Linking the levels?:
The organisation of UK development NGOs’ advocacy

End of grant report for DfID (ESCOR) R7314
“Organising NGOs’ Transnational Advocacy:
Organisational frameworks and organisational effectiveness”

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The UK Department for International Development (DfID) supports policies, programmes and projects to promote international development. DfID provided funds for this study as part of that objective but the views and opinions expressed are those of the author alone.
Over the last few years UK-based development NGOs have increased their advocacy and policy work. Most NGOs see the link between their micro-level operational experience and their advocacy as central to the legitimacy and effectiveness of their advocacy. This study examined the ways in which NGOs seek to make this link, and how they grapple with issues of legitimacy, accountability, governance, and evaluation. Questions are raised as to whether organisational structures which evolved for hands-on development work are suitable for a focus on advocacy. NGOs need to actively work at linking the levels, and to seek to mainstream advocacy within their overall activities.

NGOs and other civil society groups are increasingly important and prominent actors in international development. ‘Being international’ is often seen as providing such organisations with a privileged perspective on the links between national and international policy decisions and on-the-ground developmental impacts. This study sought to unpack the idea of ‘being international’ through archival work and the use of systematic qualitative methods. Forty-four in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with UK NGO staff members and DfID officials, with computer-assisted qualitative data analysis techniques employed to systematically analyse this data. It was found that:

- Many NGOs have shifted their activities towards advocacy and policy-work, largely in an effort to scale-up their developmental impacts.
- The role of advocacy is often poorly-understood within NGOs, with tensions arising around its relationship to marketing, fund-raising and more traditional development work.
- NGOs enjoy good relations with DfID, although there are some concerns about NGOs’ independence and autonomy.
- ‘Legitimacy’ is often used as a synonym for accountability, representation, effectiveness and expertise, making ‘legitimacy debates’ less than clear.
- NGOs claim legitimacy for their advocacy from a variety of bases. Only ten percent of the NGOs examined claim to represent the South, but legitimacy is most often claimed on the basis of links to, and experience in, the South.
- NGOs remain weakly accountable to the Southern groups whose interests they claim to promote.
- Whilst some effort is being made to develop suitable evaluation methodologies, most NGOs conduct very limited evaluations of their advocacy.

The policy-relevant lessons of the findings include:

- NGOs’ must base their advocacy on clear understandings of the relevant policy processes, and work to make the link between operational experience and advocacy messages.
- NGOs must strive to demonstrate the value of advocacy and respond to doubts about their legitimacy and accountability.
- DfID must be clear about what it feels NGOs should do to increase their legitimacy and accountability, and should encourage NGOs’ efforts to become more accountable and transparent.
- DfID must be clear and transparent in its relationships with NGOs to ensure that close partnerships do not compromise NGOs’ independence.
- DfID should strengthen its support for UK NGOs’ efforts to increase their development awareness and educational activities.
- DfID should continue to support the Southern capacity-building role of UK NGOs.
• DFID should promote the evaluation of advocacy work, and the development of innovative evaluation methodologies.

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Sources


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Linking the levels?:
The organisation of UK development NGOs’ advocacy

1.0 Background and objectives

The initial aim of this research project was to understand the relationship between the organisational frameworks which UK-based international development NGOs (NGDOs) adopt for their advocacy work, and the effectiveness of such advocacy, in order to inform their advocacy activities, improve their relations with target-groups such as the Department for International Development (DfID), and increase their effectiveness.

Theoretically, the research proposal was informed by a growing recognition of the roles of non-state actors in the workings of the international political economy, as part of a wider set of challenges – often termed globalisation – to state sovereignty as the key ordering principle of international relations (see, for example, Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton 1999; Higgott, Underhill and Bieler, 2000; O’Brien et al, 2000; Reinicke, 1998; Rosenau, 1997). More specifically, and more empirically, the research proposal was concerned to examine and understand the changing roles of NGDOs (Lewis, 1999). Over the past decade Northern NGDOs have become increasingly involved in advocacy and policy work in an effort to influence the policies of consumers, corporations, governments and international organisations. NGDOs have altered the mix of their activities in recognition of the fact that traditional ‘operational’ development activities are ineffective and unsustainable when poor communities find themselves in an unfavourable national and international policy environment which is beyond their control (Edwards and Hulme, 1992).

Many commentators have assumed that ‘being international’ gives international NGDOs a comparative advantage in their efforts to influence policy, enabling them to link grassroots experience with advocacy at national and global levels. However, little attention has been given to the problems of ‘being international’. This research project sought to unpack the idea of ‘being international’, looking at the costs and benefits of different ways of organising transnational advocacy. Beginning with a simple conceptual framework which related ‘organisational framework’ to ‘organisational effectiveness’, the research project developed into a broader examination of the issues which NGDOs face in organising their transnational advocacy – including issues of governance, legitimacy and accountability – and the various ways in which NGDOs seek to deal with such issues. The research project was progressively developed in this way to take account of data availability issues, measurement problems, and the emergence of new themes during the course of the research.
2.0 Methods

The research project was funded from April 1999 to March 2000, with initial research beginning in early 1998 (see appendix A2.1). There were five stages to the research process:

**Stage 1:** Literature review concerning non-state actors, the development and roles of NGOs, the advocacy and policy work of NGOs, NGOs’ organisational structures, and ways of assessing the effectiveness of advocacy and policy work (See enclosed paper 1).

**Stage 2:** Meetings with a variety of individuals and groups from within the NGDO sector, to focus in on a useful and feasible research project (A2.2).

**Stage 3:** Finalising the research proposal and applying for funding. Funding applications to DfID’s ESCOR (£8500) and the Nuffield Foundation (£5000) were successful.

**Stage 4:** Data collection, with research assistance, extending from May to October 1999. Employing a broad definition of ‘development’, individuals or departments at a wide range of UK-based NGDOs, and departments within DfID, were selected. Around 100 letters were sent out, explaining my research project and requesting a research interview (A2.3). Forty-four hour-long research interviews were arranged, conducted and taped (A2.4). Interviews were semi-structured, addressing a common range of issues but allowing the interviewee to shape the course of the interview (A2.5). In addition, supplementary documents such as Annual Reports were collected to provide further data about the activities and finances of the NGDO in question. Interviews were transcribed and data extracted from the supplementary documentary material.

**Stage 5:** Data analysis, taking a variety of forms. A first step was the construction of a ‘results table’ which compared the NGDOs in terms of 31 variables (A2.6), the plotting of NGDOs in terms of each of these variables, and the writing of summary pieces about how the NGDOs vary in terms of each of these variables. This process, and the construction of diagrams depicting the “organisational shape” (A2.7) of each NGO, allowed the speedy comparison of NGDOs to identify similarities and differences, and develop a preliminary taxonomy of NGDOs (A2.8). A second step involved the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis to facilitate the systematic analysis of qualitative data. Interview transcripts were imported into the software (Atlas.ti) and coded (A2.9). In this way all sections of the interviews which were about, for example, ‘legitimacy’, were compared, and their links to other codes, such as ‘representation’, explored. Codes were then grouped, enabling the development of ideas at higher levels of abstraction and helping me to make sense of the data (A2.10). A final step in the analysis involved writing pieces about codes (e.g. ‘pressures to evaluate’),
and groups of codes (e.g. ‘evaluation motives’ which includes ‘pressures to evaluate’, ‘evaluation for whom’, ‘evaluation why’, and ‘evaluation impact’) as summaries of the research findings, which will form the basis of subsequent reports and papers (A2.11).

3.0 Research findings: UK NGDOs and advocacy

3.1 The growth of NGDOs’ advocacy

‘Advocacy’ has a wide range of meanings for NGDOs. Most frequently, advocacy is seen as involving efforts to change institutions’ policies in ways which are expected to favour the poor and marginalised. Confusion about the meaning of advocacy arises from the fact that its central meaning is often confused with the range of approaches to advocacy, the mixture of activities which can be part of advocacy, the variety of target groups that advocacy can involve, and the diverse bases which advocacy programmes might be built on.

Advocacy is widely seen as having grown rapidly over the last five years. Definitional problems, with some of the ‘growth’ being a re-labelling of pre-existing activities, make a clear assessment of the growth of advocacy problematic. However, advocacy is definitely a growth area. As with other development trends – such as participation, micro-credit, and gender-sensitive analysis – advocacy has rapidly diffused through the NGDO community, with only a few conservative NGDOs opting out of the trend, a trend that a small number of NGDOs saw as an unhelpful bandwagon.

Fashion and the demonstration effect across the NGDO sector is an important factor in the growth of advocacy, but many NGDOs see their shift towards advocacy in quasi-evolutionary terms. At a slightly abstract level some NGDOs see their shift to advocacy in relation to debates about the role of Northern NGOs (NNGOs) in an emerging global civil society. More concretely, many NGDOs see their shift to advocacy coming about in recognition of the limited and short-term impacts of traditional operational development work, and in an effort to “scale up” their impact. As one interviewee put it, it is felt that “advocacy work can deliver a bigger bang for your buck”.

3.2 Doing advocacy

NGDOs’ advocacy activities are based upon policy analysis, research, and the channelling of information. On these bases they engage in a range of activities from awareness-raising, through development education, networking, capacity-building, lobbying and campaigning, to, in a few cases, direct action. The sorts of issues which NGDOs advocate about range from general principles of inclusion and participation in decision-making, through macro issues such as reform of the WTO and the regulation of MNCs, to specific issues such as education, debt, child labour, food security, biotechnology and reproductive health. Many interviewees report that a tight focus on specific issues,
perhaps as a way in to wider themes, is key to successful advocacy. NGDOs’ advocacy targets institutions at a variety of levels – international organisations, national governments and departments, corporations, trades unions and other NGDOs. The selection of target groups ought to be issue-driven, based on a clear understanding of the policy process, with messages tailored for particular target groups.

Approaches to advocacy are shaped by understandings of what advocacy is, by NGDOs’ size and resources, and by the issue and target group in question. Many NGDOs, as well as DfID officials, value the diversity of approaches both within and between NGDOs. Thirty percent of NGDOs see themselves as technical specialists with a particular niche within the NGDO landscape, a position which shapes their relations with DfID and other target groups. Most of the NGDOs appreciate the benefits of having clear advocacy strategies, but very few have them.

Whilst a small number of NGDOs seek to “mainstream” advocacy, in many cases the role of advocacy departments is poorly understood, under-valued and seen as secondary to hands-on operational work. Internal legitimacy issues about the position of advocacy, and its relationship to activities such as fund-raising and marketing, create tensions and put advocacy workers under pressure to justify their activities.

3.3 DfID, Financing and funding
The large majority of NGDOs enjoy good relations with DfID. NGDOs have a broadly positive view of DfID, seeing it as “on the ball” and “ahead of the game”. DfID appreciates that it is the job of NGDOs to provide constructive criticism. Occasional tensions arise due to the styles of individual DfID officials, or from an NGDO’s adoption of confrontational tactics. DfID is seen as open to input from NGDOs, although several NGDOs are unsure about who they ought to be dealing with within DfID, and also express some frustration with what are sometimes seen as rather tokenistic consultation exercises.

Although NGDOs rarely receive funding – from DfID or elsewhere – specifically for advocacy, their funding mix clearly shapes their identity, with balanced funding portfolios providing greater freedom. Few NGDOs experience problems as a result of DfID sometimes being both a donor and a target group for advocacy. This is because: NGDOs very rarely receive DfID funding for advocacy which might be targeted at DfID; DfID is a large and complex institution with compartmentalised funding and policy functions; and, NGDOs tend not to take a confrontational approach to DfID. However, the possibility of such donor/target tensions arising is appreciated, and there are some fears about (financial) independence, the “over-cosy” relationships which some of the larger agencies are seen as
having with DFID, and the implications of Partnership Programme Agreements and an emerging contract culture.

3.4 Legitimacy, representation and accountability

When the ‘legitimacy’ of NGDOs’ advocacy is discussed, the word often stands in for issues of accountability, representation, effectiveness, credibility, authority, expertise and comparative advantage. ‘Legitimacy’ debates need clarifying and disaggregating into, at least: legitimacy for what?; legitimacy to whom?; and, legitimacy on what basis? However, whilst legitimacy debates are muddled, NGDOs keenly feel the pressures – from target groups, Southern partners, and funders - to establish their right to express their views, and to be listened to by DFID and other target groups.

NGDOs claim legitimacy for their advocacy on a variety of bases. Ten percent make modest claims, or avoid the term/practice of advocacy as it is felt to be disempowering. Ten percent claim legitimacy in terms of organisational structures - staffing, governance, and formally democratic membership structures. Fifteen percent state that their legitimacy derives from/is illustrated by their history and institutional survival. Fifty percent claim legitimacy on the basis of links with the South which provide them with expertise and experience, with only a fifth of these claiming to be ‘speaking for’ the South. It is disingenuous to dismiss NGDOs en masse as unrepresentative, as only ten percent of them claim legitimacy in terms of simplistic representation. That said, rather more of the NGDOs do describe what they do in terms of promoting values or interests which come from their experience in the South.

Most NGDOs see the quality of the relationship between their programmes and advocacy work as crucial to their legitimacy and effectiveness, and many are actively working to improve this connection. Work with Southern partner organisations is central to this, providing the evidence, legitimacy and rationale for advocacy. However, NGDOs do lack formal or substantive mechanisms of accountability to their intended beneficiaries for their advocacy work. NGDOs are confused by multiple accountabilities, and by questions about what they ought to be accountable for (inputs, outputs, outcomes or impacts?). In part, this is due to the complexity of advocacy work, involving a lengthy chain between the micro and the macro, which makes the tracing of connections of causality, responsibility, legitimacy, representation and accountability extremely difficult. NGDOs which were established for ‘hands-on’ development work and the channelling of funds have not established organisational structures to ensure that they are accountable for their advocacy.

Micro-macro links are very important for the legitimacy and effectiveness of advocacy, but NGDOs also argue that there are other bases for their advocacy work. In an emerging international division of
labour, UK NGDOs feel that they are able to add value on the basis of comparative advantages such as their: skills in policy analysis and the ability to spot threats to, and opportunities for, Southern partners; access to and knowledge of Northern and international institutions; access to resources and information; experience of international policy debates; and, large UK constituencies. Whilst NGDOs do see continuing roles for themselves in international development, targeting Northern institutions and raising awareness about international development issues as part of UK civil society, they are enthusiastically seeking to build the capacity of Southern NGOs (SNGOs) and communities to take control of their own advocacy and development. Although some concern is expressed that direct funding of SNGOs might weaken the link between NNGOs’ operational and advocacy work, DfID’s role in strengthening Southern civil society is widely supported.

3.5 Evaluation
NGDOs evaluate, or consider evaluating, advocacy for a variety of reasons. Firstly, evaluation is for learning: to advocate more effectively next time; to develop advocacy skills and capacities; and, to make more informed decisions about the allocation of resources. Secondly, evaluation is about demonstrating the value of advocacy. Thirdly, evaluation is about establishing just what it is that an NGDO can be accountable for. NGDOs are beginning to respond to increasing pressures to evaluate their advocacy, pressures which they see as coming from within individual NGDOs, from funders, and from the wider NGDO community. However, several NGDOs feel that there is less pressure to evaluate advocacy than they might expect, in part because they receive little funding specifically for advocacy, and because there is a lack of attention to issues of impact.

In general, NGDOs’ evaluation of advocacy is very limited, with most NGDOs struggling to get to grips with it. NGDOs which do evaluate their advocacy tend to focus on activities/inputs or outputs, less frequently considering outcomes, and very rarely looking at impacts. Evaluation activities tend to take the form of “counting the shots” (meetings held, letters written, column inches), collecting anecdotes, and recording changes in policy wording. The cutting edge of evaluating advocacy involves efforts to deal systematically with qualitative data, and to map out the complex processes and multi-dimensional nature of advocacy with a view to developing indicators for different stages in the policy process, and in relation to advocacy at various levels. NGDOs at the forefront of evaluating advocacy recognise that the aims of evaluation and the nature of the specific advocacy campaign ought to shape the evaluation process. A pre-requisite for evaluating advocacy is the establishment of clear, although perhaps flexible, goals at the outset of an advocacy campaign. Whilst NGDOs are less anti-logframes than might be expected, there is some concern that the use of logframes might limit NGDOs’ ability to seriously involve partners in evaluation, and constrain efforts to develop innovative evaluation methodologies.
NGDOs face a variety of problems in their efforts to evaluate advocacy, many of which stem from the fact that advocacy is such a different sort of development activity from operational activities. Outcome-related problems include the fact that advocacy tends to have multiple objectives, a lack of baseline data, the relatively intangible nature of impacts, and, the fact that targets are unlikely to acknowledge that policy change came about as a result of NGDO pressure. As regards processes, evaluating advocacy is rendered problematic because of the complex, gradual and cumulative nature of advocacy for policy change, which makes the attribution of impact to advocacy by an NGDO extremely difficult. Finally, there is a paucity of methods for evaluating advocacy and it is difficult to know in advance what indicators might be suitable.

4.0 Recommendations for policy and practice

Through providing a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of the state of play of UK NGDOs’ advocacy, this research project has also generated some important points for policy and practice, for both NGDOs and DfID. As regards DfID, my recommendations for policy and practice are:

a) **Recognising the complexity of advocacy**
   - DfID should continue to recognise the complexity of advocacy work, and appreciate that developmental impacts are likely to be (even) more gradual and less predictable than in more hands-on development work.

b) **Valuing the diversity of UK NGDOs and maintaining their independence**
   - DfID should continue to value the diversity of UK NGDOs and – by being clear and transparent in its relationships with NGDOs - ensure that close partnerships do not compromise NGDOs’ independence.

c) **Supporting NGDO-NGDO cooperation**
   - DfID should support UK NGDOs which wish to co-operate in their research and policy analysis activities, reducing unnecessary duplication of effort and resource expenditure.

d) **Being clear about legitimacy**
   - DfID should avoid using ‘legitimacy’ as a synonym for effectiveness, accountability, representation, credibility, authority, expertise or comparative advantage. If DfID has concerns around NGDOs’ ‘legitimacy’ it must be clear about what it feels NGDOs should do to increase their legitimacy and accountability, and should encourage NGDOs’ efforts to become more accountable and transparent.
e) **Direct funding and the micro-macro link**
- DfID should ensure that its efforts to increase direct funding of SNGOs do not weaken the link between UK NGDOs’ operational and policy work.

f) **Supporting development awareness and education work**
- DfID should strengthen its support for UK NGDOs’ efforts to increase their development awareness and educational activities.

g) **Supporting Southern capacity-building role of UK NGDOs**
- DfID should continue to support the Southern capacity building role of UK NGDOs.

h) **Promoting flexible frameworks for evaluating advocacy**
- DfID should promote the evaluation of advocacy work, whilst ensuring that efforts to develop innovative evaluation methodologies are not stifled by the imposition of frameworks which are poorly suited to the complexities of advocacy.

5.0 **Dissemination**

Dissemination activities are ongoing, and have been central throughout the research process. Research ideas and results have been presented and discussed at a variety of meetings and conferences, as follows:

- Initial proposal outlined and developed.

b) **September 1998: Development Studies Association Annual Conference**
- Presentation of literature review/research proposal.

c) **January 1999: NGOs in a Global Future Conference**
- Presentation of literature review/research proposal (Enclosed paper 1).

d) **January-March 1999: British Overseas NGOs for Development, Advocacy Workshop**
- Presentation of research proposal and participation in four day-long workshops.
e) February 2000: **Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics, Research Seminar**
   - Presentation of preliminary research findings paper.

f) April 2000: **Association of American Geographers, Annual Conference**
   - Presentation of paper on “Advocacy across borders”.

g) May 2000: **“Organising NGOs’ advocacy” discussion, National Council for Voluntary Organisations**
   - Half-day workshop organised by myself with 25 participants.

Most of the above presentations have involved the production of presentations and papers for the audience/participants. I have also responded to many requests from around the world for copies of working papers and preliminary findings. One such paper (see enclosed paper 2) is to be published as:


A further dissemination activity undertaken on the basis of the research was a contribution to an **Open University/BBC Programme** on “Power” for the “Ever wondered?” series of Saturday morning programmes. The contribution was to a piece on “Is people power really powerful?”

Future plans for dissemination include:

- Research reports for the NGDO staff members involved in the research, and other interested parties.

- Possible development of a web-site facilitating the dissemination of research findings.

- Publications in practitioner-oriented journals such as *Development in Practice* and *IDS Bulletin*.

- Publications in development and voluntary-sector academic journals such as *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, Third World Quarterly, Voluntas* and *World Development*.

- Publications in international relations academic journals such as *Alternatives, Global Society, Millennium* and *Review of International Political Economy*.  

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Appendices

Appendix A1.0 Bibliography

This short annotated bibliography provides reference to some of the most useful papers that have been consulted as part of the research process.

Items referred to in research report


Additional literature about NGOs, the organisation of advocacy, and its evaluation


Theoretical, but useful, discussion of what makes an NGO ‘legitimate’.


One of the few efforts to grapple with effectiveness - in terms of relative/comparative effectiveness of different campaigns.


Includes some useful tools for looking at NGO campaigning and its effectiveness.
Useful critique of NGO advocacy with case studies.

Useful attempt to understand government-NGO relations.

Excellent discussion re UK NGOs and international advocacy, forms of advocacy, problems and possibilities.

Excellent paper on issues of legitimacy and values, institutional and developmental imperatives for NGDOs.

Papers from the second major UK NGOs conference - useful discussions of evaluating effectiveness.

Background paper to the third major UK NGOs conference - about changing context for NGOs, changing roles etc.

User-friendly guide to evaluation. Contains some useful conceptual frameworks, and ideas about indicators.

Discussion of some of the problems faced by NGOs in evaluating performance - multiple stakeholders, no bottom line etc.

Excellent book dealing with a whole range of NGO activities. Very user-friendly and addressed to NGO practitioners. Includes sections on North-South relations, and advocacy.


Useful paper about the ways in which NGOs might/should evolve.


Useful chapter on NGOs’ advocacy activities.


Very useful report about IDR’s work on advocacy.


Up to date review of evaluation issues.


Useful research note about the tricky management issues which international NGOs have to grapple with.


Useful paper about the implications of direct funding.


Interesting review of the issues facing Northern and Southern NGOs trying to develop partnerships.


Theoretical, but useful framework for thinking about accountability.


Simple, useful model for understanding government-NGO relations.

Useful discussion about legitimacy and impact of NGO networks lobbying the World Bank.


Critique of NGOs’ advocacy in relation to issues of legitimacy.


One of the few empirical attempts to assess effectiveness. Focus is on lobbying in US domestic politics, but is useful re operationalizing and studying effectiveness. Available at <http://www.aspeninst.org/dir/polpro/nstrf/enpatoc.html>


Comprehensive review of and handbook for evaluation.


Short article exclusively about assessing impact and effectiveness. Argues that evaluating effectiveness is very important and makes some suggestions for progress in this area.


Useful extension of Korten’s generational model of NGOs.


Useful background about international NGOs.


Fairly sympathetic critique of the NGO sector!


Up to date chapter about advocacy in terms of the UK voluntary sector.


Very useful attempt to provide some coherence and clarity to discussions of scaling up.
Case study of the processes of lobbying, issues and problems.

Special issue providing background to transnational NGOs and advocacy.

Discussion of problems for international advocacy associations, varieties of organizational structure etc.

Excellent paper looking at pros and cons of different organisational frameworks.

Provides some interesting tools for thinking about NGOs and their effectiveness - basically, a stakeholder approach.
Appendix A2.0 The research process

This appendix is included to provide further information about the research process. It is a research process appendix, rather than a collection of data, for reasons of space and confidentiality.

Appendix A2.1: Research activities

This is a record of meetings that took place as part of the research.

April 1998
Research meeting with Michael Edwards, NGO practitioner and researcher

June 1998
Research meeting with Raj Thamotheram, Ethical Trading Initiative

July 1998
Academic Council on the United Nations/American Society of International Law Summer Workshop

August 1998
Research meeting with Richard Bennett, BOND
Research meeting with David Lewis, LSE
Research meeting with Elsa Dawson, Strategic Planning and Evaluation Department, Oxfam

September 1998
Research meeting with Rick Davies, Centre for Development Studies, University of Swansea
Development Studies Association Conference

October 1998
Funding applications to DfID and Nuffield

January 1999
“NGOs in a Global Future” conference

February 1999
BOND Advocacy Workshop Session 1
BOND Advocacy Workshop Session 2

March 1999
BOND Advocacy Workshop Session 3
Research interview, Africa Resources Trust
BOND Advocacy Workshop Session 4

May 1999
Short presentation to UK Trade Network

June 1999
Research interview, Africa Resources Trust
Research interview, BOND
Attendance at DSA NGO study group on NGOs and Institutional Change
Research interview, Traidcraft Exchange
Research interview, Wateraid

July 1999
Research interview, Banana Link
Research interview, Marie Stopes International
Research interview, Christian Aid
Research interview, CAFOD
Research interview, Babymilk Action
Research interview, Population Concern
Appendix A2.2: Preliminary meetings

Preliminary meetings were held with:
- Michael Edwards – Former head of research at Save the Children Fund, and NGO commentator
- Raj Thamotheram – Former director of the Ethical Trading Initiative
- Richard Bennett – Director of BOND
- David Lewis – Centre for Civil Society, LSE
- Elsa Dawson – Strategic Planning and Evaluation Department, Oxfam
- Rick Davies – Centre for Development Studies, University of Swansea
Appendix A2.3: Interview request letter

This is an example of the letter that was sent to request research interviews.

Mr. John Smith,
Global Concern,
London.

18th August 1999

Dear Mr. Smith,

I am in the process of conducting a research project concerning the advocacy and lobbying work of international NGOs and am writing to ask if you would be willing to meet up with me, or my research assistant, for a research interview.

The research project is titled “Organising NGOs’ transnational advocacy: Organisational frameworks and organisational effectiveness”, and aims to inform NGOs’ advocacy work to improve its effectiveness. I should like to stress that this is not just an “academic” piece of research; I am fully committed to producing practically-useful findings and welcome the input of practitioners to make this possible.

I am particularly interested in the ways in which NGOs organise their advocacy work, whether and how such work is linked to operational programmes, and how issues of accountability, governance and legitimacy are dealt with. In addition, I am interested in whether and how NGOs assess the effectiveness of their advocacy and lobbying work.

The research interview would be conducted at your convenience at sometime over the next few weeks, and would last for approximately an hour. I promise to respect the confidentiality of your responses and, if you wish, provide you with a summary report on the outcomes of my research.

If you are willing, in principle, to meet up with me for a research interview please drop me a line so that we can make arrangements. I would be extremely grateful if you would be prepared to meet up with me.

Thanks for taking the time to read this, and to consider my request. Please get in touch if you have any questions or require any clarification. I look forward to hearing from you - e-mail is best.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Alan Hudson
Appendix A2.4: Organisations involved in the research

This is a list of the NGDOs and other organisations which directly contributed to the research through research interviews.

ACORD
Action Aid
Action on Disability and Development
Africa Resources Trust
Akina Mama wa Afrika
Anti-Slavery International
Babymilk Action
Banana Link
British Overseas NGOs for Development
CAFOD
Catholic Institute for International Relations
Child Hope
Christian Aid
Commonwealth Medical Association
Consumers International
DfID
Healthlink Worldwide
Help Age International
Intermediate Technology
International HIV/AIDS Alliance
Marie Stopes International
Minority Rights Group International
Oxfam
PANOS
Population Concern
Save the Children Fund
Tearfund
Tourism Concern
Traidcraft
VSO
War on Want
Wateraid
World Development Movement
World Vision
Appendix A2.5: An interview agenda
This is an example of the sort of agenda that was used during semi-structured research interviews.

Introduction
Where does Global Concern fit in the landscape of UK-based development NGOs? Similar organisations, competitors, collaborators?

How is Global Concern funded?

Organising advocacy
What does Global Concern understand advocacy to mean?

Does Global Concern have a stated advocacy strategy?

What is the position of advocacy within the organisation? Has this changed over the years? Why?

Organisational structures: Targets, donors and partners
Target groups:
What target groups do you advocate to? How do you do advocacy? On a day-to-day basis?

Is DFID a target?

Donors:
What are your relations with DFID like?

Do you receive DFID funding (for advocacy)?

How do relations with donors affect your advocacy work? Any constraints?

Partners and family:
Could you tell be a bit about the Global Concern family? How does it work?

How do you work with partners? Are they Global Concern partners or external partners? How does advocacy link with work with partners?

How do you decide which issues to focus on?

Do you consider yourself to be representing anybody when you do advocacy?

Where does your legitimacy as an advocate come from?

What happens when different parts of the family disagree?
**Effectiveness, evaluation and accountability**

**Effectiveness**
What factors make a campaign in/effective?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of Global Concern as an advocate?

**Evaluation**
Do you do any assessment of advocacy impact and effectiveness?

If you don’t, why not and any pressure to do so? (Internal and/or external)

If you do assess, why and how and for whom? Separate evaluation department?

Criteria of effectiveness? Clear goals? Output or process?

Do you think assessment is worth doing?

What do you do with the assessments? Do they have any impact?

Is evaluation necessary for accountability and legitimacy?

To whom are you accountable for your advocacy work? Upward and/or downward? Southern board members?

**Futures**
How do you see Global Concern changing over the next 5 or 10 years?

What do you think the role of NNGOs will be in 5 or 10 years time?

Other issues?

Useful output?
Appendix A2.6: Initial results categories
These are the categories which were used in an ‘initial results’ table, to compare the NGDOs examined.

1) Aims
2) Year of establishment
3) Annual Report: Do we have one? If so, what year?
4) Income: Year and source of information
5) Expenditure: Year and source of information
6) Staffing size: Tiny (<10), Small (<30), Medium (<71) large (>70): and total/UK split
7) Funding mix: Public donations, NGO grants, private grants, Govt. grants, income generation
8) International structure: Self-contained, loose network, tight network, federation.
9) Advocacy?: Understanding of advocacy
10) Position of advocacy within the NGDO: none, marginal, important, central
11) Experience of advocacy: new (2 years), recent (5), established (12), long-standing (22), always (23+)
12) Advocacy issues: Permanent, cyclical; Key issues or products.
13) Key target groups
14) Advocacy strategy: none, vague, clear, precise
15) Donor constraints: No, maybe, sometimes, yes
16) DfID relations: none, poor, OK, good
17) Partners: type
18) Programmes and advocacy connection: unconnected, loose link, integrated
19) Legitimacy sources
20) Accountability, downward: weak, moderate, good
21) Southern board members: no, token, yes
22) Evaluation of advocacy: none, a little, some, lots
23) Evaluation for whom: self, partners, donors
24) Evaluation why?
25) Evaluation, what?
26) Self-reflexive: a learning and thinking organisation? Yes or no?
27) Useful output: what would be useful in terms of research output
28) Strict advocacy?: representing or not?
29) Membership organisation: no or yes (types)
30) Approach: conservative, progressive, radical
31) Importance of channelling funds: none, marginal, important, central
Appendix A2.7: “Organisational shape” template

This is an example of the template which was developed and used to summarise the “organisational shape” of individual NGDOs.

**NGO: Global Concern**

**APPROACH:** Conservative

**TARGETS**

**EVALUATION**

A little, counting column inches

**MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS**

No members, UK financial supporters

**FUNDERS**

60% supporters
15% DfID, 15% EU, 10% trading

**ACCOUNTABILITY**

Weak

**AGE:** 24

**INCOME:** £10m

**STAFF:** 25

**OTHER NGOS**

Part of global alliance network

**SOUTHERN LINKS:** Partners & Programmes/Advocacy

Agricultural co-operatives in Africa and Asia

**DISTINCTIVE FEATURES:**

Deals with agricultural co-operatives.

**ADVOCACY UNDERSTANDING, POSITION AND DEVELOPMENT**

Advocacy as speaking for

Marginal to overall NGDO

Recent development
Appendix A2.8: A typology of NGDOs

This is a simple typology which was used to help me to make sense of the range of NGDOs.
Appendix A2.9: Codes and definitions

These are the “level 1” codes which were used in the analysis of the qualitative data within Atlas.ti, with brief descriptions of what they referred to.

Accountability: The extent and nature of reporting and information provision to Southern partners about what’s being done and why.

Activities: The activities (especially advocacy) of the NGDO.

Advocacy approach: The approach of the NGDO to advocacy.

Advocacy development: The ways in which the position of advocacy within the NGDO has developed.

Advocacy initiation: How and from where advocacy issues and positions arise.

Advocacy position: The position of advocacy within the wider NGDO.

Advocacy strategy-clear: Instances where the NGDO has a clearly stated advocacy strategy.

Advocacy strategy-none: Instances where the NGDO does not have an advocacy strategy.

Advocacy strategy-precise: Instances where the NGDO has a precise advocacy strategy, with indicators of success and failure.

Advocacy strategy-vague: Instances where the NGDO has a vague advocacy strategy.

Advocacy tension: The possibility/existence of tensions between advocacy and other NGDO activities such as marketing and fund-raising.

Advocacy understanding: What the NGDO understands advocacy to be.

Advocacy why: How the NGDO justifies doing advocacy.

Board members: Who is on the Board? Any Southern members?

Capacity building: The importance attached to doing capacity-building.

Chain of advocacy/legitimacy: The link between the micro and the macro.

Channelling: The importance or not of channelling funds to the South.

Civil Society: The importance of civil society.

Comparative advantage: The comparative advantages of Northern NGOs.

Confusion: Uncertainty about who to deal with in NGOs or DfID.

Constituency: Public supporter base.

CSCF: Views about the Civil Society Challenge Fund.

Decentralisation: Reorganisations of NGDOs.

DfID: General comments about DfID.

DfID-NGOs symbiosis: The symbiosis between DfID and NGDOs.
DFID relations: General comments re NGDO relations with DFID.

DFID relations-good: That DFID-NGDO relations are good.

DFID relations-OK: That DFID-NGDO relations are OK.

DFID relations-poor: That DFID-NGDO relations are poor.

Direct funding: Changes in the funding regime, implications and views.

Division of labour: Roles of Northern and Southern NGOs.

Donor constraints: Possibility that a target group also being a donor might introduce tensions.

Donor constraints-maybe: Recognition that it might be an issue.

Donor constraints-no: Declaration that it is not an issue.

Donor constraints-sometimes: Acceptance that it is sometimes an issue.

Donor constraints-yes: Experience of it having been an issue.

Effectiveness: Things which contribute to effective advocacy.

Evaluation-what: What is done in terms of evaluating advocacy.

Evaluation-whom: Who evaluations are done for.

Evaluation-why: Why evaluations are done.

Evaluation criteria: What criteria or indicators are used in evaluations.

Evaluation impact: What impacts evaluations have.

Evaluation participatory: Arguments for more participatory evaluations.

Evaluation pressure: What pressures – internal and external – there are to evaluate advocacy.

Evaluation problems: What problems there are with evaluating advocacy.

Evaluation process or impact: Whether evaluation is/should be about evaluating process and/or impact.

Financial independence: Importance of financial independence (from DFID) and having a range of funders.

Flexibility: That flexibility (or lack of strategy) is a good thing.

Funding: Funding sources and how they make a difference to the NGDO’s activities.

Goal clarity importance: The importance of having clear goals.

Governance: How the NGDO is governed.

History: What the history of the NGDO is.

Impact: Examples of advocacy impact.

Influencing: That influencing is what should be done, rather than advocacy.

International advocacy: Advocacy about issues in both North and South.

International-federation: That the NGDO is part of an international federation.
**International-loose**: That the NGDO is part of a loose international family.

**International-tight**: That the NGDO is part of a tight international family.

**International-organisation**: What the international organisation of the NGDO is.

**Issues**: What issues the NGDO advocates about.

**Legitimacy**: Comments about the legitimacy of the NGDO’s advocacy.

**Legitimacy-internal**: Questions about the legitimacy/value of advocacy, from within the NGDO.

**Legitimacy or mandate**: A distinction between legitimacy and mandate.

**Legitimacy sources**: Where NGDOs (claim) to get their legitimacy as advocates from.

**Logframes**: The use of logframes in planning and evaluation.

**Membership**: Whether the NGDO is (part of) a membership organisation.

**NGO competition**: Competition between NGDOs and its impact.

**NGO cooperation**: Instances of cooperation between NGDOs, and constraints to it.

**NGO future**: The future direction of the individual NGDO.

**NGO identity**: The NGDO’s identity, and how/why its maintained.

**NGO niche**: What the NGDO considers its niche to be.

**NGO sector future**: Comments about the future of the NGDO sector.

**NGO subcontracting**: Reasons for subcontracting from larger to smaller NGDOs.

**NGOs to listen to**: How DfID decides which NGDOs to listen to.

**NNGO value**: Comments about the value which NGDOs add to international development.

**North-South**: North-South issues and tensions in advocacy work.

**Organisational structures**: How the NGDO is organised – issues and problems.

**Partner selection**: Ways in which Southern partners are selected (for advocacy).

**Partners**: Relations with partners and the importance of these.

**Programmes and advocacy**: The link between programmes and advocacy.

**Representation**: Whether or not the NGDO (claims to) represent Southern communities.

**Restructuring**: Restructuring of NGDOs and the position of advocacy.

**SNGO advocacy**: Understanding of, and calls for, Southern advocacy.

**Social audit**: Comments about the use of social audit.

**Specialism**: That the NGDO is a (technical) specialist, and what difference this makes.

**Targets**: Different ways of relating to target groups.

**Values**: The values of a specific NGDO, or the role of values in general.
Appendix A2.10 Code groups diagrams from Atlas

These diagrams, generated from Atlas.ti, show the ways in which codes and code groups were built up.

Level 3: Doing advocacy

Level 3: Across and within NGOs
Appendix A2.11: Code groups written about and definitions

This provides brief descriptions of the “level 2” code groups which have been written up and how they feed into “level 3” codes.

Level 3: Doing advocacy
Level 2: Understanding: what NGDOs understand advocacy to be
Level 2: Growth – extent, ways in which, and reasons why, NGDOs have moved further towards advocacy.
Level 2: Doing advocacy – how the NGDOs go about doing advocacy in practice.
Level 2: Impact – examples of impacts of advocacy.
Level 2: Approach – the diversity of NGDO approaches to advocacy, including being a ‘specialist’ NGDO, the value of such diversity, and how approaches shape relations with targets including DfID.
Level 2: Strategy – whether the NGDOs have advocacy strategies, how clear they are, and implications of this.

Level 3: Across and within NGOs
Level 2: NGO-NGO – NGDOs working together, either through co-operation or sub-contracting.
Level 2: Identity – that NGDOs have identities or niches, how and why they are built and maintained, and what the implications of this are.
Level 2: Internal organization – position of advocacy within NGDOs and its relationship with other parts of the NGO – misunderstandings, marginalisation, justification, relations with fund-raising.

Level 3: Funding, finance, and DfID
Level 2: DfID relations – DfID-NGDO relations, their form and quality, and changes in the relationship.
Level 2: Financing – funding, funding sources, financial independence.
Level 2: Donor constraints – the dual-role (target/funder) issue, experiences of it, reasons why it’s not such a big issue, wider issues and the future.

Level 3: Legitimacy
Level 2: Legit issues – issues around legitimacy
Level 2: Legit sources - where NGDOs (claim) to get their legitimacy as advocates from.

Level 3: International representation?
Level 2: Internat organization – the international structure of the NGDO, really global or not, decentralisation trends.
Level 2: Representation – whether and how the NGDOs represent anyone, what they do if they don’t represent.
Level 2: Partners – programmes-advocacy link, the role of partners, and partner selection.
Level 2: Southern civil – NGDOs’ and DfID’s efforts to develop Southern civil society.

Level 3: Accountability – why accountability is an issue, whether NGOs are accountable, to whom, how, and problems of accountability.

Level 3: Evaluation
Level 2: Evaln motives – reasons for, and pressures to evaluate advocacy.
Level 2: Evaln practice – what evaluation of advocacy takes place.
Level 2: Evaln problems – problems around the evaluation of advocacy.

Level 3: Chains, divisions of labour and NGO futures – the fact that there is a chain of advocacy, with emerging divisions of labour, which are based on comparative advantages, including the ability of NNGOs to add value, which in turn shape the future of NNGOs and the NGDO sector.