budgets work, and how donors influence those budgets.

Fortunately, a few civil society organisations were honest enough to see these failures–and visionary enough to imagine a different way of working. Just before the Dakar conference, leading international NGOs such as Actionaid, Oxfam, Save the Children and World Vision formed an alliance with the worldwide federation of teachers' unions and Education International, which subsequently also brought on board its sister federation, Public Services International. The third major stakeholder in the campaign was Global March Against Child Labour, a coalition of hundreds of child rights organisations.

Breaking through the haze

The first task facing the campaign was simply to break through the haze of complacency and cliché that surrounded education as an issue. The GCE needed to create a sense that the world faced a crisis; that 125 million children out of school and nearly a billion illiterate adults constitutes a global emergency. Above all, this meant getting the media to pay attention. This is not easy when the effects of the crisis are not easily captured by the cameras in the way that famines, war and disease can be. But some creative media work and skilled polemics spearheaded by international NGO members of the campaign went a long way toward overcoming this. We needed to get world leaders to sit up and take notice. Here, the experience and credibility of many of our members–be they teachers' unions representing those who work the coalface of education every day, or NGOs with strong partnerships at the grassroots–was essential. The help of the skilled advocacy organisations also was crucial in order to translate this grassroots knowledge into the technical language spoken by policymakers.

The first task was simply to break through the haze of complacency that surrounded education as an issue.

Getting and keeping the ear of decision-makers and media also depends, however, on being able to show massive popular backing for the issue. The GCE needed to create a sense of outrage among ordinary people to give parents, community groups, churches, youth associations, parliamentarians and others an impetus to do something. This is perhaps the hardest part of campaigning, especially when campaigning for something good rather than against something bad. Without a clear 'villain' to rally people's anger, without a simple call to stop, end, ban, or abolish something evil or unjust, it can be difficult to create a strong enough motivation for people to give up part of their day to support your cause.

In facing this challenge, the capacity of Education International and Global March to mobilise their members and supporters has been an enormous boost. We organised an Action Week just ahead of the Dakar conference, which attracted participants from some 100 countries. The Action Week has become a highly successful feature of our campaign calendar in April of each year, with groups organising events ranging from street theatre to radio phone-ins to mass rallies in order to turn the spotlight on education. From 7-13 April 2003, the fourth annual Action Week will focus on girls' education, and the 2005 target for achieving gender equity in education.

Some successes

After three years, the GCE can point to some successes. We have been unrelenting in our pursuit of donors and UN agencies following the Dakar conference, pushing them to endorse concrete arrangements for

DADANG TRI, (C) REUTERS 2002

delivering and co-ordinating the extra funds needed to put the Dakar promises into action. We have gotten the implementation of Dakar onto the agenda of major forums such as the World Bank-IMF Annual and Spring Meetings and the G8 summits, and we have shaped this agenda to a considerable extent by developing our own constructive proposals for a Global Initiative, linking sound national plans to additional donor funds. It is safe to say that without the GCE, these issues would most likely have faded to oblivion by now.

Real work lies ahead

We recognise, however, that popular mobilisation and organisation, especially in the South, is where the real work lies ahead for the GCE. We have encouraged and supported the formation of national education coalitions in a number of countries, bringing together all civil society groups who want to promote the right to education and ensure that governments implement policies that can deliver that right. GCE sees the further strengthening, linking and empowerment of these coalitions as the way forward for the campaign. While not stepping out of the international arena, we will concentrate more in future on building capacity and unity at the national level. Our vision of the GCE as a 'global' campaign in the future is not an organisation that functions solely on the global level, with leaders at GCE headquarters who spend their time lobbying leaders in Washington, Brussels or Paris. Rather, it is a vision of an alliance that grows out of active, concerted movements for education in every province of every country.

Ours is a vision of an alliance that grows out of active, concerted movements for education in every country.

'If current trends continue', as the planners say, then 75 million children still will be denied access to education in 2015. We, as civil society organisations, have an overwhelming obligation to make sure that current trends do not continue. We do not make the budgets, we do not engineer aid agreements, we do not draft the plans and policies. But we do have the ability to rally ordinary people to demand education as their right. Ultimately, it is pressure from the grassroots that will be the single most powerful force in changing the budgets, changing the policies, and changing the lives of those 75 million children. ■

Anne Jellema is Advocacy Co-ordinator of Global Campaign for Education. For more information on the GCE and how to join in the Global Action Week in April 2003, please check their website, located at: www.campaignforeducation.org.

Pursuing policy change

Alan Whaites

ADVOCACY for an international development NGO (non-governmental organisation) should be aimed at policy change that benefits the poor. The experience and knowledge that NGOs accrue through their direct partnership with poor communities can bring valuable insights into the policy debate. The alternative to advocacy is a one-dimensional approach to development that loses sight of the broader context in which the poor seek to overcome poverty.

Failing to apply development knowledge to the policy arena can also go beyond being a lost opportunity, and can become an act of complicity. In the early 1990s, the international board of World Vision adopted a policy on advocacy that rightly asserted that there are instances in which silence is itself a statement or an acquiescence. More recently, the board passed a policy on the promotion of justice that reflects the positive need for NGOs not only to critique international public policy, but also to offer constructive alternatives.

For World Vision, it is the practical potential of advocacy that is key to its worth as a tool for development. An organisation ostensibly committed to the poor that fails to use its influence as an asset for their benefit has real questions to answer. Equally, an NGO working alongside the poor that does not also aim to help them voice their own concerns is short-changing its partners. This emphasis on voices in development is not political correctness, but a recognition of the real importance of policy. Constructive changes in public policy can bring huge benefits for poor communities, while poorly thought-through policies can have a devastating effect.

This emphasis on voices in development is not political correctness, but the recognition of the importance of policy.

Good work swept aside

In 1998, at the height of the collapse of the Indonesia rupiah, I travelled to Jakarta to join a team assessing the impacts in urban community development projects. It was clear at the time, and has remained so since, that a combination of deflationary macroeconomic policies and poorly implemented safety-net programmes exacerbated a terrible situation. These failures of policy and planning did much to regress decades of work by development NGOs who had been busy strengthening education, health and income-generation at the local level. In a comparative instant, much good work was swept aside. And, as usual, it was the most vulnerable–particularly children–who suffered the worst effects.

No NGO, no matter how small or large, can ignore the fact that the lives of the poor are shaped by these policy contexts. In future, it may be Poverty Reduction Strategies (or the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth

SUPRI. (C) REUTERS 2002

Facilities) that do the most to determine their fate. Or, it may be the end results of the Doha/Development round of trade talks. As a result, advocacy at the global level remains as important as ever.

Barriers to development

For the poor, the global realities of trade and conditionality are also balanced by local policy environments in which weak governance–particularly, corruption and the absence of rule of law–can create considerable barriers to development. For these reasons, advocacy is not just an issue for the international arena, but can bring profound changes nationally and locally. The Indonesian example above points to the linkages that exist between these levels, and the importance of working to inform the global with the local. In addition, some of the most remarkable advocacy that I have witnessed has been at the community level. Local community organisers helping slum families to secure new drainage, paved roads and schools, or the brave street children's project workers who persuaded police officers in a brutally repressive state to cease the arbitrary arrest and beating of the children in their care.

For the poor, advocacy can bring real and tangible results. Ultimately, good advocacy enables the poor to have a stronger voice themselves. Advocacy, therefore, never should be driven by the developmental fashion parade of new concepts. Nor should it just become a continuous succession of bandwagons as global inter-NGO campaign succeeds global inter-NGO campaign. Advocacy must be based on good policy analysis and genuine organisational commitment. As a result, World Vision makes a point of joining campaigns when they fit with our ongoing organisational advocacy strategy and pursue realistic policy changes that reflect the real needs of our partner communities.

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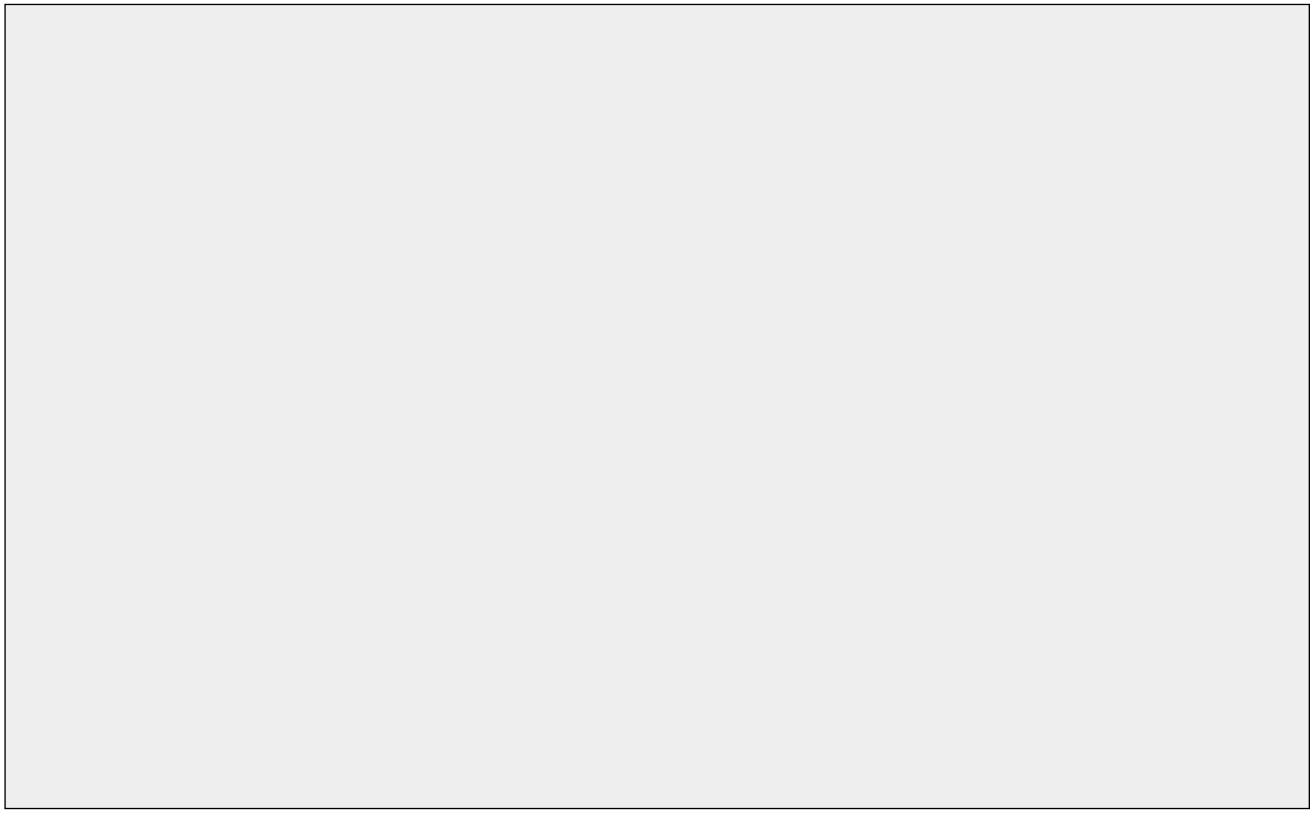
The commitment of World Vision to advocacy is, after all, driven first and foremost by our basis in faith. As a Christian NGO, World Vision is conscious that the theme of justice is prominent throughout the Bible. This rooting of advocacy within core organisational beliefs is important for any NGO. Advocacy must be owned if it is to be sustained despite possible criticism, confrontation and controversy. The Bible is not just a call to individual transformation, but also a challenge to all societies. Biblical principles of equity, respect for God-given human rights, and building peace lie at the heart of our advocacy. When the rights of exploited children are asserted, or when institutions such as the WTO or IMF are challenged to put poverty reduction first, World Vision is bringing its faith to bear in the public policy debate. ■

Alan Whaites is Director of Policy and Advocacy for World Vision International.



SUPRI. (C) REUTERS 2002

Long-haul fights

Pins Brown

ANTI-SLAVERY International is the world's oldest human rights organisation. Founded in 1839, our roots go back to the abolitionist movement of the 1780s. Now, as then, we are committed to eliminating slavery through research, raising awareness and campaigning, and we are an advocacy organisation through and through.

For us, advocacy means obtaining a change in policy, attitude or behaviour in order to improve the situation of those affected by slavery or slavery-like practices. It is about challenging power and vested interests, and giving a voice to those whose point of view is ignored or unknown, and can be a very long process. Practically speaking, this means campaigning, lobbying, raising awareness and keeping all manner of people informed about slavery issues. A glance through the history of the organisation shows that neither our advocacy objectives nor methods have altered much over time. We still work to change both policy and practice and to empower individuals, and still employ a variety of techniques to get there. Combating slavery continues to involve getting issues onto the international agenda, and ensuring they are given priority, but it also involves influencing the daily decisions people make–village chiefs, employers, children, landowners, school-teachers. Our work and the work of our partners is often at both these levels. One week a United Nations conference, the next an event with Miss Togo on the perils of child domestic work.

Long gestation period

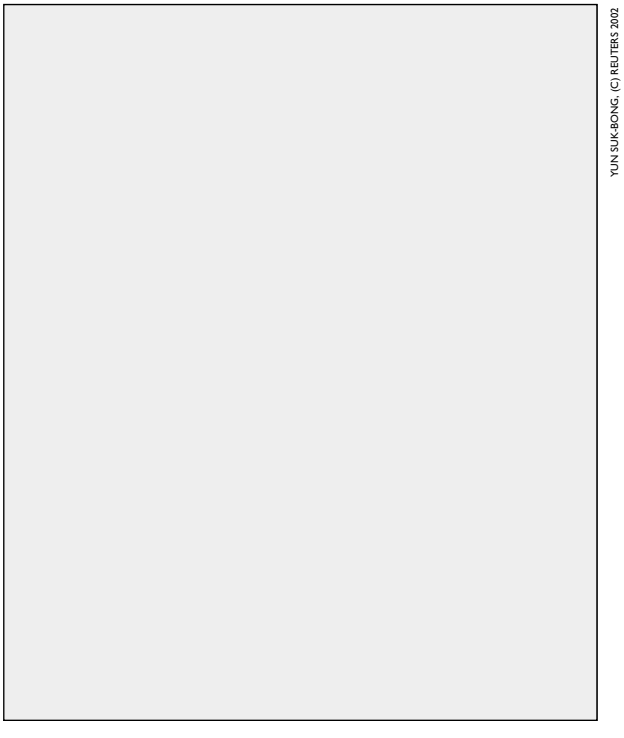
The Anti-Slavery movement's original campaign to abolish slavery had a long gestation period (the bill abolishing slavery in the British Empire took effect in 1834), and exhibits many of the characteristics of our current campaigns. The first step, and one that is still often ignored, was having the issue of slavery recognised as a problem. For many NGOs embarking on advocacy around a particular issue–say, for example, exploitative child labour–the initial battle is in persuading people that there is a problem. Especially when we forget that though an issue is of burning importance to us, it may mean nothing to others. Many contemporary forms of slavery are just seen as part of the way society operates, and has always operated. In the words of the International Labour Organisation, advocacy turns yesterday's unchangeable and unchallenged reality into today's unacceptable anachronism. Child labour is now firmly on the international agenda, but let us not forget that until the 1990s the international community barely considered it a problem, let alone a priority issue. It was only the campaigns of Anti-Slavery and others in the 1980s that brought about this change of view. That first step in persuading people of a problem is crucial.

In our original campaign against transatlantic slave trade, the movement's methods included collecting evidence on the atrocities committed, getting opinion leaders on board, using them to gain public interest, running parliamentary campaigns, and ensuring that all these activities were followed through. Sound familiar? The campaign also used international diplomacy–once Britain had abolished the trade, the Anti-Slavery Society (as it was called then) worked to encourage Britain to use its influence over other countries. Legislation and its implementation were also key, as was keeping a watchful eye over the countries and individuals concerned, making sure that the reality for ex-slaves wasn't just a different form of slavery.

It is about challenging power and vested interests, and giving a voice to those whose point of view is ignored.

Little change

Giving a human face to slavery was also important, and the society used photographs, slides, posters, banners and lecture tours from witnesses to slavery and freed slaves. Looking at



YUN SUK-BONG, (C) REUTERS 2002

A former sexual slave reads a protest letter during a rally near the Japanese embassy in Seoul last March.

GEORGE MULALA, (C) REUTERS 2002

Slaves were hidden in this cave, about 70 kilometres south of Mombasa, Kenya, to avoid detection by British opposed to the slave trade.

and reading those materials today shows how little has changed. Alice Harris, later joint Secretary of the Society, took extensive photographs of massacres and other atrocities against Congolese workers in rubber plantations in the Congo Free State. These images, now in the Anti-Slavery library, were used in a report on the situation to the British government, by a commission of enquiry set up by King Leopold of Belgium following international pressure, and in a 1903 report, 'Rubber is Death.' By 1906, King Leopold had been forced to relinquish personal control of the colony to the Belgian government. Now, over 100 years later, an Anti-Slavery exhibition of photographs of trafficked children in West Africa will travel to India, Kosovo, the United States and the Ukraine as part of our current trafficking campaign.

As we've seen, many elements of our advocacy work are unchanged. But there are some differences. Advocacy targets those in power, whether over state decisions or over the children of a relative or tenant. In the course of time, the location of some of that power has altered, and there has been an increased awareness of the power of individuals over others, and therefore the need to target several groups or a whole community in order to bring about change. Governments were originally our main targets. Then, with the rise of international institutions and law, we lobbied for and were involved in the development of international law and monitoring groups on slavery. This work continues, most recently in law on child labour and against trafficking in persons. With the growth of unions, non-governmental organisations and other civil society groups, we now work in partnership with organisations around the world, using our combined forces to bring about change.

We now work with organisations around the world, using our combined forces to bring about change.

In conclusion, it is interesting to note that many of our partner organisations in the South are larger organisations than we are. They tell us that some of what they gain from working with Anti-Slavery is a greater understanding of advocacy and what it can do. Many are human rights organisations already with extensive experience of lobbying their governments. Some are service delivery organisations who want to prevent the abuses they are dealing with every day. All say that what we can do with them is share the methods and experience that our long history of anti-slavery work has given us, and help them in turn to share the reality of slavery with others. ■

Pins Brown is Child Labour Advocacy Officer for Anti-Slavery International.

Advocacy challenges for Northern and Southern NGOs

Ted van Hees

DURING THE PAST MONTH, in my capacity as EURODAD co-ordinator, I have attended two global events that challenge us to think and rethink our strategy as civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) regarding the matter of globalisation and the institutions that are its driving forces. These two events were the Johannesburg World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) and the Annual Meetings of World Bank and IMF in Washington, D.C. Below, I will reflect on some of the achievements we made, problems we confronted, and lessons we learned at these events for our strategic thinking as globally operating NGOs.

From the perspective of a Northern NGO network–EURODAD (European Network on Debt and Development)–I want to emphasise that we in Europe (or in the North, in general) do have our own specific responsibility because we know our political situation and politicians, and also their positions in Brussels, Geneva, New York or Washington. In other words, we cannot leave advocacy work in the North just to our Southern colleagues; we should strategise together. In addition, they can contribute in advocacy campaigns and media work in our countries in a very powerful way. Support to Southern NGOs cannot be limited to simply giving them a platform in our countries (as some of us claim is the best way to conduct 'Northern' advocacy), but 'translate' and interpret their views, along with our own, for the Northern/European public, media and policy-makers.

NGO collaboration

In Johannesburg, and to a lesser extent in Washington, I found a new spirit of co-operation among NGOs and NGO networks worldwide. Efforts to develop joint strategies and, to some extent, a joint agenda, were evident. A striking feature of this new global collaboration, however, was that it took place particularly between people of Northern and global networks. Some Southern colleagues joined us, as members of these networks, or in association with them, in the advocacy and campaigning work toward policymakers and media. But most Southern activists participated at the major conferences, events and demonstrations that were organised alongside the official process and the related advocacy, policy and media work. The most important exception to this Southern NGO absence in this 'official process' was the Third World Network (TWN). We together monitored the negotiations on trade, finance and globalisation in a caucus group consisting of TWN, Oxfam International, Christian Aid, Friends of the Earth, EURODAD and others.

Furthermore, major global environmental and developmental networks collaborated in an excellent way in the Eco-Equity Coalition[1], joining in analysis, actions and monitoring of the Summit and joint (besides their own) work on media and government delegations. This broad collaboration was, moreover, a great learning experience on the issues 'farther away from our beds.' Hopefully, Eco Equity will follow up on this experience by monitoring together the European Union and its commitments at the WSSD, and, beyond that, act as driving force of the Coalition of the Willing, the group of EU and like-minded Southern governments who had more ambitious targets on energy. We invited the European Union to extend this Coalition also to the policy areas and targets not met in Johannesburg.

Joint agenda?

So, let us turn to the latest Annual Meetings of IMF and World Bank, and take the example of work on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and the IMF's Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF). As a general objective, I believe that international networks and NGO families like EURODAD or World Vision should help create the political space for international, but foremost national Southern NGOs, by organising effective advocacy in the North

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South African Foreign Affair Minister Dlamini-Zuma speaks at a WSSD news briefing.

(and toward the South), so that IFIs and donors provide this political space in the international political arena and in their countries' processes. In this context, the presentation at the World Bank/World Vision Workshop Democratising Development by Mr. Amadou Sow, Secretary General of the Ministry of Economics an Finance in Guinea, demonstrated for me once more that the PRSP process, despite its deficiencies, has opened up enormous space for civil society, including, to a certain extent, poor people themselves, for engaging with their governments in the design and implementation of development policy.

Having said that, I realise that we need to keep reminding IFIs and donors (when they reveal a short-term memory) to do the things they have committed themselves to. The external IMF ESAF review[2], for instance, already advised to organise national conferences or processes of all relevant national stakeholders, where options and trade-offs would be discussed and agreed. In the first months after the launch of PRSP and PRGF, IMF representatives repeatedly made similar and even stronger statements on the need to open up the consultations with Finance Ministries and Central Banks for other stakeholders, including civil society. Hugh Bredenkamp (as the one then responsible for PRGF), for instance, said that the IMF was prepared to step back from imposing its policies, and instead would take a role as adviser, helping governments and civil society to compare policy options and trade-offs.

A loss of legitimacy?

Moreover, if the PRGF process will not be opened up for broad consultation with civil society (and all sectors of government), then the IMF and World Bank will lose further legitimacy, and what may be worse, also jeopardise and endanger the whole potentially promising PRSP process as well. This could finally result in the withdrawal of CSOs and NGOs from their national PRSP processes, and the same for international NGOs globally. The reply Brain Ames, responsible for PRSP at the IMF, gave at the conference to my question on this issue does not make me optimistic in this respect. He acknowledged that it is a problem that PRSPs are often rather general in their macro-economic policy content, and that this may create a disconnect between the PRSP and the macro-economic programme. But the conclusion he draws from this is completely wrong. It is not just a matter of making PRSPs more macro-economic. He said that the IMF is to discuss the PRGF with the government alone, because it is the lending instrument of the IMF. It is not clear to me if he realises that this is exactly the problem, namely that this same lending instrument carries the major macro-economic conditionality, and therefore must be discussed in the same open and participatory way as and in connection to the PRSP.

One concern that we need to address in all this is the dominance of Northern and global NGO networks.

Northern NGO dominance

A similar problem applies to the relationship between trade and PRSP/PRGF. Trade policy, including opening up for trade, should be based on the PRSP, not the other way around. IMF-conditionality and WTO-ruling imposes policies from outside that should be developed in the country. International NGO networks collaborated fairly well on this in both Johannesburg and Washington, and challenged at the latter event IMF and World Bank, whose increasing involvement on trade aims at overall further trade liberalisation, without looking properly from the perspective of local vulnerable sectors and national economies.

One concern that we need to address in all this is the dominance of Northern and global NGO networks, like EURODAD, Oxfam International or World Vision, of the advocacy and policy development process. Southern NGOs often do participate in the kind of events we discussed–a reason sometimes in the past for the Northern dominance on policy work. It is rather that they make different choices regarding where to be and what to do, namely at their own, often parallel, NGO events. This is sometimes also driven by their Northern partners who engage them in their conferences (which is, as such, a good thing), instead of being involved in direct policy and political work. For some groups it also may be a deliberate choice not to engage in such work because they consider that as 'loss of energy' and 'delivering yourself' to the institutions and governments. I do not agree with that, and believe that it is of crucial importance that in the future we manage to get a better balance between Southern and Northern people in the work on promoting another kind of globalisation based on human, sustainable development.

I hope that the establishment in early 2003 of a new co-ordination structure of development networks and NGOs in Europe, and the (partial) integration of their policy, advocacy and education staff in joint working groups will contribute further to this end. ■

Ted van Hees is Co-ordinator of EURODAD (European Network on Debt and Development).

1. Members of the Eco Equity Coalition are ANPED, Consumers International, Danish '92, EURODAD, Friends of the Earth International, Greenpeace, Oxfam International and WWF. It published every morning its journal: *Eco Equity.*

2. The IMF External ESAF Review took place in 1998/99 as the first relatively independent evaluation of an IMF policy.

Finding a voice in all the noise

Riz Khan

TO THE OUTSIDER, it often seems like a lot of talk about talk about action. Outsiders hardly notice the action, even when it achieves startling results.

Advocacy isn't an easy business. It starts with the idea that there's us and them, and whenever there's us and them there's better and worse, right and wrong, and so on, irrespective of intention.

As a journalist it's been my job to inform. To pass on information about what's been happening in this world. Even though I'm supposed to tell you about the good and the bad, it seems like there's rarely time for the good stuff. CNN founder Ted Turner once tried to base a news show around 'good news.' It didn't last long.

Missed by the media

So what has gone wrong? Why has the story of all the hard work done by advocacy groups and those in the world of human development been largely missed by the media? If you ask me, I'd say it's a communication issue. We (the journalists) and you (those working for a better world) don't talk the same language. You throw large documents at me entitled something like 'Achieving Sustainable Development: How Public-Private Participation Can Redress the Socio-economic Imbalance and Inequity in Developing Nations'. I switch off. (By the way, I made up that title, so please don't use it as a title for some real, heavily researched project, otherwise I will switch off!)

Why has the story of all the hard work done by advocacy groups been largely missed by the media?

CAREN FIROUZ, (C) REUTERS 2002

'I get to see the dedication of the staff involved in difficult projects in difficult places.'

Like the rest of this world, newsrooms are littered with overworked, underpaid people barely making it through the day. Sadly, a passenger ferry sinking, or a train derailing pushes the adrenaline levels to the point of action. A thick stack of documents from even the worthiest of organisations doesn't. Journalists don't have time to read all that material.

True, it may not be written for them. The documents might represent a culmination of valuable research that will help an NGO to improve the way it works, or to better target those in need, but I argue that the world should know about what goes on–positive stuff and all.

It's only by changing public opinion on matters of development and reducing the general cynicism toward 'organisations' that more effective action can be achieved.

It doesn't seem to take a lot to make the public grumble about NGOs and how they work, while getting support is an uphill battle most of the time.

So it comes down to finding a voice in all the noise. Making you–those in civil society doing the hard work–heard by us–the people who tell other people what is happening in the world about them.

One of the lucky ones

Am I boring you yet? Think of it as revenge for the many official documents I did try to read over the years!

Seriously, though, I'm one of the lucky ones. I'm a journalist who gets to see the world of the NGOs from the inside. I get to take part in sessions, panels and discussions held by a wide variety of agencies and organisations from the United Nations to World Vision to the World Bank. I also get to travel and see what happens at the grassroots level. I get to see the dedication of the staff involved in difficult projects in difficult places. Almost every time, I walk away frustrated that the story isn't being told.

I recently returned from Kabul, Afghanistan, and saw the remarkable

VASILY FEDOSENKO, (C) REUTERS 2002

'I also get to see what happens at the grassroots level. I spoke to truly devoted people...many of them volunteering their time and skills.'

work being done by UNESCO there, in order to rebuild the country's media. Kabul is not the easiest place to operate. I spoke to truly devoted and caring people, like those working at AINA, a Paris-based NGO, founded by a world-class photographer, Reza Deghati. A man, it struck me, with a huge heart to achieve what he has managed to in such a short time. The people working at AINA include journalists from around the globe–many of them volunteering their time and skills to teach the information-hungry Afghans how to be reporters and technicians in their country's battered media.

Waiting for the next bomb

Here's the irony. Hardly any of the international media in Afghanistan are actually telling this story–or have any idea of what's going on. The journalists planted there are largely waiting for the next bomb to go off, or another international dignitary to pass through offering significant sound-bites, and largely Western 'words of wisdom.'

So who's to blame for this gap in information? Is it the NGOs and agencies not getting their message across? Yes, to a large degree it is. Having said that, they can be forgiven because they are rather preoccupied with the task at hand.

Is it the media for ignoring all but the headline news–the death, destruction, disaster and the odd election (and there have been a few 'odd' elections!)? Yes it is, but then there's the excuse of dwindling resources and reduction in newsgathering budgets.

Hardly any of the international media in Afghanistan are telling the story–or have any idea of what's going on.

It's a two-way street.

Here I might make a suggestion. I don't know exactly how useful it could be, but I'm optimistic it could have some impact.

NGOs and other such agencies need to learn to talk the language of the media. Develop the culture of the sound-bite, if that's what it takes to get the message across. Build relationships. Allocate a member of staff or two to the task of liasing with the media in a way that we deaf journalists might hear a little better. Offer access to areas and stories that journalists on their own might not manage to get to, and might not think of in the first place. Find snappier ways to get the information across to the media–shorter, sharper titles with condensed, easily understood information.

And we journalists?

Well, I'd be the first to admit we also have to learn to listen...even to talk about talk about action. ■

Riz Khan is a journalist who covers civil society and international affairs.

Offering constructive alternatives

Len Good

WE LIVE in a complex and constantly changing world, where politics, economics and cultures mix in sometimes chaotic and often unpredictable ways. Many issues transcend geographic and cultural barriers, as we become more interdependent and increasingly influenced by actions and reactions from around the world. While governments try to focus on the welfare of their own people, international organisations are left to try and steer the course from a global perspective.

As president of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), I feel that I have a unique perspective on the relationship between government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). While CIDA is part of the Canadian government, significant portions of our projects are delivered with the help of NGOs all over the world. I can truly say that CIDA would not have achieved many of its successes without the help of NGOs, which is a true testament to their commitment, knowledge and resourcefulness.

Influencing outcomes

Where does advocacy come into the picture? Advocacy, simply put, is the process of attempting to influence outcomes, such as changes in public policy or resource management, in order to have a positive impact on people's lives. As organisations that are relatively free of geo-political interests, NGOs play a vital role in helping governments be responsible stewards. How? Through their own networks, NGOs help reconcile various views by bringing together people from all over the world. NGOs, by virtue of their own organisational abilities, seek out and engage related interested groups. In this networking lie some of the greatest strengths of the NGO community. Such characteristics make NGOs uniquely suited to advocacy.

The dialogue generated through consultations with civil society, including NGOs, influenced–and, in my view, improved–major CIDA policy initiatives over the years. This was seen most recently in CIDA's policy paper: 'Strengthening Aid Effectiveness.' Some of the main principles and approaches in this paper include stronger partnerships with developing countries, local ownership of development projects, improved donor co-ordination, focusing on a results-based approach, and trying to achieve greater coherence on related policies, such as those affecting trade, technology transfer and investment.

Through their own networks, NGOs reconcile various views by bringing together people from all over the world.

The hardest part

As demonstrated most recently at the G8 Summit at Kananaskis, it is apparent that NGOs are most effective when they express their messages positively by offering constructive alternatives and by cultivating relationships with the governments that they are seeking to influence. This may, in fact, be the hardest part of effective advocacy, but it can also be the most crucial to real success.

As advocates, NGOs concentrate on their innate strengths, including their networks and their ability to remain apolitical. They continue to involve the efforts of others in civil society. They refine their messages. They cultivate relationships with governments. And they continue to remain accountable to and supported by both their membership and their clientele. This is a tall order, but one that I believe NGOs are capable of, as evidenced by the fine work that has been accomplished by NGOs until now. ■

Len Good is President of CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency.)

JIM YOUNG, (C) REUTERS 2002

Leaders meet at the opening meeting of the G8 Summit in Kananaskis, Alberta, in June.

Advocacy in complex settings

Hendro Suwito

ADVOCACY is a complex activity under normal circumstances. But it is even more so in a country like Indonesia, with its ethnic diversity, political tensions and widespread poverty.

Indonesia has some 20 major ethnic groups and more than 200 minor ones, each with its own unique customs and culture. They are scattered across several thousand islands that stretch across an expanse equal to the distance between London to Tehran. Five years after its worst economic collapse, this country of 210 million people is still deep in turmoil.

Advocacy work here was conducted on a very limited scale between the 1970s and the late 1990s. However, following the resignation of President Suharto in May 1998, it began gaining momentum. The pendulum has swung dramatically from one extreme to the other over the past four years. People now realise that they can openly voice their opinions or even criticise their foes through media or other means. Demonstrations, once a rare sight, now occur almost daily.

Non-government organisations and social welfare groups also have seized the opportunity to speak out. Some have chosen relatively moderate methods to advance their causes, using, for example, print and electronic media or peaceful demonstrations. Other more radical groups have opted for confrontational methods, such as staging protests, in an attempt to force the government to take drastic measures to end corruption, pay greater attention to the poor, or end child labour and trafficking. This kind of strident advocacy usually garners wide-scale media coverage, but often is unsuccessful in bringing about change.

People now realise they can openly voice their opinions or even criticise their foes through the media.

Indonesia is still struggling to overcome a number of problems. Its foreign debt of US$140 billion ranks among the highest in the world. Indonesia remains high on the list of the world's most corrupt countries. It has serious problems with law enforcement, unemployment, ethnic conflict, religious conflict, malnutrition, child labour and many other issues.

DADANG TRI, (C) REUTERS 2002

Not turning a deaf ear

The government is not unaware of these issues, nor is it turning a deaf ear. It simply does not have adequate resources–financial or human–to address them all. This is where advocacy work by civil society can make a difference.

Public awareness campaigns directed at specific target audiences may be the most effective approach to advocacy in Indonesia today. Several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have initiated such campaigns to fight corruption, end child labour and trafficking, and encourage peacemaking. Many NGOs also have established networks and mapped out joint advocacy programs. Some are creating and distributing materials on child rights in an effort to educate people on the importance of this issue.

In Papua and East Nusa Tenggara provinces, one NGO has combined efforts with local government offices to provide programmes designed to educate local leaders about the need to improve child welfare. Local governments have responded positively and committed themselves to boosting financial resources for children's education and health services.

Doing advocacy in a complex country like Indonesia is delicate and demanding work. Nevertheless, we must not be discouraged if our efforts seem to bring about little, if any, change. We must hold out hope that, through our co-operative efforts, the situation will eventually improve. ■

Hendro Suwito is Communications Manager for World Vision Indonesia.

Advocacy in a network of Northern NGOs

Richard Bennett

[There is increasing interest in the use of networks to increase participation in, and the impact of, advocacy. BOND (British Overseas NGOs for Development) is the network of UK-based international development NGOs (non-governmental organisations). Founded in 1993 by 61 organisations, it has grown today to more than 270 members. Through BOND, NGOs network to improve their own performance, and to influence government policy and practice. How does a network of diverse Northern NGOs develop its advocacy work? BOND General Secretary Richard Bennett reports.]

IN THE UK'S non-governmental organisation community, one feature stands out prominently: diversity. Amongst BOND's 270 members are organisations with bases in different faiths, and some with ties to no faith at all; there are different ideological backgrounds; and there are members with different sectoral and geographical areas of focus. There are different missions, and different lessons learned from experience. Organisational ages range from six months to more than 100 years. There are organisations founded by trade unions, and organisations founded by corporations; or by England's white mainstream, or Scottish nationalists, or one of the many minority ethnic communities.

But these groups have much in common, too. In particular, they share a commitment to confront global poverty and injustice, which has enabled BOND to base the network's unity on a collective Statement of Principles. This Statement covers common values, and outlines an agreement on how Northern organisations should work in relationship with their Southern partners, with Northern supporters and institutional donors, and with the minimum constitutional and legal safeguards to ensure accountability.

Engaging in advocacy

When it was founded in 1993, one of the principal discussions amongst BOND's early members was about how the network could enable organisations to engage actively in advocacy. How could such a diverse range of NGOs, even if united in its core values, increase its influence over policy-makers and opinion formers?

These groups have much in common, too. In particular, a commitment to confront global poverty and injustice.

Historically, only a few UK NGOs had advocacy programmes. Mainly large organisations, they had used a stronger-than-average unrestricted funding base to build work that was poorly supported by institutional donors.

A second group of organisations, mainly large or medium in size, wanted to develop the capacity to advocate, but needed new skills and knowledge to do so. They were more restricted in the resources they could invest, and felt excluded from key channels of information. And, with smaller capacity, they needed to find ways of working with others on focused advocacy programmes.

A third group of mainly smaller organisations was aware that, given their size, they would not be able to develop significant advocacy capacity on their own. But, like others, they were receiving an increasing number of calls from Southern partners to engage with decision-makers in the North. They could respond only if they could take part in collective activity with other UK organisations with little investment of resources.

BOND has developed an advocacy programme with the twin aims of building the individual capacity of members, and enabling the network as a whole to advocate collectively. This programme, although still in its infancy, is beginning to deliver.

Picking the right moment

One series of training courses builds the organisational skills needed

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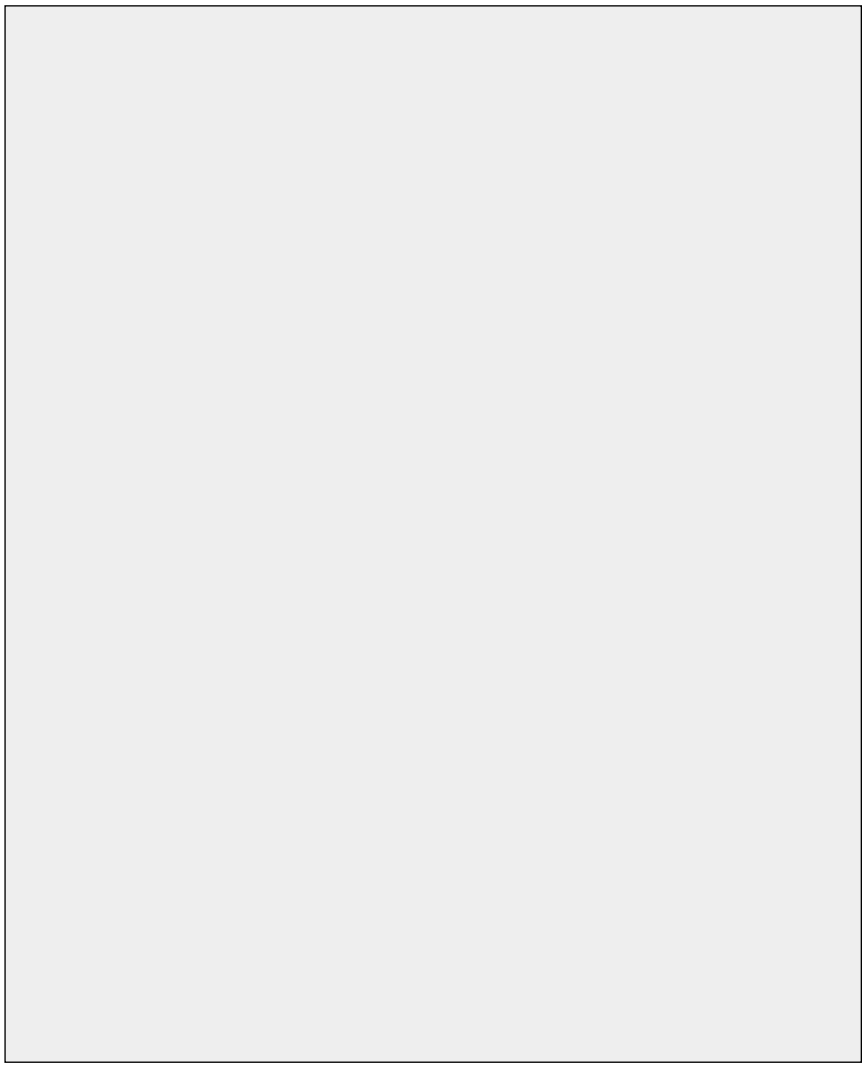

for an advocacy programme. A second series, Corridors of Power, explores the internal operations of key target institutions for advocacy–UK Parliament and government departments, the European Union, the World Bank, the IMF and WTO–and how to pick the right moments and people for influence. A third examines the issues for advocacy: aid quantity and quality, trade, debt, the arms trade. These all draw on the skills and knowledge available within BOND's membership, and are backed up with guides on best practice and articles on current topics in the network's newsletter.

On aid quantity and quality, and on civil society and government relations–with the UK government and the European Union as primary targets for advocacy–BOND members advocate collectively. A small team in the network's Secretariat co-ordinates activities and represents members. On each subject area, an advisory or steering group of the organisations with a specialist interest in the topic is brought together. Their skills and knowledge underpin the planning of advocacy content and timing, and they meet with key officials as a group. Advocacy activities are then designed to combine the network's representation of its entire membership in meetings, media work and publications, improved co-ordination of the specialist organisations' individual activities, and supporting opportunities for members with little capacity to participate in activities with low investment of time and resources, such as letter-writing to ministers.

For us to be effective, we need to continue to build our collective and individual advocacy capacities.

Focused knowledge

Beyond the core subjects for the whole network, groups of members work together on more specialist topics. While these groups often focus on exchange of information and learning from each other's experience, some work together on advocacy. On disability and development, reproductive health, Eastern Europe, participating in a group enables organisations with specialties in their development activities to recognise and use their focused knowledge for advocacy. BOND's Development and Environment Group recently enabled members to work together on issues for the World Summit on Sustainable Development: providing NGO representatives for UK government and EU delegations; collaborating on development of common positions; and enabling a wider range of organisations than would otherwise have been possible to build an effective engagement.

BOND's advocacy work is still in its early years. The network is still learning much about how to make this combination of activities effective. It is certain that the expectation that Northern NGOs engage in advocacy will continue to grow, and that for us to be effective in our influencing work, we need to continue to build our collective and individual advocacy capacities. Increasing the scale of impact is vital, but so is diversity in civil society; networks are a crucial means of enabling both. ■

Richard Bennett is General Secretary of BOND, a UK-based network of more than 270 international development non-governmental organisations.

Carving a niche in New York

Nicola Reindorp

'[P]urely governmental clubs that have habitually treated voluntary organisations with disdain, and commerce with hostility, have the smell of decay in a world where events are increasingly shaped by forces outside government.' (Righter, 1995:5)[1]

IN JANUARY 2002, Oxfam International (OI) established a new advocacy office in New York to strengthen Oxfam's advocacy on protection of people from disasters and violence–one of Oxfam's five overall aims for its work across the world. The office is a satellite of the confederation's first advocacy office in Washington, D.C., focused on the World Bank and IMF, and is a counterpart of two new offices in Brussels and Geneva focused respectively on influencing the European Union and the World Trade Organisation. Together, these offices reflect the growing commitment of the 12 organisations that constitute Oxfam International to be a global campaigning force that needs to seize the information and influencing opportunities in key Northern capitals, as well as collaborating with allies across the South.

Increasing openness

By opening the office, Oxfam–like other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have established New York offices in recent years–has been able to take advantage of the increasing openness of the United Nations system to NGOs. In numerical terms, the pace of change is striking: in 1968, 377 NGOs were affiliated with the United Nations.[2] By 1998, this number had grown to 1,350. Four years later, this number has almost doubled again: today there are 2,143 NGOs formally linked to the United Nations through the Economic and Social Council. This is a reflection of changes in the world outside. It is also a result of determined advocacy by the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

The timely provision of situation reports from NGO staff can be essential briefing material.

These numbers point to a cultural shift, as NGOs obtain greater access to debate and decision-making–previously the preserve of governments. In 1996, the UN Security Council permitted NGOs to address it directly for the first time–on the situation in the Great Lakes. This has become a regular event. However, there is always a risk of backlash. Openness to non-governmental bodies in the United Nations has provoked suspicion among some UN Member States, who question the qualifications for representation, and accountability, of NGOs, not least when they perceive that NGO influence threatens to eclipse that of governments. And change comes slowly: much of the United Nations' daily work in New York, whether in the Security Council, or the committees or working groups of the General Assembly, goes on behind closed doors.

So what then is the role of NGO advocates in New York?

What the focus on the formal process obscures are the informal channels for influence. Member States

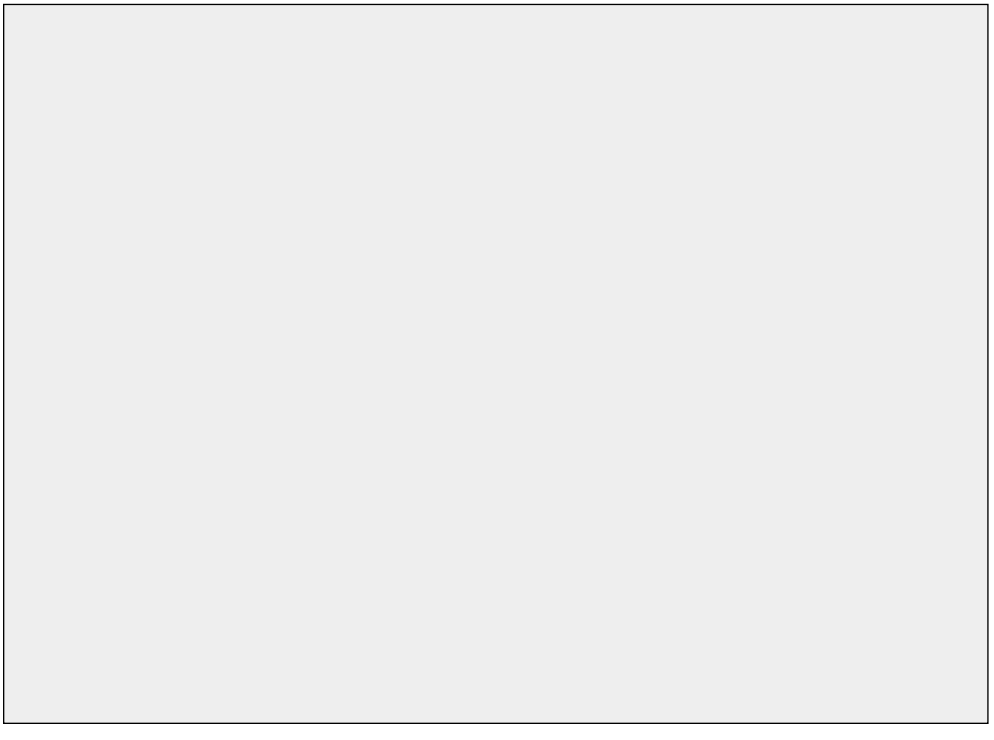

PHOTO BY HO, (C) REUTERS 2002

Oxfam and other organisations have been able to take advantage of the increasing openness of the United Nations system to NGOs. Here, the UN Security Council is shown during an October session.

are interested in NGOs' information and analysis. Particularly for smaller missions on the UN Security Council, with few foreign embassies sending information, the timely provision of situation reports from NGO staff in the countries of concern can be essential briefing material. Even the larger missions express interest in the different slant that comes from NGO staff and partners, compared with their diplomatic cables. Missions also express interest in NGOs' ideas and recommendations for action, particularly where the proposals are rooted in well-informed analysis and are deemed broadly possible within the prevailing political, economic or diplomatic constraints. Security Council ambassadors and Under-Secretaries-General also agree to meet regularly with NGOs at an NGO Working Group on the Security Council. Thus, meetings with NGOs–whether with small groups or in bilateral meetings at the missions–are a regular feature of the New York diplomatic arena.

Shorter meetings

Another key channel for NGOs to inform and influence the Council is via Arria Formula meetings (named after a Venezuelan Ambassador, Diego Arria, who crafted a formula to allow non-Council members to brief Council members outside the formal chamber of the Council itself). Although the meetings appear to be getting shorter in length, the format of three or four NGOs giving succinct briefings on a theme of the Council's choice and answering questions continues to be described by missions as a prized institution. However, detractors argue that their usefulness is weakened, as First Secretaries now attend more often than permanent representatives, reducing the meetings to empty gesture. Certainly, the range of questions that often comes up does not give the impression of Council members having a focused agenda on those things for which they want NGO input. There is also the risk that NGOs get co-opted, used as megaphone diplomats by missions seeking to influence one another.

All this comes with a caveat question about the extent to which decisions are taken in New York, or the extent to which influence on a mission translates back to the capital where policies and positions are being crafted. The degree of NGO influence in New York may be a factor of the power of the UN-based staff to steer their colleagues 'back at HQ.' Experience suggests that complementing advocacy in New York with lobbying in capitals is necessary to achieve the greatest impact.

The diversity of the NGO 'community' is an interesting facet of NGO advocacy in New York. The 2000+ NGOs accredited with ECOSOC (UN Economic and Social Council) span the gamut of development, humanitarian and human rights issues and range from small, New York-based organisations to multi-million dollar confederations with operations across much of the globe. Governments vary in their adeptness at dealing with this varied assortment of organisations. Most Security Council members appear willing to adjust to the huge range of concerns that NGOs have, accepting that there is a tacit division of labour among NGOs; but they also appear grateful for NGO efforts to co-ordinate themselves.

Most Security Council members appear willing to adjust to the huge range of concerns that NGOs have.

Besides the UN Member States, the organisations and departments of the United Nations itself are both important targets and allies in lobbying on effective responses to conflict and effective humanitarian assistance and protection. Links with the United Nations' 'humanitarian' funds and programmes and OCHA (UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs) are routine and collegial. More of a challenge is building bridges to the Departments of Political Affairs and Peacekeeping, both of whom have key roles to play in policy and advocacy on humanitarian protection, but who are more wary of NGOs.

Daily challenge

So what are the challenges to maximise advocacy impact?

If the strategic use of information and analysis is the key to NGO influence, ensuring that information gets from field programmes to New York targets at the right time is the principal challenge. Despite the increasing global reach of the larger NGO networks, their internal communication channels are not yet strong enough to take full advantage of the available influencing opportunities. Accompanying analysis with thoughtful recommendations remains a daily challenge, when events move fast and resources–not least time–is scarce. If NGOs are to maximise their influence, focus and follow-through are fundamental–in stark contrast to how the Council allows itself to operate. NGOs in New York also need to get better at using the New York-based media in order to increase the pressure on UN Member States to act in ways commensurate with their responsibility to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. ■

Nicola Reindorp is Director of Oxfam International's newly established advocacy office in New York.

1. Righter, R. (1995) *Utopia Lost–The United Nations and the World Order.* (Brookings Institution Press: Washington DC).

2. Through their consultative status with the Economic and Social Committee ECOSOC.

Advocacy and NGOs: In search of legitimacy

Eduardo Nunes

POVERTY IS MORE than simply material privation. It is a process that transforms men and women into things, stripping them of their humanity. This goes beyond mere privation, and lies at the heart of the problem.

Seeing the poor only as those in need of food or material goods diminishes the nature and scope of the problem. If we see the poor only as needy beings, we do them a great disservice. Such a perspective ignores two basic realities:

a) the poor are excluded because they have been prevented from speaking for themselves;

b) all NGOs–even those who would seem to be advocates for the poor–have agendas of their own. Those who see the solution to poverty only in terms of providing material goods may ignore the fact that an even deeper need is for them to have their voices heard.

One could argue that NGOs cannot truly speak for the poor–with the obvious exception of groups made up of the poor, themselves. However, they can be of some help if they try to amplify the voice of the poor.

Political poverty

Closely related to this discussion, however, is the question of political poverty. To attempt to defend the rights of the poor is important. Helping them find their voice in the political arena is even more useful. Once the poor have a voice that can be heard, they can begin speaking for themselves.

For NGOs' advocacy work with and for the poor to be legitimate and efficient, some elements need to be present:

a) Those working on behalf of the poor should try to strengthen the poor's capacity for critical awareness, thereby enabling the poor themselves to reflect on their own situation.

b) With an awareness of some of poverty's underlying causes, advocacy workers should support the search for alternatives. This links the political dimension to other dimensions, such as economy, technology and social reconstruction. Advocacy cannot be effective if it is limited to only pointing out shortcomings. How can the market–despite its obvious problems–be dealt with in a way that benefits the poor, and helps increase their competitive capacity? This is the kind of action that can, for example, change trade politics, increase the minimum wage, and even improve education and health.

All NGOs–even those who would seem to be advocates for the poor–have agendas of their own.

c) Advocacy that empowers rather than deprives the poor of their voice should pay attention to what grassroots organisations among them are saying.

Irreplacable role

This is an area in which the role of NGOs is clear and almost irreplaceable. Once poor communities organise themselves locally, they must build links that extend beyond their immediate borders. If national governments (and multi-lateral organisations) are not acting in the interests of all citizens, these links may build bridges between groups in different countries, thus fostering local and global change.

These elements may help clarify errors and increase the efficacy of advocacy actions.

Advocacy based on respect, dialog and empowerment of the poor may create a new dynamic of change that helps bring about the reduction of human privation and fosters the creation of societies characterised by peace and justice. ■

Eduardo Nunes, Ph.D., is Director of Strategy and Policy for World Vision Brazil.

PHOTO BY STR, (C) REUTERS 2002

A landless mother in Brazil holds a child and a club during a protest rally in Brasilia.

Filling in the gaps

George Mkanza

RECENT structural adjustment programmes, local government reforms, and the shift toward globalisation have created a demand for more representative democracy and more participation of civil society in public policy discussions.

Globalisation has generated shifting patterns of poverty and insecurity both within and between countries that call for new and diverse responses. As actors in an emerging global civil society, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can help create a countervailing force by taking an active role in public policy discussions.

Advocacy is the process that aims to change policies, positions or programmes in government, international agencies and organisations, and multilateral and bilateral organisations. The aim of advocacy work is to influence policies and decisions, as well as behaviour and attitudes, in order to eliminate any form of injustice and discrimination that may be directed toward a particular group.

NGOs have few formal powers over national and international decision-making, but they can, and do, make a difference in such things as community empowerment, the promotion of sustainable livelihood, children's and women's development and participation in community life, and leadership enhancement. In African countries, a growing number of NGOs with relief and rural development programmes have been formed to fill the gaps left by governments. Most NGOs were established to empower communities, meet local needs, defend their interests, or promote new policies.

NGOs can, and do, make a difference in such things as community empowerment and child development.

NGOs become involved in advocacy work for a number of reasons. For instance:

* Various factors in the private and public arenas contribute to poverty, livelihood insecurity, discrimination and violations of human rights. Significant impact can only be achieved through changes in the policies and actions of government and other institutions.
* Advocacy is an integral part of development activities that seek to tackle the root causes of poverty, thereby ensuring that any work done will have long-term impact.
* Poverty and discrimination often result from policy decisions made at community, national and international levels.
* Through engagement in pubic policy discussions, NGOs empower community members to hold policymakers accountable for their areas of responsibility.

Varying roles

NGOs' roles in bringing about change in public policy vary greatly, depending on how government policies and programmes affect development. The role of the NGO can range from substituting for a government when it is weak, to implementing government policy, to placing concerns on the public agenda, to generating and demonstrating alternative programmes, to co-operating with government in formulating and writing new policies, to educating and mobilising the public and lobbying government officials, and discussing what they consider to be unjust or unwise policy.

No matter what the role NGOs play, they can serve as catalysts for overcoming constraints on positive development policies. Toward this end, NGOs need to seek constructive collaboration with governments, rather than simply analyse and criticise their policies and operations.

There are a number of reasons given for why some NGOs are not involved in advocacy work. Some say they don't see advocacy as their job.

PHOTO BY STR, (C) REUTERS 2002

Mwajab Rajab (left) and her grandchild, Salehe, stand with their neighbour, Asha, outside their mud and wattle hut in Boko village, on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam.

WORLD VISION PHOTO BY NIGEL MARSH

'Through engagement in public policy discussions, NGOs empower community members to hold policymakers accountable.'

Some feel powerless to effect change, or fear reprisals from host governments and donors. Or, if they do see it as an important part of their role, they nevertheless allow the daily demands of their field activity to take precedence. At times, the complexity of policy issues involved, the cost of taking on additional programme activity, or the dependence of NGOs on government funding, may factor into why some NGOs shy away from being engaged in advocacy work.

Clear sense of strategy

To be effective in advocacy, NGOs must develop a clearer sense of strategy, find better ways of linking local-level action and analysis with advocacy, develop viable alternatives to current orthodoxies, and smooth relations with governments and donors. In addition, they must continue to form broad alliances with other NGOs, and enhance the competency of their staff for successful advocacy work.

In World Vision Tanzania, we have intentionally focused on grassroots advocacy, seeking to empower local communities to engage in advocacy initiatives. We focus on intensive and regular capacity building in order to help local communities enhance advocacy initiatives and build community participation.

We have intentionally focused on grassroots advocacy, seeking to empower local communities.

We initiated a full-fledged advocacy unit in 1999. The main focus has been on FGM (female genital mutilation) eradication, girl child rights (access to quality education), child rights promotion (especially with regard to participation and protection), and the promotion of gender mainstreaming in all of our activities. We have initiated sensitisation workshops, promoted the formation of Children and Advocacy committees in all our projects, and established grassroots linkages with national and international forums.

At the project level, we have created advocacy sub-committees, whose roles are: mobilise community members, facilitate advocacy at the grassroots level, lobby local leaders on the enforcement of laws and bylaws related to advocacy issues, participate and assist in data collection, develop and deliver advocacy messages, and document and review community engagement in girl child education, FGM and child rights.

So far, we have learnt that effective advocacy must be integrated in all of our project work in order to achieve sustainability. We have learnt that effective advocacy must be community-owned, but have links between grassroots, national and international levels. We are also learning that it can be slow and sometimes discouraging. Nevertheless, as with any worthwhile endeavour, we know we must press ahead. ■

George Mkanza is National Director of World Vision Tanzania.

Bridging the gulf

Kathy Vandergrift

A SIGH OF RELIEF greeted the end of the last G-8 Summit, held in June 2002 at a remote site in Kananaskis, Alberta, Canada. No one had been killed, no property had been destroyed, no violent confrontations led to police brutality. G-8 leaders, the police, and advocacy groups could all declare victory in the battle of wits and wills over the shape of global development.

A closer look at this event reveals some important trends for global advocacy and a significant challenge. Concern about the impacts of G-8 policies for the poor gained public support. Through careful planning, advocacy groups demonstrated that different styles of advocacy and protest can complement each other. To achieve their objectives, however, advocacy groups will need to bridge the gulf between street politics and electoral politics.

The death of a protestor during the previous G-8 meeting in Genoa doubled the resolve of G-8 governments to limit protest and win the communications battle this time. In Canada, the escalating pattern of violence during the 2000 Summit of the Americas in Quebec City and the 2001 meeting of the G-20 in Ottawa was of concern to government officials, police forces, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Hosting the G-8 challenged Canada's reputation for tolerance and decency.

Limiting voices of dissent

Some commentators suggested that fear of terrorism was used to justify restrictions on public movement and expenditures on security that would not have been acceptable under other circumstances. Critics also claimed that, beyond security, event organisers tried to limit the space for voices of dissent in order to control the message and public opinion. It almost seemed as though they were convinced that the main problem with previous events was a failure to communicate the benefits of economic liberalisation.

The situation was complicated by the focus on Africa. The main critique of the proposed New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was that it claimed ownership by the African people for a plan that was hatched by a few leaders and appeared to be recycling already discredited World Bank and IMF schemes. Advocacy groups faced the challenge of maintaining a positive focus on African development while being critical of NEPAD.

Rules of engagement

Some African voices were heard at an earlier two-day conference on NEPAD, sponsored by CIDA, the Canadian development agency. Closer to the G-8 meeting, a G6B policy conference (for the 6 billion people affected by the G-8) was organised by NGOs in Calgary.

Strategies to avoid violence were developed by advocacy groups, and unofficial rules of engagement were negotiated with police forces. Media coverage of maps and tactics by both sides increased tensions and, indirectly, the onus on all sides to prevent violence.

Advocacy groups found creative ways to get their message over the barricades. The creativity drew public support. Young marchers proclaiming their call for justice, in some ways, is a more compelling image than the formal pose of G-8 leaders against a scenic Rocky Mountain vista.

Official G-8 statements reflect some of the specific issues, such as regulating the diamond trade. Progress on more fundamental issues, such as debt cancellation, is hard to find. Most analysts would agree that G-8 leaders were forced to address concerns they would not have had to if there were not protestors as well as campaigners.

Dark side of G-8 policies

No research on public opinion has been released, but informal indicators suggest that the non-violent, creative campaigns increased public awareness of the dark side of G-8 policies. Fair trade, reform of the World Bank and IMF, more attention to HIV/AIDS and arms control gained public support. Within a genuine pluralism of voices, Christian groups, along with those of other faiths, could bear witness to the implications of their faith for public policy choices. The civil tolerance of diversity on the street seemed more democratic than the back-room trade-offs among G-8 leaders.

Global advocacy is becoming a fine art. It is being conducted in parallel to electoral politics and official governing systems; that presents a challenge. The reasons why so many people, particularly young people, have dropped out of mainstream politics are understandable. But there is a need for people of good will within the system as well as on the protest line. NGOs are not a substitute for good governance.

Democracies in developed countries need revitalisation, and democracies in developing countries need to be strengthened. Democracy needs to be more than electoral machines and popularity contests. If advocacy groups want to correct the flaws and reform the core values of governments, they cannot avoid the system. Bridging the gap between official governing processes and advocacy campaigns is a challenge we all need to address. ■

Kathy Vandergrift is senior policy analyst, Advocacy and Government Relations, World Vision Canada.

Accent on justice

Don Posterski

MY PIANO PLAYING CAREER ended early. Although I officially passed grade six, my technique was more a matter of memory and rote than the expression of an artist. One code on the musical score that I do remember enjoying, however, was the accent. Whenever I saw that indicator, I knew I had permission to pound out that particular bar of music with all the muscle I could muster. The result would not have pleased the composer, but the added crescendo did make me feel better.

When we read the biblical account of Jesus challenging the scribes and Pharisees, the issue is really about getting the accent right. It is adding crescendo in our lives to that the Creator God is able to say, 'We've got it right.' Listen to Jesus' concern:

Emphasise justice

'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You tithe...but you have neglected the weightiest matters of the law: Justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others' (Matt. 23:23, NRSV).

In other words, scribes and Pharisees, 'You've got the accent wrong. Among the other important matters of faith, you need to emphasise justice.'

Jesus encounter with the Pharisees tends to trouble me. I feel hypocritical, too. Although I'm a strong believer in the centrality of justice in the Christian life, when I'm honest, the

The longing to be loved and the desire to love is often more powerful in me than a yearning for the justice of others.

longing to be loved and the desire to love are often more powerful in me than a yearning for the justice of others.

Without escaping my dilemma, I do wonder if, systematically, being loved and having the capacity to love is what really generates a persevering 'accent on justice.' In other words, I suspect that it is only when we receive God's love with all the enabling impact that God's presence generates in us that we will find ourselves really yearning for justice for others.

Fuel for justice

How, then, can we get the accent right? When love and mercy and forgiveness flows from God to us, we are touched and changed. God's loving presence in us becomes the fuel for justice. We are energised to express peceptive words and strategic deeds. We are motivated to bow down and discern what to groan in our prayers. We are guided in how to effectively pursue our personal and organisational advocacy–to defend people who are exploited by those with unchecked power, to champion the dignity of children, and create opportunities for people who have inherited circumstances that are unbearable.

Maybe those piano lessons weren't a waste after all. ■

Don Posterski is Director of Church Relations for World Vision International.

WORLD VISION is a Christian relief and development partnership that serves more than 75 million people in nearly 90 countries. World Vision seeks to follow Christ's example by working with the poor and oppressed in the pursuit of justice and human transformation.

Children are often most vulnerable to the effects of poverty. World Vision works with each partner community to ensure that children are able to enjoy improved nutrition, health and education. Where children live in especially difficult circumstances, surviving on the streets, suffering in exploitative labour, or exposed to the abuse and trauma of conflict, World Vision works to restore hope and to bring justice.

World Vision recognises that poverty is not inevitable. Our Mission Statement calls us to challenge those unjust structures that constrain the poor in a world of false priorities, gross inequalities and distorted values. World Vision desires that all people are able to reach their God-given potential, and thus works for a world that no longer tolerates poverty. ■

BACK COVER PHOTO BY CLAUDIA DAUT, (C) REUTERS 2002: A HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST HOLDS A CANDLE OUTSIDE CHILE'S SUPREME COURT IN THE CAPITAL CITY, SANTIAGO.

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