THE TRANSFORMATION OF INTERNATIONAL NGOs AND THEIR IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT AID

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Abstract
International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) are among the key actors in the transformation of development as a global public policy issue in the post-Cold War era. This chapter explores how in the past two decades INGOs concerned with development have transformed their structures and practices as well as development discourse. The author shows how development INGOs have globalised, in terms of both the formation of international confederations and the collaboration of multiple INGOs in global coalitions. A key development has been the erosion of the apparent North–South divide among development INGOs, with INGOs that originated in donor countries reforming their structures to give a greater voice to their affiliates in recipient countries, and organisations that originated in developing countries forming affiliates in developed countries. The reorientation of INGO advocacy from states toward intergovernmental and corporate actors is also explored, as is the creation of new forms of partnerships with both governmental and private actors. The chapter addresses how development INGOs have attempted to respond to critiques of their accountability and legitimacy through reforms such as the International NGO Charter on Accountability, while the conclusion explores the limitations of the transformations of development INGOs, and the challenges that these new configurations pose.

1. Introduction

Addressing representatives of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) at the Millennium Forum in 2000, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, praised their ‘pioneering role’ in development and claimed that they ‘can work at the international level to lift billions out of poverty’ (Annan, 2000, 2). It is now widely recognised that INGOs are crucial actors in international aid and development (Lewis and Kanji, 2009). The purpose of this chapter is to explore the different ways in which development INGOs have both transformed themselves and played a transformative role in international development in the post-Cold War era. In order to provide the context for the transformations analysed, the chapter begins by exploring the
core characteristics of development INGOs and their evolution during the Cold War period. The main body proceeds to evaluate in turn the major aspects of the transformation of development INGOs in the post-Cold War era, including their structures and networking, their role in the developing world, their impact on development discourse and their development practices.

2. Development INGOs

There is no universally accepted definition of the characteristics of an INGO (Judge, 1978, 31). However, it has become common to follow the practice of the Union of International Associations (UIA), which collects data on organisations set up for non-profit-making purposes that were not established by governments and which operate in three or more countries. It is estimated that by 2009 there were more than 25,000 INGOs, of which more than 4000 were involved in development (UIA, 2010). Their diversity varies enormously and includes, but is not limited to, advocacy groups, grant-making foundations, research institutions and service-delivery organisations. As this piece will highlight, many INGOs concerned with development combine several of these roles. While some aim to promote development in general, others specialise in particular sectors such as education and health.

According to data of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on ‘net private grants’, development aid originating from non-governmental sources amounted to more than US$22,000 million in 2009, the latest year for which data is available. Figure 4.1 indicates the dramatic increase in non-governmental development aid over the last two decades, with a slight dip following the economic downturn of 2008.

Figure 4.1 – Non-governmental development aid, 1990–2009 (in US$ million)

![Graph showing non-governmental development aid from 1990 to 2009.](source: OECD (2011).)