

INVOLVEMENT OF NGOS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Abstract

This paper examines the activities and roles of NGOs in order to determine their place in contemporary society. The first part of the paper outlines the criteria for definition and classification of NGOs. The second part of the paper provides an analysis of NGO evolution and development throughout history focusing on their influence and role in the world. In the end, the author concludes that NGOs represent a citizens' initiative in order to solve community problems and their involvement in society requires time and resources.

Keywords: explosion of NGOs, civil society development, democratic consolidation, NGOs-agents of change, community problem solving

JEL CODES: L30, L31, L44

IMPLICAREA ONG- URILOR ÎN SOCIETATEA CONTEMPORANĂ

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Rezumat

Această lucrare analizează activitățile și rolurile ONG-urilor în scopul determinării locului ocupat de acestea în societatea contemporană. Prima parte a lucrării prezintă criteriile de definire și clasificare a ONG-urilor. A doua parte a lucrării realizează o analiză a evoluției și dezvoltării ONG-urilor de-a lungul istoriei cu accent pe influența și rolul lor în lume. În final, autorul ajunge la concluzia că ONG-urile reprezintă o inițiativă a cetățenilor cu scopul de a rezolva problemele comunității, iar implicarea lor în societate necesită timp și resurse.

Cuvinte cheie: explozia ONG-urilor, dezvoltarea societății civile, consolidare democratică, ONG-urile – agenți ai schimbării, rezolvarea problemelor comunității.



Proceedings of the 11th Administration and Public Management International Conference
"Strategic Management for Local Communities"

1. OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is a survey on the nongovernmental sector taking into account its increasingly important role over the past decades which makes it a distinctive sector within civil society.

To accomplish the purpose, the following objectives were established:

- Presentation of the definitions and classification of non-governmental organizations;
- Analysis of the non-governmental sector development;
- Description of the spectrum of NGO activities

The contribution of this paper consists in summarising definitions, classifications as well as developments in the field and in providing an analysis of the spectrum of NGO activities.

The data collection method used in this descriptive, qualitative and exploratory study was the document analysis method. In this regard, the paper is focused on the study of a range of publications relating to the NGO sector which provide both theoretical and practical insights of relevance to researchers.

2. DEFINITION AND CLASSIFICATION OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Currently, there are many nongovernmental organizations operating worldwide, with major differences from country to country as regards their structure and position in society. (Bagci, 2007). Therefore, it is difficult to formulate a precise and commonly accepted definition at global level.

According to some authors and literature studies, the definition of an NGO should be based on several criteria. In this regard, Dreesmann (1987) believes that any NGO should be autonomous and not dependent on the state and its funds. This does not mean that NGOs could not receive public funds. They could receive funds from public sources, but it is important that the state should not interfere in their activities. The author also specifies two other criteria: they should be not for profit organizations and two thirds of their funds should be obtained through voluntary contributions.

Other authors (Edwards and Hulme, 1992; Moore, 1993) consider that NGOs have four essential characteristics that distinguish them from other civil society organizations: voluntary, dependent, non-profit, self-serving.

The World Bank's Operational Directive on NGOs no 1470 defines NGOs as private organizations dedicated to promoting the interests of the poor, protecting the environment, providing basic social services, developing communities (Fischer, 2006).

According to Official Development Assistance (1990), NGOs are voluntary organizations serving community interests locally, nationally and internationally. Moore (1993) considers that these organizations are essential vehicles of democracy and key elements for the success of civil society. Frantz (1987) defines them as formal organizational structures that arise when people constitute themselves into a social unit and pursue an explicit objective. They formulate rules governing the relations between their members as well as their obligations. Korten (1991) argues that NGOs are the earliest form of human organization arising before the establishment of governments. Furthermore, Banks and Hulme (2012) believe that the failure of the state in certain fields between 1970 and 1980 fueled interest in NGOs as an alternative to development, focused on solving community problems and providing services. Lewis and Kanji (2009) state that these organizations have emerged due to philanthropic tradition and helpfulness.

An important issue in defining NGOs is that in many countries the concept of NGOs is considered synonymous with the concept of civil society (Frantz, 1987). However, the concept of civil society has a wider scope. There is no commonly accepted definition of the concept of civil society in communities or in academic debate. Civil society is the arena of collective voluntary actions grouped around interests, goals and shared values, an intermediate space between the state and family populated by organizations that are separate from the state and have autonomy (Buzec, 2007).

With respect to nongovernmental organizations classification, it is very difficult to distinguish between different types of NGOs because the boundaries between them are vague. Therefore, a single - standard typology of NGOs does not exist. Taking into account the definitions of different authors in literature, we cannot say that NGOs could be seen as one class of organization. (Hailu Senbeta, 2003). Probably the only way to analyse the organizations of this sector is the study of a small sample and massive repetition of the study on other small samples by taking into account their similar characteristics.

It is also important to mention that the same NGO may evolve to a great extent during its life, for example from a volunteer based organization to a professional staff organization successful in attracting additional funding from private donors and governments (Sooryamoorthy and Gangrade, 2001; Wood, 1997).

Additionally, non-governmental organizations vary depending on the following criteria: size and scope, structure, role, funding, origin, membership forms, motivations, values, religious orientation, their use of volunteers or professionals, and their relationships to governments and donors etc.

Therefore, in terms of size, they could be small or large; in terms of organizing they could be formal or informal, bureaucratic or flexible. Other difference regards the funding: some of them are externally funded receiving funds from donors, while others are based on locally mobilized resources. The literature makes also a distinction between "Northern NGO" and "Southern NGO". The former concerns the

organizations that originate in the industrialized countries, and the former refers to organizations that operate in underdeveloped areas (Lewis, 2009). Another distinction regards the membership forms of NGO. On the one hand there are community-based organizations or people's organizations, and on the other hand intermediary forms of NGO also called grassroots support organizations. As regards resources, some NGOs are rich while others struggle to survive from one year to another (Lewis and Kanji, 2009).

Some NGOs have permanent well-trained staff and low level of volunteering, while others have a high rate of volunteering or rely almost entirely on volunteers (USAID, 2009).

With respect to motivations and values, some NGOs are paternalistic, trying to respond quickly to people's problems (Brown and Kalegaonkar, 2002), while others promote a radical approach to problems and identify solutions having long term effects. However, it is sometimes possible that one single organization incorporate all these features (Lewis and Kanji, 2009).

Gauri and Fruttero (2003) highlight two accounts of NGO motivation: a so-called "opportunistic" one and a "benevolent" one. The former aims to maximize funding through grants and contracts. The latter is aimed at reducing poverty and improving living conditions for people with disabilities. Therefore, NGOs could be classified into benevolent and pragmatic. If they choose to perform in poor areas, they should pay attention because the risk of failure is very high, putting in danger the flow of funds from donors.

According to Clark (1991), most researchers have concluded that there are six categories of NGOs: relief and welfare agencies, technical innovation organizations, public service contractors, popular development organizations, grass-roots development organizations and advocacy groups and networks. Unfortunately, this classification does not allow differentiation of NGOs depending on functions, ownership and scale of operations.

In 1996, Salamon and Helmut developed the International Classification of Non-profit Organizations by taking into account the third sector organizations in different countries. By means of this classification they proposed a series of criteria that should be taken into account when categorizing NGOs from all levels. The system put forward by Salamon and Helmut identified 12 major activity groups by using economic activity as a key for selection: culture and recreation, education and research, health, social services, environment, development and housing, law, advocacy and politics, philanthropic intermediaries and voluntarism promotion, international, religion, business and professional associations, unions, not elsewhere classified.

According to Hailu Senbeta (2003), this classification has both advantages and disadvantages: provides a clear separation of organizations depending on their non-economic activities, but fails to make a clear difference between them depending on their goals.

Another significant classification is made by Union of International Associations which maintains a database on international civil society since 1948: international non-governmental organizations and inter-governmental organizations (Union of International Associations, 2012). This classification is certainly different from that made by Salamon and Helmut, focusing on the size instead of type (Hailu Senbeta, 2003).

Stromquist and Monkman (2000) consider that NGOs are a heterogeneous set of institutions that operate in different sectors and addresses different target groups. Therefore, they can be divided into the following categories depending on their field of activity: grass-roots operations involved in social actions; non-profit businesses run by professionals who provide jobs in order to integrate people with disabilities into the labour market; locally-based institutions using the resources of those involved in their activities; and international entities with large budgets built from grants and contracts from governments and various international organizations (Ginsburg, 1998).

Eade and Ernst (2001) show another classification system, namely International Standard Industrial Classification's. However, this classification excludes the vast majority of NGOs involved in various support activities: half NGOs receiving funds from governments as well as advocacy NGOs, whose number has increased dramatically in recent years due to the growing number of projects aimed at building and strengthening support organizations.

According to Willetts (2002), NGOs can be divided into two groups: operational and advocacy NGOs. The former attract resources through donations from various companies and foundations, grants, contracts from governments, volunteers' labour in order to support their projects and programs. This process requires a complex organization, as well as time and expertise to prepare the applications. Generally speaking, the latter have the same functions as the operational NGOs, aiming to raise funds, but at a smaller scale. They are more interested in organizing large events in order to attract favourable publicity rather than raise funds, as well as the mobilization of a small number of people in a short period of time in order to involve them in the organization's activities.

Another classification system is the General Industrial Classification of Economic Activities being used in the EU since 1970 in order to classify economic activities. This classification system is also flawed because it excludes organizations that receive money from governments as well as grass-root

organizations which are subsumed under other community services (European Commission Eurostat, 2011; Hailu Senbeta, 2003).

One of the richest classification systems is considered the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities developed by National Center for Charitable Statistics (n.d.) in collaboration with many non-profit organizations. The system classifies non-governmental organizations in two categories: „the product or field in which the entity is engaged and what they do in that field” (Hailu Senbeta, 2003).

Although they are different due to the variety of NGOs, all these classifications are important and can be used to facilitate, if necessary, meetings and consultations between the third sector organizations and academics, governments, industries, etc. for planning future work.

3. ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE NGO SECTOR

Throughout history, two categories of actors have distinguished within the society: the state and civil society. Due to this model, the society was divided into two sectors: public and private sector. This differentiation has become outdated with the passage of time. In modern societies there is a new distinction: a profit-oriented sector and another one, not for profit, called the non-governmental sector or the third sector (Hințea and Marton, 2003; Păceșilă, 2014).

The first non-governmental organizations have emerged in the nineteenth century in industrialized countries, being involved in charitable or philanthropic activities. The first organization was the Anti-Slavery Society set up in 1839 followed by the Red Cross and Caritas (Young and Dhanda, 2013).

After World War II, Western European governments have recognized the importance of the NGO sector in ensuring democratic consolidation and expansion. Therefore, they began to create a uniform legal framework in order to reduce state influence on this sector and to bring more transparency on its organizations' activities.

The role of NGOs in society has grown tremendously in the past few decades due to their increasing involvement in population welfare activities. Over time, they began to operate in fields where governments had no mechanisms for handling problems. The importance of the work done by NGOs has been recognized both in developed countries and in developing ones. Subsequently, the welfare and philanthropy activities have been complemented by actions involving the transformation of existing structures, democratization and strengthening civil society. In other words, NGOs have become organizations working for structural change in the society (Bagci, 2007).

The decolonization of African societies in the 1960s led to a change in addressing the poverty issues: reduce the causes rather than the consequences of poverty. The armed conflicts that ravaged the countries during the 1970s and 1980s (Vietnam, Angola, Palestine) led the European NGOs to act as mediators in order to support informal diplomacy. In addition, in the mid-1980s, the World Bank found that NGOs were more efficient and less corrupt than typical government channels (Berthoud, 2001).

The history of NGO movements is marked by several stages. The first stage was the solidarity movement which led to important political changes in Poland in the 1980s. Another stage is represented by the impact of environmental activists on the Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The latest stage reference is represented by the anti-globalization and environmental organizations who have protested against the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle in 1999 (McGann & Johnstone, 2006).

NGO involvement in social, economic, political and environmental issues turned them into key actors of society which promote the change. They could be the solution to the collapse of traditional structures and the failure of governments in some fields. Moreover, in democratic societies citizens have the right to freedom of association. The exercise of this right leads to the emergence of political religious, artistic, sporting, commercial organizations, etc, which operate within society and mobilize resources in order to produce wealth and improve the quality of life (Korten, 1990; Bagci, 2007).

In the 1980s, the recognition of the essential role of civil society in the civic and political development of countries increases the importance of non-governmental sector. In this context, people consider that NGOs, the expression of citizens' freedom of association, contribute to bridging the opportunity gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged people in the society. Furthermore, another authors (Bebbington and Farrigon, 1992; Bebbington and Thiele, 1993) considers that not only social activities contribute to the growing importance of NGOs, but also military activities, especially in developing countries.

According to Edwards and Hulme (1992, 1996) NGOs are considered an important channel for social welfare, poverty alleviation and development of civil society at the end of the Cold War in 1989. The explosion of NGOs is also related to reducing the role of the state in the economy. Taking into account their effectiveness in reducing poverty, the states increasingly support NGOs in providing services in sectors where government intervention is not enough. Moreover, many NGOs operate in fields which were previously the exclusive jurisdiction of the state, such as education and health (Gideon, 1996).

The increasing global influence of NGOs is an important phenomenon with implications on the development perspectives of poor people, on the future of these organizations and on the economy in which they operates (Bagci, 2007). However, while the governments of many developing countries are

seeking ways to encourage the NGOs activities, others are suspicious about their role as agents of change. According to Williams (1990) the growth of NGOs is often a dilemma for the state, especially in the societies where voluntary associations have not played a formative role and the state has had a predominant role in all areas. Other governments insist on their political sovereign right to act as guards in relation to organizations operating in their territory and agencies from the outside world.

4. THE CURRENT SPECTRUM OF NGO ACTIVITIES AND ROLES

In the current societies NGOs became more of a necessity than a luxury. The 20th century history has demonstrated quite convincingly that the welfare state is unable to provide welfare, economic and civil society development. The shortcomings of the state and the disadvantages of the market system have spurred citizens around the world to create civil society organizations - NGOs - in order to solve society's problems. Currently, a wide range of non-governmental organizations could be found in democratic societies having social, political, cultural, civil, sportive, religious, business or recreational purpose. Taking into account the multitude of needs and the inability of governments to meet them due to globalization and economic constraints, the activities and the role of NGOs has expanded.

In the report elaborated by the Commonwealth Foundation (1994) NGOs activities are grouped into two categories:

Care and welfare

- Service and delivery
- Mobilizing resources
- Research and innovation
- Human resource development
- Public information

Change and Development

- Welfare organisations
- Development organisations
- Environmental organisations
- Indigenous people's organisations
- Women's organisations
- Youth organisations
- Human right organisations
- Environmental groups
- Income generating projects
- Job creation programmes
- Children organisations
- Disabilities organisations
- Workers organisations

NGO Activities in Modern World
Source: Commonwealth Foundation (1994).

In the current societies NGOs fulfill a range of roles:

- Give citizens the opportunity to work together in order to promote social values and civic goals important to them. The NGOs are involved in various fields (Burlacu, 2011) such as health, education, rural and urban development, environment, population, social welfare, job creation, skills training, economic development, peace and human rights as well as the informal sector. (Commonwealth Foundation, 1994). In all these fields, NGOs have tried to explore new policies and practices for a better understanding and awareness of social, economic, environmental problems and other things. (Bagci, 2007)..
- Represent a unique and essential space between for profit and the government sector. The private enterprise produces private goods and services while the government is focusing on the provision of public goods and services. Most government expenditures are allocated for large projects such as dams, hospitals, schools, etc. In general, the governments do not conduct income-generating activities and rarely make investments that generate employment opportunities. Therefore, NGOs have turned into an alternative sector (Uphoff, 1995; Korten, 1990), the third sector. The non-profit and non-governmental sector contributes to the satisfaction of the community needs, ensuring a balance between the state and the free market. At the same time, NGOs can build partnerships between the three sectors that should rely on the unique strengths of each sector in order to contribute to the common good (Heintz, 2006).
- Enable social change by taking into account the challenges that public and private sectors do not focus. NGOs are able to take risks that are economically unacceptable for the private sector and politically unacceptable for the government (Drabek, 1987; Simmons, 1998). In fact, the level of organizational flexibility has a major influence on its ability to adapt and respond to changes (Moldoveanu and Dobrin, 2012) and to take risks.

In modern societies around the world, many services currently considered that best practices have been designed, tested and improved by NGOs over many years. In addition, advocacy campaigns conducted by NGOs determine governments to adopt political reforms and improve the legislative framework for business environment (Baitenman, 1990). The NGO sector also allows establishing a healthy balance between the potential excesses of capitalism and the lack of adequate state resources (Heintz, 2006).

- Have an important role in ensuring compliance with the fundamental values: human rights, democracy and the rule of law. In the context of the failure of conventional development models and of the emphasis on the role of the individual in the development process, the NGO sector

becomes an agent of democracy and development. (Bayat, 1996; Heintz, 2006). In recent decades, NGOs have taken a more active role in setting the agenda and in elaborating and implementing public policies (Porter and Brown, 2000). Civil society participation in the decision making process strengthens the democratic system because the key component of a democracy is public participation.

- Use existing resources more efficiently than public institutions and mobilize additional resources. The rapid growth in number of NGOs has not been accompanied by an increase in the quality of work performed, leading to many problems with regard to responsibility. The increase in NGO number and in their fields of application needs for sustainable financing mechanisms. The answer to the apparently limited resources could be the identification of new modalities for mobilizing resources or the development of new modalities for increasing them (Commonwealth Foundation, 1994).

According to Edwards și Hulme (1995), NGOs have three roles in society:

- Preferred channel for delivering services
- Vehicles for democratization and essential components of civil society
- Effective vehicles for achieving economic and political objectives

Uphoff (1995) argues that there are two general categories of NGOs according to their role in society:

- NGOs involved in supporting development initiatives. They are the expression of the free will of social groups and try to build a collective society where every individual becomes a citizen.
- NGOs having some degree of institutionalization. They are the expression of social movements as well as of civil society's capacity to organize itself in different historical epochs.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The involvement of NGOs in contemporary societies were investigated in this paper by studying different researches in the field. This paper attempted a qualitative research in order to identify the definitions and classifications of non-governmental organizations, to analyze the establishment and development of the NGO sector and to describe the current spectrum of NGO activities and role.

The emergence of NGOs is not an accident, but a response to voluntary action of citizens in order to solve community problems. They should not be regarded only as organizations providing services or as vehicles of development and democratization. Their dynamics should be understood as a consequence of the

process of economic, social and political development. The explosion of NGOs should not be separated from the trends and changes that have occurred in different fields on local, national and global level.

In contemporary societies, the involvement of NGOs in different fields requires significant time commitment and substantial financial resources. In these circumstances, it is necessary that NGOs should focus on creating and nurturing relationships through building local, regional, national and international coalitions, creating partnerships with the for-profit and governmental sector as well as increasing dialogue and exchange of information with public institutions.

Another priority should be attracting human resources by organizing campaigns in order to raise public awareness on the role of NGOs in a democratic society and the importance of volunteering.

Although NGOs are everywhere and have access to different types of resources due to the complex mixture consisting of alliances and rivalries, businesses and charities, conservatives and radicals (Young and Dhanda, 2013), it is recommended that they focus on identifying new fundraising formulas and practices.

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