

Discuss the impact of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their limits and opportunities in relation to social development and civil society, making particular reference to examples from a selected country or countries.

By Hyeyoung Kim

Social and Public Policy

20002058500

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1. Defining NGOs

Why NGOs?

The proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in industrialized or non-industrialized countries alike is clearly witnessed in reports and data. The number of international development NGOs registered in the OECD countries increased from 1,600 in 1980 to 2970 in 1993 (Hulme and Edwards, 1997:4) In South Korea there are approximately 10,000 NGOs and this number grows to 20,000 if we include their branches. Half of them started during the last 10 years (Park, 2002).

Observers have commented on the international trend:

Their numbers have grown exponentially; the size of some makes them significant players in social welfare and employment markets at the national level; the funding they attract has increased enormously; and their visibility in policy-making fora, the media and with the general public, has never been higher (Hulme and Edwards 1997:3)

NGOs have been actively engaging in local, regional, national and international

matters with (or against) government and business sectors since their beginning. Understanding of NGOs (or 'nonprofit' organizations or 'third sector' organizations) has become important to understanding how societies operate, struggle and develop.

In this essay I will discuss the impact of NGOs and their limits and opportunities in relation to social development and civil society, making particular reference to East Asia and South Korea.

What are NGOs?

Defining terms in an academic field can be difficult, and there may not always be agreement. The term NGO, which is understood and used in different ways in different places and times, has been considered very difficult to define and agree on, if not impossible. One of the reasons which makes it a hard job is that there are many similar terms used for the same thing or the same thing with slightly different connotations. Some of the definitions found in the third sector literature are: major group; pressure group; interest group; private voluntary organization; independent voluntary sector; third sector organization; grassroots organization; activist organization; nonprofit body; and professional, voluntary, and citizens organization (Martens, 2002:278). Put simply, in the West, NGO refers to organizations working on development in non-industrialized countries while 'non-profit' or 'voluntary' organizations mean organizations working on welfare matters in Western industrialized countries (Lewis, 1999:2). However, more generally, the terms third sector or non-profit organizations are considered to refer to activity

which is neither state sector nor business sector. An important additional assumption is that, unlike cooperatives and mutual benefit organizations, whose activities benefit more directly their members, NGOs aim to help interests of many and unspecified persons although there is overlap with 'mutual' bodies (Bidet, 2002:132, Park, 2002:74).

It seems that the term NGO was first invented by the United Nations (UN) but NGOs came to the world long before the name and concept (Park, 2002:60; Bidet, 2002:271; Anheier et al., 2001:4). Well known NGOs, established in the late 19th and early 20th century, are the British Anti-Slavery Society (1838), International Committee of the Red Cross (1864), Sierra Club (1892), Save the Children Fund (1919), etc. (Park, 2002:60). Even though the NGO has a long history it was identified only as something which it is not; non-governmental. So, by the nature of their origin, the term NGO is sometimes problematic:

...the term NGO has been criticized for its negative connotations and inaccuracy—especially as it was structured from the point of view of governments and gained its boundaries in reference to them as “nongovernmental.” (Martens, 2002:277)

In those early days NGOs usually referred to international NGOs which act within a UN context. Now the range of NGOs has been so much extended to regional, national and local bodies engaging in activities of public interest that even the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN recognizes national, regional,

as well as international organizations as worthy of consultative status (Park, 2002:62-3; Martens, 2002:282).

With its careful attempt Park's work (2002) argues that four practical criteria of NGOs should ideally be met: 1) citizen participation by which NGOs are structured and differ from governmental organizations; 2) inclusiveness which makes NGOs open to anyone regardless of qualification, gender, religion etc.; 3) volunteerism by which NGOs operate and are differentiated from nonprofit hospitals or schools; and 4) public interests which distinguish NGOs from business organizations.

Martens (2002) provides comprehensive definition in accounts of juridical and sociological perspectives:

NGOs are formal (professionalized) independent societal organizations whose primary aim is to promote common goals at the national or the international level (Martens, 2002:282).

In this study I approach NGOs bearing in mind Park's definition when trying to evaluate their impact and limits in terms of civil society and social development. Since this narrows focus, relating especially to certain kinds of NGOs, and lays stress more on citizen's voluntary participation, it provides tool to simplify my task when estimating NGOs' roles and their relation to social development. In effect, the argument is that their roles as citizen and voluntaristic organizations are

crucial.

I have discussed so far what NGOs are or more accurately what NGOs could mean. Next I will deal with questions of why and how they came to exist.

NGOs and ‘civil society’

The beginning of NGOs is inherently related to capitalism and the nation-state since most commonly it is held that ‘market failure’ and then ‘government failure’ generated NGOs or more generally the third sector.

In orthodox economics, the private market is usually seen as an efficient mechanism for ensuring provision in line with citizens’ tastes and preferences. However, this optimality breaks down in the case of jointly consumed, non-excludable and non-rival goods — in part because of the so-called free-rider problem, wherein the benefits of consumption can be reaped without paying (Kendall and Knapp, 1996:12).

This view regards the third sector “as a response to demand for public or quasi public goods and services supplied by neither the market nor the state” (Weisbord 1975, 1977 cited in Kendall and Knapp 1996:12).

Government has tried to meet those demands abandoned by the market sector by building a welfare state. However, features such as bureaucracy, lack of

flexibility and inefficiency in decision making set limits on satisfying various demands. There is also an unwillingness to respond, given the idea of 'smaller government' which has often prevailed since the late 1970s:

The idea of a mixed economy of welfare was a key plank in the Thatcherite project of rolling back the frontiers of the state: an attempt to reduce the scale of government activity and to change its role from the direct provision of services to the planning, monitoring and regulating of services provided by other 'sectors'. (Harris et al., 2001:3-4)

Another explanation of growth of NGOs is related to civil society. It is useful to understand the meaning of civil society historically since civil society has been a base for NGOs to flourish, providing citizens with a capability of reflexive thinking and self determinism. Among various organizations within civil society, the NGOs we are concerned with set public goods as their primary aim and operate with voluntary resources even though they may also have paid staff.

One can trace notions of 'civil society' back to seventeenth century Europe when the nation-state began to emerge. At that time it referred to the state of safety and order as a counter concept to the state of nature, which Hobbes described as a state where 'every man is against every man' (Anheier et al., 2001:12). Here 'civil' is close to 'civilized' when it is used against 'barbarian'. A nineteenth century American scholar, Alexis de Tocqueville, developed an idea more like what we

mean today by civil society even though he didn't use the term itself. He argued that local self-government, the separation of church and state, a free press, an independent judiciary and most importantly associational life are useful tools for democracy and he foresaw the increasing demand for a voluntary sector to hold ever growing government power in check. (Anheier et al., 2001:13). Anheier et al. see Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) as the first who had the idea that many people now have of civil society as 'between the state and the market':

He goes back...to Hegel, who saw civil society as all kinds of social interaction, not just economic ones. Gramsci then goes a step further, and divorces the notion of civil society from economic interaction (2001:12).

Park (2002) also argues that civil society has been growing with the nation-state in the course of securing autonomous space for checking on state power and protecting freedom and the rights of individuals.

As with the term NGOs there is no agreed definition of civil society. It could mean different things to different people, as they are pleased to use it in a way which will suit them. Here in this essay, by civil society I mean to include 'active citizenship, growing self-organization outside formal political circles, and expanded space in which individual citizens can influence the conditions in which they live both directly through self-organization and through pressure on the state' (Anheier et al., 2001:11). This perspective looks at civil society in terms of

political and social interaction and effect, noting especially the influence, check upon and resistance to government as well as the market. In this way it provides a starting point for assessing NGOs' impact on civil society in the course of social change.

2. Aims and Functions of NGOs

Aims and functions of NGOs

The question of what functions NGOs perform is not an agreed matter. And the question of what they should be as already intimated is even more diverse. I provide brief overview now of key activities.

Social service provider

NGOs have been delivering social services which governments are unable or sometimes unwilling to provide. This function of NGOs can be found more in Western industrialized countries where NGOs work closely with their governments as partners or contractors. However this function as a social service provider is not confined only to Western countries. More and more NGOs in developing countries or countries in transition receive funds from their governments or donors and perform as service providers. Even though NGOs have been providing services independently from government since their beginning, cooperation with government in providing direct services increasingly became more common during the last two decades. This is mainly due to the tendency of governments to encourage NGOs to engage in service providing more and more on behalf of governments for several reasons. In the late 1970s and early 1980s conservative governments in Britain and in America and many other countries afterwards, reduced the roles of government in direct service

provision along with the privatization of public sector. By funding NGOs government is able to avoid many of its 'nitty gritty' works of service provision. Instead it directs, regulates and overlooks NGO's performance. Another reason is a strategic one. It seems that NGO activities are to some extent seen as a guaranteed way of promoting democracy, civil society and active citizenship. Due to their commitment to non-profit methods and the spirit of public service, NGO's 'probity' gives government an approval of 'good' policy when government works with them (Hulme and David, 1997). Sometimes this has not only ethical benefits but also financial ones. Since NGOs promote and utilize volunteerism, they can be more cost-effective than government. Increased government funding channeled through NGOs for the last two decades may not be the sole cause of NGO growth but is surely one of the main factors especially in Western industrialized countries (Hulme and David 1997:6) .

Activities involving the function of service providing are: promoting volunteerism, assessing people's needs, inventing new services or ways of provision, delivering services, evaluating results, funding small grass roots organizations, etc. These may contribute significantly to socio-economic development.

Monitoring, Criticizing, Advocating

NGOs encourage social change and can protect individual rights by monitoring, by criticizing government and market power, and by influencing social or market policies. This can cause NGOs to act against government, often rendering NGOs-government relationships rather antagonistic. But this is not always the

case. In cases of international or transnational matters which government can not address eagerly for some diplomatic reasons, NGOs can make their voices heard without being restricted.

Very important monitoring, criticizing and advocating roles of NGOs may be found more in countries where government abuses its power to press down individual freedom and rights. In both Latin America and Central Europe NGOs are expected to play more monitoring, criticizing and advocating roles rather than acting as service providers because in those countries, as Anheier (2001:16) points out, 'cold war was understood as a key component of authoritarianism, a way in which repression was legitimized'. The same was true in South Korea until the late 1980s when it emerged from a long military dictatorship. In such countries the general public may understand NGOs as against government. A survey conducted in 2000 in South Korea shows that Korean people think that 'criticizing government policy and advocating alternative policy' (33.8%) and 'protecting rights of excluded people' (31.6%) are more important roles of NGOs than 'delivering social services' (13.8%) and 'promoting citizen participation for community solidarity' (4.2%) (Kang, 2001). NGOs' monitoring role is not restricted only to government activities. NGOs play as a counter-weight to the private sector. Growing global social movements against capitalism are one area of evidence. In South Korea 'Minority shareholder campaign' has been aiming to increase corporate governance transparency and to stop illegal internal transactions within huge conglomerates known as 'Chaebol'.

Thus these roles of NGOs are intrinsically political. They aim to expand public space and promote political awareness by demonstration, assembly, campaign, public hearing, petition, monitoring, statements, etc. (Park, 2002:68). These activities have a direct bearing on social development and on those features of civil society which were emphasized above.

Characteristics of NGOs

One of the reasons that makes it hard for us to conceive what NGOs exactly mean is because of diversity in their scale, in terms of size and money, their fields of action, their ways of activities, their structural forms and their target beneficiaries. These things affect how far they meet various needs of different people in different situations. Some examples will be considered below.

Scale: grass-root, local, national, regional and international, or Northern and Southern.

Fields: human rights, development, environment, women, youth, peace movement, poverty reduction, international aid, refugee relief, disability, anti-corruption, economic justice, welfare, consumer rights.

Activities: service provision, monitoring, needs assessment, advocating, training, education, coordination, funding, policy assessment, campaign, petition, policy proposal.

NGOs are not seeking profit. This distinguishes NGOs from other non-state entities such as multinational companies (Bidet 2002:278). They have money

making programmes like fund-raising, publications or rather small scale business-like programmes but the money they make is used for staff or other managerial costs. This non-profit value attracts not only government to cooperate with them but also the general public to be their supporters. People voluntarily devote their time and money to the common ideals. Volunteerism is what NGOs are based on. It carries two meanings. One is willingness without being forced and the other is sacrifice without expecting direct material return. Volunteerism is related to the next attributes, informality and 'amateurism'. In comparison to government sector organizations and many of private sector organizations they tend to be less bureaucratic and more informal. In this context NGOs are sometimes accused of being amateurish as well. However, NGOs increasingly become professional, hiring paid staffs with special skills such as fund-raising or public relations, and developing management capability. This is partly because NGOs, especially those which are mainly funded by government and other types of donors and provide social service, are in one way or the other forced to meet certain level of formality. In fact some large scale international NGOs are not less complex in decision making than state organizations (Edwards and Hulme, 1995).

Due to their relative informality NGOs are said to be more flexible and innovative in their activities. They are quick to find out needs of people, recognize injustice and respond to tackle those issues. NGOs in different fields of action may build temporary coalitions for addressing bigger problems or issues which affect the more general public and dissolve the coalition once the goal is achieved. The 'Voters coalition 2002' in Korea operated until the recent presidential election and

the 'Solidarity for abolition of the Ho-ju (family headship) system', which I will discuss in the next chapter, consists of more than 20 different NGOs and works for one objective. To meet the needs of people who are unreachable by government policy or to tackle issues unpopular with governments or the market, NGOs have been creative and innovative in many ways. Korean NGOs came up with a 'single person demonstration'. The 'Assembly and demonstration act' in South Korea prohibits demonstrations within 100M around any foreign embassy. Some private companies or even government agencies abuse this act by strategically renting part of their buildings to a foreign embassy. Since the act defines a demonstration as a gathering of more than one person the 'single person demonstration' can bypass the Assembly and demonstration act and still draw people's attention. The single person demonstration is performed by one person usually standing with a picket in the related place. People can take turns. So this can go on several weeks or months if there are enough volunteers. Very often innovative approaches of NGOs become an international model which many other organizations follow. One prominent example is the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. Banks usually credit money only when a debtor is proven to be able to pay back but the Grameen bank provides small credit to the very poor people without bank guarantee. However, the Grameen maintains a return rate of 97%.

NGOs are sometimes more willing to address issues which require long-term investment. Those issues are often left without being taken care of by official agencies because they are keen to have visible results within a certain time frame. Innovativeness mentioned above and willingness to invest for long-term

projects without prompt results are possible because of an open attitude to learn from experiences. Those characteristics are sometimes misunderstood by partners in cooperation and have led them to misjudge NGOs as not being accountable (Edwards and Hulme, 1995).

Finally and most importantly NGOs have a strong commitment to social change whether it is explicit or not. Some suggest that a recent tendency of some NGOs to adopt micro-finance credit as their main activities encouraged by donors could exclude helping poor people to be aware of and confront structural inequalities (Hulme and Edwards, 1997:9). However, it would be more appropriate to say that these NGOs are taking a different route to the same destination:

Social justice requires that people be liberated from the conditions of material poverty as well as being able to organize themselves to defend their rights, and different sorts of organization will be more, or less, effective in promoting these goals according to context and circumstance (Edwards and Hulme, 1995:225).

This emphasis draws a clear line between NGOs and other agencies (state agencies and market agencies). Given the fact that NGOs and government may share the same objective of welfare of their people, and that NGOs are increasingly expected to act like market agencies with high standards of accountability and effectiveness, this is perhaps the most distinctive feature of NGOs.

3. Impact of NGOs

Here I note the potential positive impact of NGOs in three different levels: first impact on grass-roots, secondly impact on government policy and finally impact on civil society.

Impact on grass-roots

NGOs' impact on the grass-roots can be at its best most adequately described as empowerment of the poor or the disadvantaged. The Grameen bank, as I mentioned above, becomes a model which many other NGOs follow. After 26 years of operation it has grown to have 1,000 branches in Bangladesh. So far 10% of the total population of Bangladesh benefit from the Grameen bank and it seems that 42% of them have escaped out of extreme poverty. (Internet Hankyoreh, <http://www.hani.co.kr>).

Another rather new way of empowering people is through a community movement as an alternative way of living. There have been many different kinds of community movements but here I mean the community movement as a citizen movement which originated from the recognition that individuals are isolated from decisions about ways of producing all the goods they consume by the enormous market system. Community movements encourage people to be aware of issues related to every-day life such as food, house, waste, medical service,

transportation etc. and to control their life more autonomously. Many of these movements are initiated by rurally based community groups or environmental NGOs which promote organic farming technology and link these producers of organic agricultural food and consumers.

Such locally based movements may not have had great impact on many people so far. However in places where extreme poverty is not the main problem, the community movement is a rapidly growing NGO activity and not only criticizes whatever is wrong with government policy and private markets but also proposes alternative ways of living. It may set out to all kinds of 'sickness' which the modernized world has such as environmental degradation, exclusion, insecurity, etc. and build an 'ideal' society.

Impact on government policy

NGOs have a huge interest in influencing public policy. McCormick (1993:142) describes this, saying 'the fundamental objective of an NGO is to influence public policy from outside the formal structure of elected government'.

Trying to influence the policy process is far from simple. Authors come up with different views about the policy process itself: Lasswell argues there are seven stages of policy process which are intelligence, promotion, prescription, invocation, application, evaluation and termination; Dror revised this to meta-policymaking, policymaking and post-policymaking; others (Brewer and deLeon) divide it into initiation, estimation, selection, implementation, evaluation and

termination (all these authors are discussed in Park 2002:148). Although some authors suggest that it is more suitable to view policy processes as 'garbage cans' or 'primeval soups', stressing a less linear pattern, some will agree that the policy process can be broken into the three stages of agenda setting, policy development and policy implementation (Najam 1999:151). In this essay I will add policy evaluation to this common understanding following Chong's (1997) view.

Policy process stage	Main task
Agenda setting	Setting priority
Policy development(selection)	Choosing from alternatives
Policy implementation	Taking into action
Policy evaluation	Assessing

Table 1. Policy process and main tasks

The impact of NGO activities on government policy can be found throughout the whole policy process including policy development, implementation and evaluation. Moreover NGOs bring an impact to government policy not only as advocates but also as service providers or partners:

Whether they define themselves explicitly as advocacy organizations or not, citizen organizations (NGOs) are in the business of influencing policy. We need to broaden our

understanding of such influence by looking beyond narrow and restrictive notions of policy advocacy as the only, or even principal, role that citizen organizations play in the policy stream (Najam, 1999:173-4).

Citizen participation has been studied for quite a long time. Arnstein analyses citizen participation in terms of 8 stages according to the degree of participation: non-participation (manipulation and therapy), degree of tokenism (informing, consulting and placation) and degree of citizen power (partnership, delegated power and citizen control) (cited in Park, 2002). A particular NGO's relationship with government might fall at any point of Arnstein's "ladder", reflecting the degree of influence and extent of power that is shared with the NGO. Najam (1999:151-2) categorizes participation of NGOs in the policy process into four roles: monitor, advocate, innovator and service provider. NGO participation in policy processes could be through a coalition of multiple organizations or one single organization. It could be institutionalized participation, which is formal and government-oriented, or non-institutionalized participation, which is informal and free from government influence. Institutionalized participation could include taking part in government organized meetings, committee or public hearings, taking legal action, or implementing contracts with government. On the other hand non-institutionalized ways could be demonstrations, campaigns, petitions, making public statements, organizing seminars or public hearings, monitoring, etc. (Park 2002:153).

Time, degree, roles and methods of participation vary according to location, visibility and strategy of NGOs and one NGO can have more than one way of policy process participation. Big international environmental organizations such as Greenpeace and Sierra Club have been successful in the agenda setting stage. They organize international campaigns and events, or participate in formal meetings. Agenda 21 formulated in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 is a clear example of institutionalized participation for the latter. In South Korea many NGOs including those which are not directly working for women's welfare, formed a coalition, Citizens' Alliance for Abolition of Family Headship System, to raise awareness of the unequal law governing the family system and ultimately to abolish the law. They successfully managed to bring this issue to official attention, and now it is in the process of being tackled (<http://no-hoju.women21.or.kr>).

In the policy development phase there tends to be more institutionalized participation such as a public hearing or meeting organized by governments. NGOs recognize that when the policy process is about to select the best-fitted alternative, institutionalized participation is often more effective than campaign or protest (Park, 2002:161).

Examples of NGO activities against governmental policy implementation, which has an adverse impact on environment, abound in Korea. One of the most well known incidents of NGO impact on policy implementation is the huge movement among NGOs and individuals against the Dong River Dam in South Korea.

Initiated by local people it grew into a national protest and succeeded in stopping government plans for building the dam. NGO impact as service provider on policy implementation is especially obvious in development projects such as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee which is 'large enough in size and comprehensive enough in scope to serve as a pseudo-government agency' (Najam, 1999:166).

NGOs' roles as whistleblower and watchdog over national or international levels have a very visible impact on policy evaluation. In the area of human rights and environment, international NGOs such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International have been monitoring any violation of international conventions and treaties. In South Korea not many NGOs are participating in policy evaluation partly because the government restricts their participation. For instance government environmental policy evaluation is carried out by the Korea Environment Institute which is a state agency, and funding and access for other non-governmental bodies is very limited (Park, 2002:160).

Impact on civil society

Located between government and individual, organizations in civil society may protect individual rights, check on exclusive power of government and encourage the general public to participate actively in processes of decision making which will affect their lives (Park, 2002:56). NGOs and civil society have interactive relationships. As I indicated above NGOs are based on growth of civil society and political democratization. At the same time NGOs reinforce democracy and

promote civil society (Yang, 2002).

Civil society requires citizens who recognize their own rights and duties as community members. They regard themselves as autonomous individuals and possess capability of critical thinking especially in relation to government and market power. NGOs, through their issue awareness programmes targeting the general public, educate them as citizen in direct or indirect ways by encouraging them to be their supporting members or just simply bring their attention to social issues. People who become supporting members of one specific organization are likely to have interests in other social issues as well. It is hard to measure NGO impact on civil society in numbers or in any tangible way. However, episodes in Seattle and Genoa as well as the recent movement by Korean people who marched with candle everyday for peace and equality are clear evidence of growing streams within civil society.

4. Limits and Opportunities of NGOs

Relationship with government

For the last two decades NGOs have become increasingly involved with government. They actively participate in government policy formulation and provide social services which were once carried out by government. This means that they have become important players in society and possess capacity to influence social processes. However, this also means that NGOs could lose many of their original characteristics. Many authors analyze adverse impacts of close government and NGOs relations. Edwards and Hulme (1995) accurately point out:

As NGOs become more involved in large-scale service delivery (or grow for other reasons), and/or become more reliant on official funding, one might expect some fall-off in their flexibility, speed of response and ability to innovate. ... Time and space for reflection may be reduced and the ability of NGOs to articulate approaches, ideas, language and values which run counter to official orthodoxies may also be compromised (Edwards and Hulme, 1995:8).

They go further saying that the willingness of NGOs to address structural

problems of poverty and injustice will be diluted by their government dependence (Edwards and Hulme, 1995:8). Another concern is that 'a context in which NGOs compete with each other for government grants seems unlikely to foster the collaborative relationships on which effective policy alliances are built' (Covey, 1995). As NGOs (especially Northern NGOs) become dependent on government or donors, the concern increases about whether the dependent relationship damages autonomy of NGOs.

Accountability

NGOs are often accused of not being able to demonstrate impact and effectiveness in a reasonably rigorous manner. This is partly because of complexity in their accountability but also partly because of lack of eagerness to assess the impact accurately. Edwards and Hulme also point out that 'effective performance assessment and strong, multiple accountability mechanisms' are critical to NGOs. Despite their staff and supporters' continued belief that 'NGOs are ethical according to explicit values and principles (Zadek and Gatward, cited in Edwards and Hulme, 1995:224)' Edwards and Hulme argue that 'improving performance-assessment and accountability is central to their existence as independent organizations with a mission to pursue'.

Professionalism / Paternalism

As NGO-donor relations become more complicated, sometimes it is not so clear who decides what the poor or the disadvantaged need. NGOs have explicit or implicit pressure that they have to satisfy not only the poor but also their donors.

It is especially so as NGOs are getting more professionalized. Their claim of professionalism may help them work with governments and secure contracts but it could block them from recognizing genuine needs of the poor, and eventually might isolate them from those whom they serve.

Information technology

Information technology, particularly as represented by the internet, has been praised as a potentially revolutionary factor in changes of social interaction. As the number of users increases, its ability of spreading information theoretically anywhere in the world within the time of one click becomes more influential. NGOs have long recognized its potentiality and searched for utilizing it more effectively. The rejection campaign by the Citizens' Alliance for the 2000 General Elections in South Korea shows a clear example of internet impact on NGOs movements. This was a temporary coalition of more than 400 NGOs which aimed for listing up disqualified or 'unfit' politicians who ran for election. When it released the list on the internet a huge number of people visited their website. The system went down because of the heavy load. Visibility of NGOs among the general public tremendously increased after this incident and many NGOs newly opened their homepages and others renewed them (Ha, 2001).

In South Korea like anywhere in the world NGOs are experiencing changes as information technology develops and consequently becomes available at cheap cost. Firstly NGOs start to see this new technology as another tool for their existing activities. They use the internet for publicizing and collecting information,

interacting with the general public, mobilizing people's opinions and raising issues. Secondly NGOs address new issues brought by an information-oriented society. This is mainly because aspects of information technology fundamentally change conditions and modes of our lives. NGOs acted against the Korean 'Internet Rating System' which was legislated for in 2001, and provoked resistance on the ground of invasion of freedom of expression, and NGOs carried out activities to protect individual privacy against censorship by state institutions. They are also working on other issues such as information sharing and opening to the public.

Along with these there are negative aspects. Concentration on cyber space as a main activity field could exclude those who cannot afford internet access and consequently expand the information gap among people (this is one of the major issues NGOs are addressing). It could be applied to NGOs as well. The gap between big, affluent NGOs and small, poor NGOs could increase (Ha, 2002).

Nonetheless this area certainly has potential in some different ways. Firstly since information technology such as internet voting or discussion groups allows more people to participate in decision making processes, it can promote participatory democracy.

Secondly it brings individuals onto the stage. An NGO as a group cannot always represent each individual. Minor differences of individuals are often compromised. However in cyber space representations of NGOs (or any other groups) and

individuals are not necessarily different. The recent example of a candle demonstration against unpunished damaging activities by American military soldiers in South Korea, which attracted more than 10 thousand people every weekend, was initiated by one individual on a few internet websites and later joined by many NGOs.

Finally information technology promotes solidarity and alliances among NGOs. It is much easier with the internet to mobilize groups with shared goals. This will extend the influencing power of NGOs.

5. Conclusion

I have discussed the impact of NGOs and their limits and opportunities. Even though not everybody would agree with the emphasis in this essay on participation and advocacy, one thing is hard to disagree with. The number of roles played by NGOs in local, national, regional and international levels is ever increasing. It has become common practice for governmental or inter-governmental agencies to consult with NGOs when they formulate key policies. However, it is important to point out two commonly held myths about NGOs.

Firstly, most of the NGO literature evaluates them in generally positive ways, but it has to be noticed that NGOs are not a solution for everything. They are not 'magic bullets'. They can have adverse impacts and need to be watched over by the public. It is critical to consider multi-dimensional aspects of NGOs to assess their impact.

Secondly, for understanding the complex world of NGOs, simplification or selection often seems unavoidable. NGOs literature many times describes functions of NGOs in terms of a simple dichotomy like 'service delivery' vs 'social change' or 'Northern international aid NGOs' vs 'Southern recipient NGOs'. However, there are many counter or cross-cutting examples or evidences. NGOs whose main activity is service delivery often aim ultimately for social change. In South Korea the number of NGOs addressing poverty in other Asian countries

rather than national poverty is increasing. In England well known NGOs for helping underdeveloped countries have started to address poverty in their own country.

To conclude the essay, it is worth summarizing key points about impact and limits. NGOs have varied affects according to their size, goals and often other characteristics. One set of aims concerns advocacy and challenge, and this seems to me to be something on which there has been a measure of success. In South Korea there is evidence of important outcomes here. As far as social development is concerned, NGOs can bring a variety of benefits, ranging from innovation to the support of volunteers. Limitations and problems can arise from interactions with governments including being drawn into governments' plan in a way which reduces autonomy, and from difficulties about accountability, paternalism or representation.

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