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NGOs: an alternative power base for women?

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Women since time immemorial have organized themselves into groups for support of their own activities and to assist others. In modern states, women's formal or informal organizations at national and local levels have offered charity, raised societal issues, engaged in networking to benefit their families, and generally provided the glue that holds society together; men occupied most positions of power in state institutions. Today, women have expanded to the global stage and broadened the scope of their concerns to include population, environment, technology, energy, and human rights, to name a few. This process was encouraged and enhanced by the four UN World Conferences for Women, but also by other UN world conferences over the past twenty-five years.

The impact of embracing this global agenda on women has been two-fold: the agenda of women's organizations now includes not only "soft" issues of family and charity widely regarded as appropriate for women's concern, but it also encompasses advocacy positions that confront what has been a predominantly male discourse on each of these topics; other women join the myriad of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) devoted to a single issue and take with them their conviction that the issue is also a woman's issue. Today NGOs and women's organizations increasingly challenge the power and scope of traditional political institutions within the state and lobby international agencies to reinterpret development policies. As the civil society expands in most countries in response to this era of limited government, these new organizations are touted as the *real* arena for citizen participation and the foundation of present or future democracy. Are NGOs really the new panacea for contemporary government? Should women's organizations be considered NGOs, or do they form a distinct type of organization? Does women's involvement translate into greater political power or does participation in

NGOs once again marginalize women? Are women more likely to influence major decisions facing society through separate or integrated organizations?

This chapter weaves together discussion on these three topics: the evolution and expectations of NGOs globally; international women's organizations and networks; and an exploration of where and how women are seeking power to influence national and international policies. More questions than answers are posed since the field is so rapidly mutating and, despite the proliferation of books and articles on NGOs, information on these concerns is sparse.

What is an NGO anyhow?

The use of the term "non-governmental organization" was adopted by the United Nations when it agreed to provide a mechanism for citizen-based organizations to participate in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Such organizations are private and non-profit; they represent people acting of their own volition and describe themselves as self-governing in their formal documents (Weiss & Gordenker, 1996). As a residual category, the term covers a wide range of groups that are not commonly thought of today as non-governmental organizations: trade union federations, business councils, international unions of scholars, lay church councils, and professional associations. Women's organizations are also often distinguished from NGOs as the term is now used; this point will be further explored later in the chapter.

NGOs and the United Nations System

International organizations may file for consultative status with the UN, a designation which allows them access to meetings of the various

committees and commissions of ECOSOC as well as to its own debates. Members of NGOs may participate informally in these groups, roaming the chambers and halls to talk to delegates; they may also, by request, be given the floor in formal debate. Further, NGOs automatically receive all documents from these discussion and may request that their own documents be distributed. So valuable was this interaction between UN staff and governmental delegates on the one hand and the NGOs on the other that the UN Department of Public Information and later other agencies in the UN system identified their own lists of NGOs and granted them similar privileges.

As development issues began to dominate the UN, new types of NGOs, concerned with economic development issues such as agriculture, community development, population, environment, energy, technological transfer, or habitat, sought consultative status.ⁱ Most international NGOs (INGOs) have affiliates or chapters at the national level in several countries. The objective of the INGOs is to monitor activities within the United Nations system of concern to their membership and to persuade the General Assembly to pass resolutions stating goals for national as well as international action. While such resolutions lack the force of law, they do provide the national NGOs with a powerful tool, which can be used to alter policies in their respective countries.

This policy role of INGOs was greatly enhanced as a result of the series of consciousness-raising world conferences that the UN convened,

ⁱ The numbers of NGOs registered with ECOSOC in Categories I -those global organizations with broad social and economic interests, and II - those with narrower issue or geographical concerns, have increased from increased from 7 in 1948 to 42 in 1993 for the first category and from 32 to 376 during the same years for the second category. NGOs on the roster rose from 2 to 560 in 1993 for a total of 978 NGOs in consultative status in 1993 (UN 1994a). The UN web page on the internet now lists 1500 organizations in consultative status.

starting in 1972, on major development issues that had not been sufficiently addressed in the original UN Charter: Environment - 1972, 1992; Population -1974, 1984, 1994; Food-1974; Women-1975, 1980, 1985, 1995; Habitat-1976, 1996; Water-1978; Desertification-1978; Agrarian Reform and Rural Development-1979; Science & Technology for Development-1979; New and Renewable Sources of Energy-1981; and the World Summit on Social Development, 1995. These world conferences are official meetings of the UN system; the delegates from governments, UN agencies, and official NGOs are charged with approving a World Plan of Action previously discussed and debated in preparatory meetings in the preceding years.

Parallel to these official formal conferences have been open, unrestricted, often chaotic and contentious, NGO gatherings. Loosely organized by the CONGO (Council of NGOs), these meetings typically featured seminars, panels, dances, films, field trips, all meant to reflect the debates and disagreements among the wide diversity of interested people from around the world who are stakeholders in the issues under discussion. For some radicals, even the NGO Forum was considered too close to the UN and its viewpoints, so alternative NGO gatherings were organized. During the UN Science and Technology for Development Conference in Vienna in 1979, the street theater groups set up an alternative to the "green" alternative to the NGO Forum! Anyone, with or without affiliation to any group, could attend these NGO meetings, often without a registration fee.

In contrast, only "official" NGOs may attend the UN conference, although frequently NGOs working on the topic in hand could register for the particular conference: 1400 groups received recognition at the 1992 Earth Summit. Such accreditation allowed these NGOs to participate in the series of Preparatory Committees, PrepComs, where the official document of the

upcoming conference, often called a World Plan of Action, is discussed and refined, and where many of the most significant changes are made. NGOs not familiar with UN procedures often ignored these PrepComs and then became frustrated at the world conference when they realized the limitations placed on substantive changes at that time. At many conferences, about the middle of the first week when the NGOs realized their impotency, some would organized a march on the official conference. At the women's 1980 conference in Copenhagen, activists invaded the actual chamber and halted debate. Usually, NGOs as well as many official delegates prefer the spirited discussions at the NGO Forum to the measured minuet of official conference procedures.

Access to delegates is another matter. National and international officials are more available during the conference than in their protected home bureaucracies.

NGOs lobby them about themes of the conference as well as on national policies. Often the delegates, official NGOs, and issue-oriented NGOs find common ground despite their earlier antagonisms. Commenting on the Earth Summit of 1992, Kakabadse and Burns write that "even NGOs that initially tried to work around their national delegations discovered that they would eventually have to finds ways to work with them. The same holds for governments: some that initially ignored NGOs ultimately found that they needed the substantive help of NGOs...or their political support back home" (1994).

Out of these world conferences have come global networks of activist international and national NGOs. The Union of International Associations list over 15,000 NGOs that operate in three of more countries and draw their finances from sources in more than one country" (Gordenker & Weiss, 1996). A

measure of their effectiveness can be seen in the frequent efforts of some authoritarian governments to reduce or abolish the role of INGOs in the United Nations system in order to reduce the global reach of many powerful NGOs that are able to challenge national sovereignty on some issues. Another measure of their effectiveness is the growing attention given these NGO networks by UN development agencies. From its inception in 1973, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) sponsored the Environmental Liaison Committee to maintain a link with NGOs organizing at both the national and international level; the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, Habitat, after its creation in 1976, established the Habitat International Coalition, an umbrella group for NGOs and Community Based Organizations interested in shelter issues. The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) was until recently the major funder of the International Planned Parenthood Federation and many of its national affiliates. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) sponsored a new global organization in 1992 called SANE: Sustainable agriculture network. NGO relationships with the World Bank are discussed below.

The proliferation of NGOs active in the UN has led to demands by the organizations themselves for a greater say in the overall deliberations; some are even calling for an assembly of NGOs to parallel the General Assembly with its representatives of governments. Such a demand is based on the claim that NGOs reflect people better than do governments, a widespread but unproven assumption (Gruhn, 1996; Tinker, 1996; UNDP, 1993; UN, 1994a). Yet a persistent question persists: to whom are NGOs accountable? As social movements, NGOs are rooted in a particular set of beliefs; at what juncture are they perceived of as interests groups who may as often undermine the political process as support it?

The report by the Open-Ended Working Group on the Review of Arrangements for Consultations with Non-Governmental Organizations supports the desires of international NGOs to participate in global governance, utilizing their expertise and practical experience in "the formulation of international legal instruments, policies and programmes, and to their implementation nationally and globally" (UN, 1994a:38). The working group stresses, however, that the vast growth in NGOs has occurred at the national and local levels, an observation that led the Secretary-General of the UN to recommend that efforts should be made "to build on and share experience and enhance multilateral agency/NGO/government operational collaboration at the country and grassroots level" (UN, 1994b:iii).

Support for the NGOs is perhaps even stronger under the administration of the present United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. When 637 NGOs from 61 countries assembled in New York in September 1997 for the opening session of the first General Assembly under his leadership, he told them that UN/NGO partnership is "not an option, but a necessity" (Maran, forthcoming).

NGOs and the World Bank

Collaboration between NGOs and governments is increasingly fostered by the World Bank as conditionality for loans. Since early in the 1980s, the Bank has had an NGO committee which specialized at first on environment but has more recently enlarged its concerns. Finding consultation with NGOs extremely useful, by the end of 1980s the Bank had begun to include NGO participation in 50% of its projects (Beckmann, 1991). The committee has funded support staff and maintains a list of over 8000 NGOs in its data base. Sunshine rules allow NGOs access to most internal documents of the Bank, facilitating critique of proposed projects (Malena, 1995). In an official

Bank publication on NGOs, Paul acknowledges "the positive contributions of NGO interventions..to poverty reduction," he notes the extremely limited knowledge we have of this sector as of 1991 and calls for a "careful and dispassionate assessment of NGOs distinctive competence and role in development process" (Paul, 1991: 1, 2).

Debate continues within the NGO community about such close cooperation: are the organizations working with the bank being co-opted? The June 1991 issue of *Lok Niti*, the magazine published by the Asian NGO Coalition, ANGOC, is entitled "GO-NGO partnership: a marriage of convenience?" Its cover shows the groom, GO, and the bride, NGO, being married by the World Bank! De Fonseka asks "What is the World Bank's interest in forming partnerships with NGOs? At the outset, altruism and similar philanthropic motivations can probably be rejected immediately. After all, the World Bank itself would wholeheartedly agree that as a bank, it does not operate in such rarified lines of business." He concludes that "Poverty is bad for business" (1991:4-5).

Nelson, an NGO activist in Washington, DC, reports on his observations over several years of NGO-World Bank interactions and suggests that the Bank promotes NGO connection to minimize criticism of its commitment to market solutions. Widespread complaints of disastrous social impacts of most structural adjustment policies did convince the Bank to attach policy conditions to loans to prevent all reductions of government spending from being taken from budgets for social programs. In his book, Nelson seeks the answers two basic questions: "Are NGOs becoming tools of a development paradigm that most do not support? Or can NGOs shift the World Bank's practice and performance in areas of environmental impact, popular participation, and structural adjustment? (1995:4). He concludes that

organizational rigidities minimize NGOs influence and that their goals are "inevitably reshaped " by their relation with the World Bank. NGOs, on their part, seek to influence programs and institute policy shifts without sufficient clout to implement.

The program cycle is criticized within the Bank as well. Noting that most NGOs are brought in after the project has been designed to assist in implementation, Malena supports consultation of NGOs "upstream" before the project is set. She argues that the current process does not allow NGOs to exhibit what are supposed to be their attributes: their closeness to the community and knowledge of local circumstances and people. Involving NGOs early on would change quality of NGO involvement (1995).

Castigation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund by NGOs reached a crescendo during the fifty-year celebrations marking the founding of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945. A coalition of NGOs called *Fifty Years is Enough* put forward demands for restructuring both organizations and rethinking their single minded devotion to a single economic model (Danaher, 1994). The role of these institutions in stabilizing the economies of the East Asian in financial crisis in 1997-98 has propelled criticism from the NGO community into the US Congress during debates for replenishing funds for the IMF. The value premises of the critics contrast with the narrow economic principles that continue to dominate the thinking within the Bank. Will the humanitarian predilections exhibited by most NGOs alter the market oriented paradigm so dominant today? Does this soft approach reflect traditional women's values, or are these values themselves becoming more central within the civil society? Does this mean enhanced power for women in NGOs?

Challenging the state

Not only are NGOs confronting multilateral agencies and the UN itself, these international governmental organizations (IGOs) are being urged by the Open Ended Working Group of ECOSOC to work with INGOs *above the state and within the state*. The implications are that national NGOs through international networks have a mechanism to end-run the state through their INGO connections and in the process undermine the sovereignty of the state. As IGOs and bilateral agencies increasingly promote NGOs as the panacea for correcting all the inequities and problems encountered when governments in the lower income countries of Asia, Latin America, and Africa pursue rapid economic growth, they are offering an alternative decision-making structure within these states. Economic transition in many of these countries has been characterized by a withdrawal of the government from significant sectors of the society thus fostering a civil society between government and market and providing space for NGO activities (Tinker, 1996). Promoters argue that citizens, often constrained by oligarchical or authoritarian governments from participation in the formal institutions of power, can influence policies that directly affect their daily life and so help create a political culture and social capital necessary to sustain democracy (Clark 1991, 1995; Diamond 1993; Renshaw 1994; Ritchey-Vance 1996).

Concerns about citizen activism and international interference in their sovereign state has led many authoritarian governments such as China or Vietnam to prohibit the creation of indigenous NGOs and limit or exclude international NGOs from operating in their countries. Yet many tightly controlled governments find they must trade greater openness to NGOs for international funding. Countries such as Indonesia try to contain NGOs by allowing them to function as service providers or advocate relatively safe

issues such as women's rights or the environment, but not human rights, as long as their positions do not challenge the government (Walker, 1996). When several environmental NGOs documented that a major source of the disastrous fires in Kalimantan in the fall of 1997 was caused by corporations controlled by people close to President Suharto, these critics were protected through their international networks who ensured reporting in the global media.

In sum, the metamorphoses of nongovernmental organizations from a focus on relief to a concern with sustainable development is a significant trend. More critical to global governance is the tendency of these increasingly articulate organizations to segue into advocacy and criticism of current international and national policies. While governments in many developing countries feel a loss of control, NGO networks and coalitions are propelled by great expectations for greater power and prestige.

Women in international organizations

Historically, women have been more active than men in voluntary organizations whether at village levels or with the International Red Cross. As the power of NGOs surges into the growing space of the civil society, do women themselves and women's issues in general benefit? After all, NGOs proclaim greater participation and broader democracy than other top-down institutional forms. If women and their concerns are in fact being integrated into NGO debates and programs, what is the role of women-only organizations? These questions are central when examining the functioning and efficacy of NGOs at all levels. Because the focus of this paper is on global governance and power, we discuss first the origin and current roles of women only organizations as they interact with the United Nations and other IGOs. Next we review various methods women chose to influence debates on

such societal issues as population or environment. Finally we consider women's roles in mainstream NGOs

Women's organizations on the global stage

International women's organizations were founded over a hundred years ago to enhance women's attempts to influence governmental policies on social justice and temperance before they were granted suffrage; the first was set up by a Swiss woman in 1868. Leaders in many of these organizations served as delegates to the League of Nations which did not have specific arrangements for NGO representation; women from auxiliary wings of trade unions joined those from the women's organizations to set up a Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations in Geneva which monitored sessions of both the League and the ILO (International Labour Organization)]. These women, along with women from the Inter-American Commission on Women of the Pan American Union, were instrumental in adding language about women to the UN Charter in 1945 and securing a UN Commission on the Status of Women in 1947 (Galey, 1995). Many of these same women's organizations registered for consultative status at ECOSOC and continue to provide leadership in CONGO (Stephenson, 1995).ⁱⁱ

Organizationally, these first wave women's organizations are formally structured with hierarchical officers and procedures often reflecting

ⁱⁱThe International Alliance of Women and the International Council of Women have suffragist roots; they have run development projects in the South, but their major international activity focuses on UN affairs in Geneva and New York. The International Young Women's Christian Association, Zonta International, and Soroptimist International are charitable groups that provide service and grants to women's groups globally and promote their issues at the UN. International Federation of Business and Professional Women and International Association of University Women continue holding world conferences and have less presence at UN meetings. Some fifty women's organizations now have consultative status.

Robert's Rules of Order. Although they now have membership from around the world, their leaders are drawn from the elite; their headquarters, and some would say orientation, are in the North. Most would consider women to have similar concerns everywhere for civil rights, education, fair working conditions, and so assume an international women's movement.

Second wave women's organizations have discarded tight structures in favor of more egalitarian forms within organizations and have preferred networks or coalitions to formal international organizations. These groups tend to be more active in outreach to the poor or disadvantaged and, in most countries, more feminist (Basu, 1995). Focused on issues in their own countries and skeptical of any generalized category of woman, these new wave groups have worked together at UN World Conferences for Women and associated meetings such as PrepComs and they participated in invited seminars and professional meetings. Given their preference for networks, they have not sought consultative status at ECOSOC; but many registered as NGOs for the women's conferences; the final list of organizations attending the Beijing NGO Forum at Hairou was 1761.ⁱⁱⁱ

Yet these newer women's organizations have had an awesome influence on global governance. Two types of organizations predominated among those set up early in the 1970s: action-research centers and groups working as agents to change the way women think or act. Both sought to alter the way donors

ⁱⁱⁱInformation exchanges were often international in reach though based in the North. In 1975, the *Women's International Network [WIN] News* began publishing excerpts from UN documents, conference reports, and updates on issues of interest from women sending in such news. About the same time, two European women, one in Geneva and one in Rome set up *ISIS* as a clearing house and newsletter for information on women's health and violence issues in the 1970s. In London, *Change* produces reports and a magazine. The International Women's Tribune Center in New York City was set up to support the NGO community following the Mexico City conference.

conceived and implemented development programs and projects so that women's concerns and needs were included. Their activities were readily apparent and both approaches were given recognition when the General Assembly agreed at its 1976 meeting to set up two new institutions for women as a result of resolutions at the International Women's Year Conference in Mexico in 1975 (UN, 1977). The UN Fund for Women, now renamed UNIFEM, was created to support grassroots women's groups with funds and support. The International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, INSTRAW, was designed to conduct, collect, and disseminate research on women in development and to utilize this information to train government officials and NGOs to improve their projects.

Research centers The research groups were set up to assist in collecting data for the national reports on the status of women requested by the UN following the 1975 world conference. Founded by committed feminists, these groups sought new ways of collecting research that worked with poor women, not only to collect information but to suggest solutions to their problems, instead of treating them as objects. The report from DAWN, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, presented by women scholars from the South to the Nairobi conference, maintains that research organizations were the most effective of the new women's organizations in influencing policy and "aim to eliminate the distinction between the researcher and the researched, so that research becomes a process of mutual education" (Sen & Grown, 1995:92).^{iv}

Documenting women's invisible work in subsistence households, in

^{iv} Researchers are still struggling with the difficulty of carrying out feminist fieldwork that produces knowledge of use to those studied. For an excellent collection of opinions on this process see Wolf, 1996.

agriculture, and in the informal sector was crucial if women's economic activities were to be acknowledged and supported by the development planners. The need for such data was immense and funds were readily available from donor agencies, population organizations, and foundations. Not only were free standing research centers involved; university faculty formed women's studies centers whose research went beyond scholarly to action projects.^v Agencies of the UN system such as UNESCO, ILO, and FAO commissioned studies; INSTRAW and UNIFEM supported research on basic needs such as water or technology. The secretariat for the 1980 women's conference funded research by women from the South to ensure a balanced interpretation of study data and interpretations.

Within the decade 1970-1980, the amount of research on women conducted throughout the world by women of all countries was indeed prodigious. Internationally, the research findings influenced policies and programs of donor agencies and INGOs. Locally, these efforts spawned new organizations designed to work with poor women to ameliorate their problems; these groups were both integrated and women only, and focused on many issues new to more traditional women's concerns such as community health, appropriate technology, household energy, or agriculture including crops and small ruminants. Women in these groups took their insights to the UN conferences on these topics, inserting language into official documents that ensured women as well as men would benefit from new initiatives.

The excitement and legitimacy of the new research on women encouraged

^vIn Latin America under military dictatorships university sponsored projects were less vulnerable than those run by social change organizations. In Nepal before the restoration of democracy, for profit consulting organizations provided a cover for action research and projects when activities of both NGOs and the university were constrained.

most international professional associations to hold panels on women and often to set up a woman's caucus or committee to encourage women scholars to attend conventions. Frequent invitational conferences were held; the first conference on women in development was held in Mexico City in 1975 just preceding the IWY conference; participants were visible as delegates and presenters at both the official and NGO meetings; the idea of Women's World Banking was formed during discussions (Tinker and Bo Bramsen, 1976). The action-research aspect led to the formation of the Association of Women in Development that holds biennial conferences of scholars, activists and practitioners from around the world.

The Copenhagen conference in 1980 was the site of the first meeting of women's studies; the International Interdisciplinary Congress of Women was established to hold periodic meetings around world on women's research and education. Typically decentralized, the Feminist Press publishes *Women's Studies International* and the National Council for Research on Women maintains a roster of women's research centers around the world. The DAWN group of Third World Scholars had begun meeting prior to the Nairobi conference and presented its report to the NGO Forum and its leading scholars continue to influence development policy individually and through the organization.

Change agents The second type of women's organization that has had global impact concentrates on changing women's lives. Leaders of these groups came from research groups and academia; others responded to their own consciousness raising concerning gender inequalities. During the 1970s, the focus was on the growing poverty among women, especially those heading households. Working as separate organizations or within NGOs, women organized poor women in rural and urban settings, assisting them to earn

money, improve their housing and services, access health and family planning clinics, receive agricultural extension information, attend literacy classes; that is, include women in all manner of development programs and objectives. Debate over the "success" of such programs continues among scholars and practitioners; activists know that the mere fact of organizing is empowering (Kabeer, 1994; Tinker, 1990).

Participation in groups outside the patriarchal family is mind blowing for many women. Just hearing about new ideas, knowing that their problems are not theirs alone, discussing alternative approaches to addressing their problems is provocative and stimulating. Most women's organizations aim at more egalitarian decision-making, though evidence suggests this is difficult to accomplish; educated leadership often believes they have the answers and manipulate, if they do not decree, certain decisions. At first most issues related to poverty, but relationships within the family and women's legal rights became more critical when households disintegrated. Domestic violence and rape became global topics openly discussed and addressed. Such issues span class and ethnicity, and provide a foundation for a global women's movement upon which many diverse institutions with their own issues are being constructed. The global feminisms described by the authors in Basu attest to these many competing, and often conflicting, perspectives found among women's organizations (1995).

In many ways, the network of research scholars provided the base for the contemporary international women's movement that embraces these diverse feminisms. Grassroots groups at first tended to be fragmented over goals and ideology; but their process emphasized participation and information, their goal has been empowerment. As a result of all these activities, change is clearly happening at the local and state levels. What is of concern to us

are the international implications of women's activism underscored by our greater understanding of women's roles and their economic and social contributions to society.

Women influencing international issues

A second category of women's organizations has focused on identifying and inserting women's viewpoints into broader societal interests. Leaders of these groups often have their roots in women's organizations or research centers. Others were founded by women who previously worked within mainstream NGOs on issues such as population, environment, technology, energy, housing, water and sanitation, and who felt that their perspectives were ignored by the dominant male leadership.

For example, in January 1985, the Environmental Liaison Committee of NGOs that advise the United Nations Environmental Programme, held a meeting in Nairobi to consider how to include more voices of women and people of the South in their proceedings. Invitations had gone out to leaders of development and population organizations that had a better record of including women. During the first day, men from Europe and the US dominated the debate, insisting that priority be given to global environmental issues such as acid rain or pesticides. Discouraged with the silence of contesting views, especially from women of the South, someone brought a procedural motion: all speakers would have to come alternatively from North and South and all speakers would have to be alternatively male or female. In order that they could speak, the men of the North had to encourage, even beg, women of the South to talk. The tone and direction of the debate changed abruptly. Not only were issues of health and sanitation in squatter areas added to the agenda of UNEP, but a women's caucus was established.

Women's stake in the environment was a featured panel at the Women's Conference which followed in June, also in Nairobi. Presenters were members of Women in Development and Environment (WIDE), an organization that had been set up a few years before by the UNEP representative in Washington, DC. Preceding the UN Conference on Environment and Development -the Earth Summit- in Rio in 1994, UNEP assembled over two hundred examples of successful environmental projects and brought the women who initiated them to a conference in Miami. A more political role for women at the Earth Summit was orchestrated by the recently established Women for Environment and Development (WEDO). This increasingly visible international coalition of women convened a World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet in November 1991 to plan strategies for the Earth Summit and write a women's version of the official conference document, Agenda 21. Over 1500 women from 83 countries attended. At the actual conference, WEDO held daily caucuses, just as the NGOs do for their members, to alert women about decisions taken and issues on the upcoming agenda. The visibility and sophistication of these efforts ensured that women's interests were included in the final document. These briefings have become a permanent feature of subsequent UN conferences and PrepComs (Chen, 1996).

In Rio, when a division occurred among women's organizations over wording on family planning, women active in these overlapping issues met frequently during the two years prior to the 1994 World Population Conference to address the conflicting views. The organization of meetings around the globe to draft and debate a Woman's Declaration on Population Policies was coordinated by the International Women's Health Coalition. A final strategy meeting was held in January 1994 to rehearse individual and group responsibilities during the Cairo conference. A US Network for Cairo '94

coordinated the activities of a broad spectrum of population, environment, and development organizations in support of the women's agenda. Once in Cairo, WEDO set up its daily caucus, briefing NGOs, official delegates, and the media (Chen, 1996). The result was possibly the most feminist document to emerge from any UN conference: Principle 4 builds on previous UN conferences when it declares "Advancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women, and the eliminations of all kinds of violence against women, and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility, are cornerstones of population and development-related programmes." Other principles declare women's right to health and education as prerequisites for all population programs (Germain, 1994).

Long term preparation for the UN World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993 also was instrumental in introducing and passing the revolutionary concept that women's rights are human rights. In 1991, the Center for Women's Global Leadership began planning for Vienna by convening women from 20 countries first to decide on their goals for the conference and then to orchestrate a campaign to secure support for this new initiative that brought domestic violence into public view. In Vienna, daily briefings for NGOs were held by WEDO while UNIFEM arranged daily meetings for delegates. A mock tribunal that heard women's own stories of human rights abuses provided dramatic documentation on the need for including women's rights in the final document (Chen, 1996; Bunch and Reilly, 1994).

The pace of UN meetings increased in 1995 when the World Summit for Social Development was scheduled for March in Copenhagen. WEDO joined with DAWN to coordinate daily caucus meeting and also arranged panels and dialogue sessions during PrepCom II. After the successes for women's issues at Rio, Vienna, and Cairo, women continued to stress unity in the face of attempts by

religious and culturally traditional groups to roll back these advances. Although similar defensive strategies characterized much of the activity at the governmental conference in Beijing, the NGO Forum in Beijing provided active NGOs with the opportunity of disseminating information about these crucial women's issues to the 25,000 to 30,000 women attending.

The women's groups that took the lead in coordinating lobbying at these four conferences were US based organizations with savvy leadership able to secure funding to enable women from around the world to participate in planning meetings as well as in the final conferences. All continue their activities, but while the International Women's Health Coalition and the Center for Global Leadership maintain focus on health/population and on human rights respectively, WEDO has expanded its membership abroad and broadened the scope of its policy papers to include issues of globalization and global governance. WEDO's primers on transnational corporations, the World Trade Organization, and the structure of the world and regional development banks were widely circulated in Beijing.

In 1996, perhaps the last of these magna world conferences took place when Habitat II convened in Istanbul. Women's issues came late to issues of shelter. When the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, or Habitat, was created in 1976 after the first Habitat conference in Vancouver, the agency immediately established the Habitat International Coalition (HIC), an umbrella group for NGOs and Community Based Organizations interested in shelter issues. Not until one of the few women members organized panels for the 1985 Women's Conference in Nairobi that promoted shelter issues, did the topic become recognized as a basic woman's issue. A Women and Shelter group was formed and began the publication of a newsletter that reported both on community programs and scholarly publications (Tinker, 1993). This caucus

held meetings and participated in PrepComs for the 1996 Habitat Conference in Istanbul; at the conference, they worked with NGOs to ensure that women's rights to housing were accepted by the delegates.

Since the beginning of the UN Decade for Women, leadership for women's issues has shifted from the older formal women's organizations to networks and coalitions of more diverse activist groups. Unlike earlier UN conferences, starting with the 1974 Population Conference, when changes in wording in the conference documents were the result of individual or ad hoc group effort on the part of NGO and government delegates, these new groups are diligent in their preparations for each topic and each conference. Organized women are not only more effective in changing policy statements; their national or local affiliates are able to lobby their own governments to follow the UN recommendations. The specialized groups, whether caucuses within mainstream NGOs or women only NGOs, eloquently presented their perspectives at the most recent series of UN world conference.

Does all this lobbying and all this activity add up to influence? If women's issues must first be inserted into single interest or development policies which in turn become the subject of negotiations at the agency or state level, do women's concerns simply fade away? Women working within the bureaucracies of bilateral agencies spoke at a plenary panel in Huairou about problems in mainstreaming women's development agenda. The speakers expressed great dismay and discouragement at their lack of achievement toward including women and their issues at every stage of program design and implementation.^{vi}

^{vi}The panel was titled "Institutional mechanisms and financial arrangements" and was held on Sep. 5, 199. In the chair was Rounaq Jahan whose book reports her findings on mainstreaming efforts in two bilateral donors, Norway and Canada, and two multilateral agencies, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank (1995).

One of these institutions was the World Bank whose new president, James Wolfensohn, attended sessions at Beijing.^{vii} The Bank has been widely accused of fostering economic reform in countries undergoing structural adjustment in such a manner that social services are reduced and the social safety net for the poor is torn. Indeed, the reduction of government in providing these services is a major factor in propelling the growth of service NGOs in those countries and the expansion of new NGOs into the provision of services. A group of women formed Women's Eyes on the Bank to monitor the implementation of the pledges made by Wolfensohn in Beijing. In addition, the Bank set up an External Gender Consultative Group to work closely with policy makers. These leaders of women only and mainstream NGOs have agreed to work within the Bank for reform in symbiotic relationship to others involved in the *Fifty Years is Enough* campaign.

Can these external women's groups influence the Bank policies more than the long existing but informal women's group within the Bank has been able to do? Women consultants have complained that policies concerning women are simply "tacked on" to program designs, if they are mentioned at all. These new groups want to start with a focus more on gender justice rather than on specifics of the project cycle (Alexander, 1996). In some ways this is a more radical position than just restructuring the Bank.

Women in mainstream NGOs

A persistent debate among women's organizations is whether women's concerns will be better addressed through women only or through integrated mainstream NGOs. Often individual women are active in both types of

^{vii}For background on the women's offices in the World Bank see Winslow, 1995.

organizations and use their insights and power of women's organizations as a source of power within the mainstream NGOs. Most NGOs either focus their energies on poverty alleviation and the related effects of poverty or on broad societal issues such as the environment/population equation or on human rights, *often considered* typical women's issues. Women volunteer disproportionately to men in these organizations. Has this translated to influence in the groups?

Little research exists on this topic. Years of experience in the sector in the US have indicated to me that women are more likely to accept the relatively low paying jobs with NGOs than are men. Reasons include greater freedom and more influence than might be found in the market, but also women's income is often thought of, if it is not so in fact, as a second income. The educated women in leadership positions seldom need the income to survive. Interviewing NGO leaders in Indonesia in 1996 confirmed these observations. With rapid economic transformation and heightening material expectations, even dedicated men felt they could no longer afford to remain in NGOs without additional income. Some formed consulting groups with funding from the same government they were, with their other job, trying to influence; critics were scathing of this practice. Yet those consulting groups accepting foreign contracts were also decried. What was left? Join the government, a foreign company, the university, and remain a consultant to your favorite NGO? What of conflict of interests? Conflict was also perceived when women in visible leadership roles found their criticisms of the government imperiled their husbands' jobs (Tinker, 1996; Walker, 1996).

Underlying this issue is the assumption that is rooted in traditions of charity and volunteerism that are embedded in most religions: somehow, who does good must be poor. If NGOs are to play the roles assigned them, can

they do so if such a belief persists? Is this belief an advantage for women? Where NGO directors are relatively well paid, as in the US, men hold those jobs while women are employed on the staff. No wonder that women often leave these mainstream NGOs to set up or work with women only groups.

Power

Nongovernmental organizations based on environmental or women's concerns are increasingly categorized as new social movements that seek to transform values of the dominant political paradigm. In his edited volume on *New Social Movements in the South*, Wignaraja suggests that while old social movements sought to transform or revolutionize the state, new ones build countervailing force to state. Further, the concerns of these new social movements go beyond economic to issues of identity and meaning (1993). Kothari expands on this theme in the same collection, arguing that the influence of the women's movement, which proclaims that the political is personal and vice versa and denies the separation of political and personal, has caused "a massive shift not just in the position of women in politics but also in our whole understanding of politics itself" (1993: 72)

In writing about social movements in Africa, Cheru suggests that "the vibrancy of independent social movements" may indicate the growth of a strong and viable civil society (1996:155). He distinguishes these progressive social movements from NGOs who tend to be accountable only to their donors and sees them as democratic expressions of community in contrast to top down democracy and meaningless elections. Prominent among these social movements are women's organizations who find alternative means for pressing demands on the state.

How does the role of women in new social movements affect global governance? Such movements intercede above and within the state, along with corporations, media, and crime syndicates, to weaken or *develop new paradigms* of national sovereignty and transform both values and institutions of government. Who will finally rule the world? Korten answers the corporations (1995); Castells warns that society, feeling its helplessness, may flock to a charismatic leader who might rule for good or for evil, but he holds out hope that the future lies in "proactive movements, aiming at transforming human relationships at their most fundamental level, such as feminism and environmentalism...a whole array of reactive movements that build trenches of resistance on behalf of God, nation, ethnicity, family, locality..." (1996:2).

How different women's goals? Jaquette discusses the impact of increasing numbers of women elected officials globally and notes that

On some measures, women are more conservative than men: They are less likely to vote for the parties on the Left, and rather than pursue their own self-interests, they more often mobilize for defensive reason-- namely to protect the interests of the family....But women are far from conservative in one important sense: Women are more likely than men to support state regulation of business to protect the consumer and the environment and to assure that the needs of society's weakest members are addressed (1997:35).

In many countries, however, women are eschewing existing political institutions as patriarchal, often corrupt and addicted to cronyism, and adopting alternative styles of making demands. Much of feminist literature on nationalist movements note how quickly women's place was returned to the

home despite their leadership roles in protest marches or armed rebellion. Male leadership argued the need for unity on revolutionary goals and questioned "double militancy" as jeopardizing the movement. Once the goals are achieved, women's support seems less critical; nationalist calls for reasserting cultural identity are often in conflict with women's expectations of equality. Although many new constitutions give women equality in civil matters, customary or religious law remains unchanged. Sometimes the women themselves are so steeped in tradition that they do not demand change.

Reviewing the 34 points that constitute the Zapatista's Commitments for Peace, Nash and Kovic comment that although land is the dominant demand of this resistance effort, women's rights to possess land is not mentioned even though a majority of those expelled from the land, largely because they are Protestants, are women. The Commitments include support for women's health and for artisan centers. But the women themselves do not raise the issue of land even for widows or single women (1991).

Learning from history, women in South Africa felt able to demand women's rights once the constitutional process had been initiated. Until 1990, women's issues were subordinated to national struggle and women's energies were largely focused in the women's auxiliary of the African National Congress. As the isolation of South Africa was ending, some urban feminists began to write about domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape (Kadalié, 1997). The Rural Women's Movement which had agitated against forced removals and Bantustans, worried that a return of power to tribal chiefs would legitimize women's subordination. In 1992, Women's National Coalition was formed from 81 groups and 13 regional alliances of women's groups plus the women's caucuses or "gender desks" of all major parties. Within two years, this group under the leadership of Frene Ginwala, present

Speaker of the Parliament, issued the **Women's Charter for Effective Equality**. Significant demands included a provision to reverse the draft constitution provision that would have made the Bill of Rights *subordinate* to customary law (Kemp, et al, 1995). The amended constitution was passed on Feb. 7, 1997.

Rhoda Kalalie, a member of the newly established Civil Rights Commission with special concern for women, calls the constitution "great." She noted in an interview that the South African government has adopted the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Platform of Action passed at the UN World Conference for Women in Beijing in 1995. Yet, she continued, the "position of South African women is dismal...sexual violence is endemic," with over one million rapes per year, 95% on black women. This outrage is exacerbated by a myth circulating in the townships that raping young virgins prevents AIDS. Asserting that "Men can stop rape faster than courts" she has challenged the president to make this a lead issue (1997).

As a result of the April 1994 elections for parliament conducted under proportional representation, 25% of the members are women. Mtintso writes in "From Prison cell to Parliament" that never before in history have black women held a seat. "Sitting in Parliament is a far cry from the experience of exile and imprisonment, solitary confinement and banishment, which was the price paid by many of us who dared oppose the apartheid regime." She calls parliament "a male domain... from its facilities (toilets, gym, childcare centers and so on) to its language, rules, sitting times, and attitudes" (1995:103). All of the activist women are finding parliament a difficult terrain, she complains, and sums up their apprehension by quoting her colleague Jenny Scheiner: "The post-election South African situation has

within it both the seeds of women's emancipation... and the seeds of entrenched patriarchy" (1995: 117).

Given this ambivalence by prominent women members of parliament or of the new administration, South African women's organizations are divided about whether to continue with their coalition now that essential provisions of the Charter were adopted and women elected to legislatures at all levels. While women were able to work together for the passage of abortion legislation, their allegiance to various parties has made a concerted voice for women difficult to maintain. Yet "the top layers of the new government remain bulwarks of male power, and women remain numerically weak at all levels of government" (Kemp et al, 1995:154).

Throughout the world, women are circumventing existing political institutions by seeking alternative ways to power through new organizations. For some feminists, the appeal of many such groups to motherhood and morality is troubling; yet in both Argentina and Chile the demands by mothers for information about their "disappeared" children were a major factor in undermining these military regimes. In both countries, as in South Africa, these organizations face the question of their relationship to democratically elected governments (Brasileiro, 1996; Jaquette, 1994).

In East Africa, with its range of effectively one party states, Tripp finds that the women are dropping out of political parties to create new associational forms that have become a significant force for political reform. Women press for property rights, greater government accountability, more participation, and guaranteed human rights in ways that often "elude conventional definitions of political activism" (1996:286). For example, women utilized a traditional method of protest in Nairobi in 1992 when the police tried violent means of breaking up their hunger strike in support of

political prisoners. Women's response to this confrontation in Uhuru Park in the center of the city was to strip off their clothes and verbally attack the attackers. But the demands these women are making reinvent rather than reinstate tradition. They call for legal rights and greater democracy in the family and in the community; and for leadership in business, NGOs, and academia in addition to politics. To bolster this demand, women are being touted as the keepers of culture. Instead of rushing into male reform groups which retain exclusion, women are creating associations and institutions that are participatory, accountable, and internally democratic.

[Maran: Taiwan?]

Even in Pakistan with its low rating for women in the Human Development Report, women are organizing around issues of female empowerment, domestic violence, education, and political participation. Weiss argues that women's organizations are instrumental in opening up civil society (1997). [Bosnia]

Disgusted with corruption and male preoccupation with violence and profits, women in many countries are avoiding patriarchal formal political machinery and institutions in favor of coalitions and networking. The basis of their strength and appeal rest on values that reflect traditional roles of women. Such trends may be seen as both troubling and exhilarating. Will this separate approach enhance or undermine women's drive for equality? Can women exercise power by invoking presumed essential female characteristics and celebrating difference? [RM: "this is a fluid issue among women's groups"]

Women's impact on global governance

_____ Women today are charting several apparently contradictory paths to power and influence on the global stage. As the influence of mainstream NGOs expands, their championing of values that resonate with women's traditional

concerns make NGOs a comfortable forum for women. Although male dominance may still be present in organizational structure and decision-making processes, women's voices and leadership are increasingly evident. Even within the political institutions of parties and legislatures, women are contesting everything from the rigidities of rules to the lack of bathrooms to the juvenile verbal assaults in the British House of Commons. In these ways, women are seeking power within male institutions, and change is often slow.

An alternate route to wielding power is to appeal as women and mothers for a change in values that underlie government policies and programs. In every country in the world, women are organizing themselves, are taking charge of their lives, are protesting domestic violence and sexual harassment, male drunkenness, and demanding access to land and housing, microcredit and markets, employment and childcare. The sum of these activities has produced the women's social movement that is fundamentally altering established institutions of society.

The power of this social movement has enhanced the role of women's organizations as they operate at the global level. At the United Nations and its agencies, in discourse with the World Bank, in negotiations at meetings of all types of NGOs, women have new authority and presence.

Which path is preferable? Women only community or self-help groups benefit from the global noise raised by the elite leadership within and outside mainstream institutions. But women leaders working within national legislatures benefit from the rising public voices of women demanding a gentler and more equitable world for women, their children, their families, and their communities. NGOs, with the growing influence in an expanding civil society, are yet another route for influence.

Is outside influence more likely to bring change in the outmoded institutions of the state? Is the backlash against current trends toward gender equality a desperate attempt to stop an inevitable shift of patriarchal relationships between women and men? Is the lack of enthusiasm for women's issues among the younger generations in the United States, for example, a reflection of improved women's position? Around the world, male as well as female scholars and activists believe that the women's movement has already irrevocably changed society.

After a quarter of a century, the cumulation of their activities globally has challenged male control in the family by reducing women's economic dependence on men. While women worry that such changes leaves mothers with double roles of nurturer and provider while letting fathers off the hook (Summerfield & Tinker, 1996), many male scholars are emphasizing how these changes alter the basic fabric of society. Amartya Sen revises approaches to the household with his discussion about women's improved bargaining position within the household (1990); Ken Kusterer proclaims the imminent demise of patriarchy: Manuel Castells writes that "the transformation of women's consciousness, and of societal values in most societies, in less than three decades, is staggering, and it yields fundamental consequences for the entire human experience, from political power to the structure of personality" (1997:136).

Translating the value shifts caused by the women's movement into new political, social, and economic institutions is a monumental task. Women need to pursue all available paths to power and influence, in women only and mainstream NGOs and in nonconventional community and political organizations. The expanding civil society gives greater space to people's organizations and so allows greater opportunities for women to mold their own future.

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