

Evaluating Human Rights INGOs

Elizabeth M. Graffeo

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Public and International Affairs
In
Government and International Affairs

Joyce Rothschild, Chair
Karen M. Hult, Committee Member
Richard C. Rich, Committee Member

December 10, 2010
Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: INGOs, Human Rights, Watchdog Organizations,
Global Civil Society, U.S. Donors

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ABSTRACT

Over the past several decades, the numbers of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) that focus on tackling human rights issues have grown rapidly. These organizations operate internationally and work with governments, legislatures, social movement leaders, activists, donors, and individual citizens. As the number of operating INGOs has risen dramatically, researchers have simultaneously begun to investigate the possibility of creating a global civil society that would govern itself in order to maintain peace, create global solidarity and achieve human rights. This research investigates the role of nonprofit organizations in developing a global civil society by evaluating U.S.-based organizations that are tapping into an often-uninvolved subset of society—American donors.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| The Big Picture: INGOs and Global Civil Society | 9 |
| Making It Work: Evoking Activism and Understanding | 13 |
| The Desire to Help | 18 |
| The Watchdog Industry | 21 |
| Previous Criticism and the Response of the Watchdog Industry | 23 |
| Research | 27 |
| Interview Analysis | 30 |
| Conclusions | 35 |
| References | 40 |
| Appendix A | 42 |
| List of Figures | |
| List of Tables | |

Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. And overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. --Nelson Mandela

Introduction

The Need for Change

During the Holocaust approximately six million European Jews were torn from their homes, relocated to filthy ghettos, forced to perform slave labor, denied everything inherent to modern human existence, stripped of their dignity, and systemically exterminated. When the veil of secrecy that hung over Germany was pulled back and the world witnessed these horrifying abuses, states, government officials, and individuals recognized an urgent need for change. In the aftermath of the atrocities witnessed during the Second World War, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This document was the first global expression of the rights to which all human beings are entitled, stating, “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (“The Universal”). This declaration was made with a vision of the end of genocide, poverty, war, violence, and abuse. After its adoption, human rights became an issue at the forefront of the global politics. Several international organizations were established to work on identifying and combating human rights violations and a global grassroots movement for achieving human rights was set into motion.

As nonprofit organizations began to investigate human rights issues internationally, seemingly endless violations became apparent, the vast majority of which

continue today. In developing countries, entire communities are suffering from extreme poverty resulting in hunger, malnutrition, lack of clean water, high infant mortality rates, disease, and rising violence. Education and literacy rates are shockingly low in these communities and the availability of modern technology is almost nonexistent. Violence against women and girls has been identified as a global priority by several dominant human rights organizations including Amnesty International; according to their research at least one out of every three women worldwide has been beaten, coerced into sex, or abused in other ways during her lifetime. In some countries domestic violence is reaching rates of up to seventy percent (“Demand Dignity”). Transnational organizations and groups profiting from sex trafficking, child labor, weapons trade, and terrorism have been identified. In addition to these worldwide problems that are entrenched in society, human rights groups have identified specific countries where government regimes continue to oppress their own citizens as an expression of political, racial, ethnic, and economic beliefs. One example of a repressive state is the government military regime in Myanmar, where a police state characterized by the absence of free of speech, assembly, or association has been created. The military is targeting ethnic minorities for extermination, restricting Internet access, forcing women and children into sex slavery for the military, and cutting their citizens off entirely from the global community.

The Growth of Human Rights INGOs

As INGOs have identified these instances of abuse and suffering, they have suggested specific reasons for the growth of human rights violations. First, INGOs have expressed disappointment over government intervention in social issues: “over the last two decades citizens and political leaders have increasingly expressed dissatisfaction with

the operation of a broad array of government programs put into place in the first half of the twentieth century. In many cases this dissatisfaction has been linked to what policymakers and academics term the failure of government” (Ahmed and Potter, 24). In reaction to this failure of government, organizations feel responsible to step in to take over where the state has been unsuccessful. Secondly, “economic failure in the developing countries has also provoked searches for new ways to achieve social development. Third-world government programs, it is argued, have failed to produce economic growth, so that economic levels in many developing countries have stagnated over the last three decades” (Ahmed and Potter, 24). Although developing countries have been facing troubles for years, there have often been no improvements for communities, and in some situations the economy has gotten worse. A final factor in the increase of INGOs is a growth in material affluence that “created a middle class whose values increasingly changed from emphasis on material and economic stability to concern with social equity and quality of life. The emergence of these post-material values all over the world gave rise to new concerns such as human rights, environmental protection, and promotion of citizen empowerment. NGOs address all of these concerns” (Ahmed and Potter, 25). With many governments failing their citizens, developing countries remaining economically stagnant, and increased compassion amongst a growing middle class citizenry, NGOs have stepped up to address the failures of the state.

In reaction to these mounting global issues that have been identified over the past several decades, the third sector has expanded rapidly and the number of nongovernmental organizations operating internationally has grown significantly. During the 1980s, the number of INGOs doubled, and by 2000 there were 45,674 of these

organizations in operation (Ahmed and Potter, 19). The UN defines an INGO as “any international organization which is not established by inter-governmental agreement” (Ahmed and Potter, 8). In addition to this basic criterion, an INGO “cannot be profit-making, it cannot advocate the use of violence, it cannot be a school, a university, or a political party; and any concern with human rights must be general rather than restricted to a particular communal group, nationality, or country” (Ahmed and Potter, 8).

Roadmap to the Thesis

This thesis first attempts to explain the importance of global civil society and its potential to advance human rights. It details various ways in which human rights INGOs can work towards creating a global network of dialogue and action to end violence, oppression, and poverty. I specifically discuss the connection between the work of human rights INGOs and building relationships and respect between individuals in developed countries and those in developing countries. This research examines INGOs that work specifically on human rights issues, which typically focus on identifying existing human rights issues, developing solutions to large- and small-scale problems, and community building. As a result, human rights INGOs are able to help create and contribute to a growing communication network among individuals on a global scale. As the growth of human rights INGOs has continued, scholars have begun to investigate the possibility of creating a global civil society that would govern itself in order to maintain peace and create global solidarity. Scholars theorize that this type of global civil society would increase the probability of achieving complete human rights. It is likely that human rights INGOs can play a significant role in helping to achieve a global civil society that would in turn help them achieve their mission. In order to do this, INGOs must dedicate energy

and funds to working with activists, volunteers, and individuals in order to build a coalition against injustice and towards transnational cooperation and dialogue.

Next, I make a case that U.S. citizens are eager to become involved with human rights and often look for an outlet that I assert should be utilized more frequently?. For this reason, my research focuses specifically on human rights organizations that operate in the U.S. and emphasizes the relationship with U.S. donors. Currently, a substantial amount of research discusses the role of nonprofit organizations that are strengthening communities in developing countries and building the foundation to global civil society in these areas. One organization, BRAC, is an example of an NGO which works on the ground to mobilize individuals and improve the lives of families and communities. BRAC's leader, Fazle Hassan Abed, founded this organization to help the people in Bangladesh, in particular poor women, become self-sufficient by relying heavily on microcredit. BRAC hired field workers to go into communities and villages in Bangladesh and assess the problems they were facing. The organization then created programs catered specifically to the needs and culture of Bangladesh, "in experiment after experiment in health, education, and income generation, BRAC refused to accept failure, pushing ahead with new ideas and improvements until there was a clear answer" (Smillie, 148). Their programs addressed a wide range of problem areas in Bangladesh's rural areas, including education, health, and literacy. Each of these programs was incredibly innovative, from "the invention of shasthyo shebikas and sheboks to the arrangement for their financial stability; from the financial incentives it created in the TB and oral rehydration programs and to the directly observed therapy they pioneered" (Smillie, 149). Since BRAC gets most of its funding from large organizations and

through microcredit projects, it is able to distance itself more from its funders and engage the communities the organization works with. While it maintains transparency with its donors, shares information about any pitfalls it has faced, and approaches each new program with thoughtfulness and innovation, BRAC sticks true to its core mission and values. BRAC and other similar organizations engage primarily with the disadvantaged community they are serving and their large funders. These organizations have few members, and most of these individuals are simply check-book members who are not actively involved. Organizations like BRAC are just “one of the many thousands of small NGOs that receive little attention but undoubtedly make up the numerical majority of voluntary development organizations worldwide” (Ahmed, and Potter, 7).

While these organizations are vital to the ongoing betterment of developing countries, it is also important for large scale transnational NGOs to exist not only to improve the lives of individuals, but also to aid in the creation of a global civil society. While NGOs are not governments and therefore their power is limited, “the power of NGOs... is the power to persuade. Their power consists of demonstrating through persuasion and action that there are other ways of organizing social and political arrangements besides those currently in use” (Ahmed, and Potter, 15). Since smaller NGOs in international development work primarily with those they are serving and their donors, there is little room for others to get involved internationally aside from donating funds. In order to create a more cohesive transnational movement against human rights violations, it is vital to create a new attitude towards these problems amongst typical Western individuals. NGOs may potentially have the ability to do this. “[C]onsider common activities of NGOs: educating the public, advocacy, empowering people through

local economic development and network construction, and monitoring international agreements. None of these involves coercion, all take place within legal frameworks established by states either individually or collectively, and all involve persuasive communication. And all aim at building or changing understandings of how the world operates and why” (Ahmed, and Potter, 15). In order to show how INGOs can be involved in the establishment of a global civil society I outline the potential ways that INGOs can provide an outlet for activism and how individuals in the U.S. can become more engaged with social justice issues around the world.

After analyzing this relationship, I investigate the three leading watchdog organizations that monitor nonprofit organizations in the United States. These organizations are responsible for providing donors in the U.S. with information to help in the decision-making process surrounding which organizations one chooses to support. Unfortunately, in part due to these organizations’ rankings system, there is a building amount of pressure on INGOs to focus on finances, budget, and short-term victories that are easily understood by donors and the public. An organization’s ranking from these watchdog organizations influences its financial income considerably, and a focus on finances leads many INGOs to create a corporate-model business structure that deters work likely to yield more abstract and less tangible successes—for example contributing to a global civil society.

In this research, I analyze the limitations and shortcomings of this analysis system for human rights INGOs and propose an improved method. I also advocate for the secondary benefits of including new components of analysis in the watchdog organizations’ ratings system.

I conclude the thesis with an analysis of interviews with ten leaders of human rights INGOs operating in the U.S. Interviews with these subjects explore the perceived role of human rights organizations in the creation of a global civil society by leaders in the field as well as their thoughts on the impact of watchdog organizations on organization decision-making. These interviews give substantial insight into the connection between U.S. watchdog organizations, donors, human rights INGOs, and individuals in countries facing extreme human rights abuses.

The Big Picture: INGOs and Global Civil Society

It is first critical to understand the relationship between human rights INGOs and the theory of a global civil society and its potential to help achieve human rights. Although globalization has provided an opportunity for individuals worldwide to interact with each other in ways never previously possible, there is often accompanied by a lack of understanding and acceptance between communicating individuals who belong to dramatically different cultures. Relationships and interactions between individuals of different races, genders, countries of origin, or language groups often result in tension due to misunderstanding. Instead of being acknowledged and respected, differences more often translate into a perceived hierarchy. For example, an individual from a developed country may perceive himself or herself as being more important or “better” than an individual suffering from poverty in a developing country. Such perceptions of “the other” are currently a major obstacle to an open global community, but it is an essential target for the future of INGO activity, the overcoming of which will be a major step in the development of a true global civil society.

Various Concepts of Global Civil Society

Scholarly examinations of the ideas underpinning a global civil society have taken several forms. There is considerable variation among the definitions of what, exactly, constitutes a global civil society; yet each definition embraces the same overarching goal: a worldwide community free from prejudice, bias, and violence that maintains international peace between individuals and governments alike. In order to achieve these goals, authors assert that individuals everywhere must become more connected as part of

the effort to break down the pre-existing judgments which standing opposed to acceptance of the “the other” as an essential and equal member of the global community at large.

Michael Hardy and Antonio Negri have proposed the idea of the “multitude” in their work *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. In their work they explain that the multitude would be “composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity—different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientation; different forms of labor; different ways of living; different views of the world; and different desires,” a concept that modes a potential solution for bridging the gap between different groups of people to create a sense of universal solidarity (Hardy and Negri, xiv). Although the multitude is comprised of very many different people, each individual remains distinct and essentially so. In a salient comparison to the Internet, the authors describe the multitude as an open and inclusive community where differences stop determining hierarchy and are instead accepted. Hardy and Negri argue, “the common currency that runs throughout so many struggles and movements for liberation across the world today—at local, regional, and global levels—is the desire for democracy,” and as a result of this shared motivation, solidarity is possible amongst individuals from different backgrounds (Hardy and Negri, xvi). The authors also claim that, “today the possibility of democracy is obscured and threatened by the seemingly permanent state of conflict across the world,” foregrounding an argument for how the multitude will provide a novel means towards achieving the goal of worldwide peace (Hardy and Negri, xii).

David Brown has proposed a similar concept that he calls transnational civil society, which “must organize for cohesive action across regions and nations as well as across local, national, and transnational levels” (Brown, 10). In another comparable view, Bratton describes civil society as “a sphere of social interaction between the household and the state which is manifest in norms of community co-operation (trust, tolerance, inclusion, joining), structures of voluntary association (citizens coming together into voluntary associations both local/national, formal/informal) and networks of public communication (pluralist media, personal access to communication technology etc.)” (Bratton in Lewis, 55). As a founding member of the board of directors of Human Rights Advocates, Rita Maran stated, “NGOs are an embodiment of civil society: they serve to fill in societal gaps and failures with respect to disparate issues ranging from environment and sustainable development, to women’s human rights, health and nutrition, and civil and political rights, among many others” (in Ahmed, and Potter, 30). These similar concepts create a foundation for understanding the ideal of global civil society.

Salamon was one of the first scholars to discuss what he referred to as a “global associational revolution” in terms of INGO involvement. He stated that this new movement was a revolution “in which third sector organizations, so called because they form an important arena of social, cultural, economic and political activity alongside the state and the market, have come to play increased roles in public policy. Whether providing services, promoting particular values, forming the basis for community self-help initiatives, or campaigning on public issues, different types of third sector organizations now have an increasingly high profile” (in Lewis, 7).

The Role of Human Rights INGOs

It is important to understand the role of INGOs in creating a global civil society. In some contexts scholars have found that INGOs have been taken as shorthand for civil society itself, but contrary to this belief civil society is a much broader concept than one that refers simply to INGOs (Lewis, 53). Part of the new interest in civil society revolves around the argument that for development to take place, efforts are needed to build common purposes and supportive interaction among the diverse set of organizational actors in civil society. For many activists and policy makers, the aim is to strengthen the engagement of civil society with the state and the market. Although these organizations do not themselves create a global civil society, they are able to institutionalize political practices to build bridges between the state and civil society in terms of welfare issues.

In order to achieve this, organizations must first establish a clear identity and strategy and then build organizational capacities for governance, decision making, organizational learning, and conflict management. This level of organizational capacity will give INGOs the ability to establish projects that work towards a long-term vision and mobilize skilled staff. Next, INGOs must “create opportunities for building shared perspectives and joint action, such as through coordinated networks and campaigns” (Lewis, 57). Finally, INGOs must “create institutions to establish and safeguard the independence of the civil society sector, such as legislation which gives voice to NGOs in policy dialogue and consultations with civil society over the reform of policy” (Lewis, 57).

Shift in Power in the International Arena

INGOs have been working their way into the international sphere using these tactics and have become strong influences in international politics. In their work, “The

Importance of Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) in Global Governance and Value Creation: An International Business Research Agenda,” Hildy Teegan, Jonathan Doh, and Sushil Vachani discuss the role of INGOs. The authors state that “the emergence of organized civil society and of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as organizational manifestations of broader social movements altered the global political-economic landscape” (Teegan, et al. 463). In their research they found that INGOs provide the best opportunity for broadening understandings of various concepts internationally and these organizations have become a vital part of creating global governance. As corporations become more powerful globally, they often look to NGOs to lead the way in value building. These organizations are able to have a more broad vision of the growing social justice issues and have insight into what is happening on the ground.

As Ulrich Beck outlines in his book, *Power in the Global Age*, nation-states are becoming less important in the cosmopolitan world in which we live today. As power is shifting to global businesses, social movements and INGOs have an opportunity to take advantage of the growing transnational network (Beck, 22). Civil society organizations (CSOs) are often more trusted than businesses or governments, and therefore people are more willing to trust them (Brown, 8). CSOs and NGOs may be able to bridge the gap between those in wealthy Western countries and communities in developing countries.

Making It Work: Evoking Activism and Understanding

U.S. Donors and Global Civil Society

While global civil society or the “multitude” may represent an ideal for many people, it is important to understand how this theory could be put into action and how

INGOs have the potential to be involved in its establishment. International human rights organizations including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Invisible Children, and others engage in massive efforts to educate individuals in developed countries about international issues and involve them in action in order to put an end to human rights violations.

Currently, the lack of awareness concerning global affairs is a significant factor in transnational tribulations. There are daily contradictions in the lives of Western consumers that show the lack of understanding and disregard for human rights violations. While Western consumers shun child labor, violence, and oppression, multinational corporations that sell products in these same countries often work with factories that use these cruel practices to maximize profits. It is vital for larger INGOs involved in human rights issues to engage Western activists and citizens in addition to serving needy communities in order to put an end to serious human rights issues. By engaging this subgroup of society, there is a chance at building a powerful coalition that accepts the other and demands justice from governments worldwide.

Currently, many consumers in the United States are supporting industries, political leaders, and legislation that either advance social injustice or do nothing to support international human rights efforts. Oftentimes, this is because many people are unaware of the discrimination, violence, and paternalism that are occurring internationally. Of those who are aware, many are ignorant as to how they can help end human rights violations. Nonprofit organizations must work against this naiveté and lack of knowledge about the economy and international issues and create a transnational community that can capture the attention of the international community to make a stand

for justice. Hundreds of thousands of people are called to action by international development organizations every year, and this action could be harnessed into a powerful social movement. The problems facing developing countries are difficult and must be tackled comprehensively and with long-term solutions in mind. These solutions must involve the population of developed countries, or these individuals will unknowingly continue to contribute to a growing system of abuse.

Human rights organizations use several tactics to mobilize individuals in the West and connect them to those in developing countries in order to bridge the gap between individuals internationally. These tactics include creating an online social networking presence, encouraging online and hard copy letter writing campaigns, disseminating information about campaign updates, appealing to celebrities to get involved and spread the message, and providing individuals with specific steps on how to get their families, friends, schools, and community active.

The Role of the Internet and Social Networking

For many human rights INGOs, social networking has become a key element in getting individuals involved in their campaigns. Parallel to the growth of humanitarian organizations, the Internet has become a dominant part of modern life and it is “changing how we do politics and how we think about politics” (Chadwick, 1). Human rights INGOs have begun to take advantage of new technology in order to strengthen the connection between individuals in developed and developing countries in order to create a global civil society. With the rapidly increasing availability of the Internet, physical boundaries are becoming less relevant, and as organizations use technology to their

advantage it is possible that the chance of developing a global civil society in which individuals across the world are united to achieve common good is becoming more likely.

As Twitter and Facebook become increasingly popular, organizations must adapt to this method of communication to reach out to activists to sustain involvement with the organization. Through this type of marketing, organizations can have daily interaction with their constituents and keep them up to date with relevant information.

Simultaneously, these individuals create a massive body of people who can be easily mobilized. One example of this is the recent Chase Community Giving project. During this project, Chase Bank gave nonprofit organizations in the United States the chance to win one million dollars. Chase set up an online portal where individuals had to “decide what matters” by casting a vote for an organization. The organization to receive the most votes would win one million dollars to dedicate to their organization’s mission and programs, and five runners-up would receive one hundred thousand dollars, each.

Invisible Children, an organization that focuses on rebuilding schools and provides mentors for children in Uganda, used extensive online marketing to direct members, supporters, volunteers, and activists to Chase’s Web site. It focused on making its efforts appeal to their members by using bright colors, vivid images, and exciting rhetoric and created a buzz about the contest. In January 2010, the organization won one million dollars to dedicate to its cause. Since then it has kept its members up to date on how Invisible Children is using the money and what progress has been made on this campaign.

Some fear that this increased use of technology is creating a culture of individuals who quickly devour information without much analysis or intellectual thought. In his

work *Speeding Up Fast Capitalism*, Ben Agger argues that regardless of the availability of endless information via the Internet, "we still lack a public sphere in which people can debate ideas (or even have ideas)" (Agger, 10). The use of social networking technology by INGOs and other political organizations is demonstrating this to be somewhat inaccurate. Nearly all INGOs have active Facebook pages, web sites, and e-newsletters that regularly receive high levels of traffic. People are quickly learning about problems that they once did not know existed and are actively spreading the word via social networking sites. Now, instead of an organization solely attempting to get the message out, individuals are acting as proponents of causes they believe in simply by posting information online and sharing it with their friends. Online technology gives INGOs and partisan organizations the ability to communicate with and mobilize individuals who may have previously been uninformed about important issues.

As Internet users in developed countries have become more familiar with online technology, we have seen that oftentimes they easily adapt to creating new communities and relating to others who do not exist in their daily lives offline. This is a huge asset for INGOs that are attempting to form meaningful relationships with their supporters. Using Facebook, many individuals connect with others from their past and enjoy posting pictures, stories, updates, and conversing with others. They create a representation of their personalities on the Web site and use it to interact with others. Similarly, in programs like Second Life, "an emergent cultural formation that is at once transnational, national and local, at once virtual and actual," we have found that many individuals deeply immerse themselves in online communities (Chadwick, 6). Users commit endless amounts of time actively engaging with their peers on the site. If INGOs can not only tap

into these already existing communities, but also harness this commitment to community and interest in relationship building, it could help build a network dedicated to their cause.

One example of an international human rights organization connecting individuals worldwide to work towards achieving human rights is WITNESS. WITNESS is a New York-based organization that uses videos of personal accounts of human rights abuses to seek justice and promote engagement and policy change. WITNESS works with local human rights groups internationally to train them how to use video cameras and editing equipment. Simultaneously, the organization develops relationships with the media, government officials, policymakers, activists, and the general public so that videos can be circulated and used to promote change. The organization has developed a participatory media site, The Hub, which allows anyone to upload footage, watch material from the site, and learn about human rights abuses across the world.

The Desire to Help

INGOs and Individuals

Although there are obviously many ways for INGOs to engage individuals in both developed and developing countries and lay the groundwork a global civil society, it is important that human rights INGOs tap into the resources and work on brainstorming innovative ways to connect activists worldwide. Some INGOs and scholars express concerns that working with individuals in developed countries may be a waste of resources. This perspective tends to develop from the notion that an organization's funds are best spent directly helping the communities and individuals that are in need. If individuals in developed countries were not open to being involved in INGO work, it

may not be beneficial for these organizations to put their efforts into working to create a global civil society. Yet I argue that this is not the case. Currently, Americans donate significant funds to nonprofits; “together, individual giving amounted to nearly 180 billion at the end of the 1990s” (Weitzman *et al.* 2002: 54), with 78 percent (Weitzman *et al.* 2002: 58) of all households making contributions. On average, giving represents about 1.9 percent of personal income, or \$503 per capita per year, or \$1,075 per contributing household” (Anheier, 72). In addition, U.S. citizens and those in other developed countries are likely to get involved in community organizations and social justice issues (Anheier, 77). Individuals in developed countries are expressing interest and compassion in important human rights issues both in the U.S. and abroad, and this should be recognized as a significant opportunity to create change.

I also looked specifically at the impact volunteering with an INGO can have on individuals. In “Citizen Activism for Environmental Health: The Growth of a Powerful Grassroots Health Movement,” Lois Gibbs looks into the activists involved with the environmental health movement worldwide. Explaining that this movement is a social justice movement that is largely controlled by INGOs, she details how individuals who get involved make changes in their lives, get others involved in the movement, tend to be more active politically with other issues, and have a more positive outlook of the future of the planet and global sustainability. These individuals were also found to have increased knowledge about politics in general and specifically about environmentalism. The author not only looked at individuals who were participating in the movement, but also at the difference between various organizations. She outlined how some organizations tended to operate only legislatively. Gibbs found that individuals who

donated to these organizations had limited knowledge about the movement overall, and often had limited information about the organization they donated to as well.

In the past, individuals who donated funds often felt neglected or left out of the decision-making process in the past, but with new technology human rights INGOs can interact with these donors and transform them into activists (Anheier, 64). This responsibility falls onto the organizations working on these important issues. If organizations are able to create a relationship between those in donor countries and those in countries being served by the organization, there is a great potential for civil society growth.

The Geography of Global Civil Society

Jackie Smith and Dawn West, two scholars from the University of North Carolina, shared insights from their work on the geography of global civil society, which showed the need for INGOs to be active in all countries worldwide. These researchers found that as a result of transnational networking and activism by large and small scale INGOs in recent years, participation in transnational activism has increased. Unfortunately, this spike in participation is not even across the globe, which the authors call “uneven geography of participation” (Smith, and Wiest, 621). Low-income countries that are tied to global activist networks and global organizations tend to have the most active communities of individuals and organizations. Although many in these countries often suffer from extreme poverty, INGOs and other global organizations are functioning successfully within communities to spread a message of hope and work on important social issues. As a result, these developing countries that are facing extreme human rights abuses often have a vibrant movement towards global peace and a community that feels

well connected with those who are different from themselves. These individuals interact with international organizations that operate locally to help them with various problems, so they quickly get to know “the other.” The research also showed that citizens in wealthier countries are active with transnational organizations, but that these individuals tend to be more distant from the issues. Those in countries that are less globally connected, for example, tend to have very limited interaction with transnational communities and are left out of the global civil society movement.

The Watchdog Industry

There is a building pressure on INGOs from watchdog organizations and the public to focus on finances, budget, and short term victories that are easily perceived and understood by donors and the public. Watchdog organizations and the media have highlighted the need for transparency and knowledge that each organization is “*accountable* for use of the resources entrusted to them and that those resources are indeed being directed toward the pursuit of their social mission” (Worth, 115). Three dominant organizations in the U.S. monitor and report on nonprofit organizations in attempts to help donors make responsible choices when donating to charity organizations: the Better Business Bureau (BBB), Charity Navigator, and the American Institute of Philanthropy. BBB Wise Giving Alliance uses a set of 20 standards to monitor operations and financial stability and rates on a “pass-fail” system; Charity Navigator rates nonprofits on organizational efficiency and organizational capacity and uses a “star-based” system; and American Institute of Philanthropy rates nonprofits with grades “A+ through F” using financial ratios and analyses of financial statements. These three ratings systems are very popular. In 2005, each site received an average of 5,000 unique visitors

a day. After disasters like the tsunami in Thailand, that number rose to over 50,000 visitors a day for up to four weeks following the event (Lowell and Meehan, 39).

As Worth points out, “there are three principal mechanisms by which nonprofits are held accountable: the rule of law, self-regulation, and transparency—that is, holding nonprofit behavior up in clear view for the donors, the media, and others to see” (Worth, 116). In the U.S., nonprofit law requires organizations to meet specific state and federal requirements for their board leadership, fiscal responsibility, and operating procedures. Within these parameters, charity watchdogs and raters establish guiding principles by which to judge and compare nonprofit organizations. These principles include mission and programs, governing body, conflict of interest, human resources, financial and legal matters, and openness.

According to these organizations, there are many standards that INGOs must meet in order to be considered responsible. For example, Charity Navigator states that “revenue from fundraising and other development activities... [should be] at least three times the amount spent on conducting them” and “according to Better Business Bureau: a max of 35% [of profits] should go to overhead” (Worth, 127). Although “unlike for-profit corporations that can be more easily compared using standard financial data and ratios, the programmatic, mission-based work of CNOs (charitable nonprofit organizations) is more complex;” efficiency is often defined in a generic manner based on societal beliefs and generic calculations created by watchdog organizations instead of being based on each individual organization and its specific resources and goals (Lowell and Meehan, 5). This type of simple data collection used to analyze and rank organizations fails to consider the specific environment and goals of the organizations being evaluated.

Since donors frequently use watchdog organizations' analysis of INGOs to decide where to donate their funds, it is vital for organizations to have the best ranking possible. This struggle for efficiency often results in INGOs functioning within a corporate structure that may lead organizations to neglect in-depth relationship building between communities in developing countries and the public in developed countries, regardless of the long term benefits of a global civil society.

Previous Criticism and the Response of the Watchdog Industry

Many scholars agree that the current method of evaluating INGOs is inadequate. As watchdog organizations that monitor the nonprofit sector adapt to concerns with their system, it is important to pursue a more appropriate rating method. Reform of rating agencies must be a key element of research since their ratings have a significant impact in decision-making by INGOs.

There is widespread recognition that rating agencies have let down both the organizations that they monitor as well as donors. Disappointment about the raters' performance and skepticism about the effectiveness of their rating systems has led to many organizations failing to provide raters with information necessary for evaluation. Ratings are not backed by the force of law; therefore organizations are left with an ethical dilemma. On one hand, they are not required to provide information to these organizations in order to be evaluated. Simultaneously, if they do not provide the necessary information, donors may perceive them as not being accountable. In 2005, The National Council of Nonprofit Associations and the National Human Services Assembly did a study to investigate the worth of ratings by these watchdog organizations. Their study identified several key areas of concern regarding the rating and ranking of

organizations, including that evaluation criteria and methodologies vary too greatly between the watchdog organizations, criteria are too simplistic, evaluators focus too heavily on financial measures, and evaluators overlook program effectiveness. In addition, the report asserted that evaluators are often under-skilled, driven by revenue, and do not meet their own criteria. In light of these concerns, the study outlined eight points that a watchdog organization should adhere to:

1. Makes its methodology and criteria readily available and understandable to donors and to the CNOs being evaluated.
2. Provides sufficient information about the relevant expertise and/or experience of its management and staff to enable donors to judge its overall competence to evaluate CNOs.
3. Interacts with the CNO being evaluated to validate and/or clarify the information being used and to allow the CNO to appeal/challenge any conclusions drawn by the evaluating organization or publication.
4. Provides its findings free-of-charge to potential donors and to the CNOs being evaluated.
5. Complies with the same criteria and/or standards it applies to the CNOs being evaluated.
6. Meets the same “transparency” requirements that apply to the CNOs being evaluated (e.g., public scrutiny of financial data, tax returns, and officer compensation).

7. Applies its criteria and publishes its findings in a way that recognizes major differences in the types and structures of charitable organizations (“one size does not fit all”).
8. Provides resources (training, reference materials, etc.) to assist the organization being evaluated in meeting their criteria.

Similarly, Stanford’s Social Innovation Review evaluated these three groups that rate charities and found that “the results were sobering: ...these sites individually and collectively fall well short of providing meaningful guidance for donors who want to support more efficient and effective nonprofits” (Lewis, 39). It identified three main points of failure: “they rely too heavily on simple analysis and ratios derived from poor-quality financial data; they overemphasize financial efficiency while ignoring the question of program effectiveness, and they generally do a poor job of conducting analysis in important qualitative areas such as management strength, governance quality, or organizational transparency” (Lewis, 39). This study suggested four improvements (Lewis, 43):

1. Improved financial data that are reviewed over three to five years and put in the context of narrowly defined peer cohorts
2. Qualitative evaluation of the organization’s intangibles in areas like brand, management quality, governance, and transparency
3. Some review of the organization’s program effectiveness, including both qualitative critique by objective experts in the field, and where appropriate “customer” feedback from either donor or the aid recipient’s perspective
4. An opportunity for comment or response by the organization being rated

In response to criticism, Charity Navigator has made a commitment to expand its rating methodology. In July 2010, the organization added an Accountability and Transparency methodology that evaluates if an organization is acting ethically in terms of its actions to its stakeholders, the state, donors, and the public. The organization set two basic questions for evaluation: Does the charity follow ethical best practices? Does the charity make it easy for donors to find critical information about the organization? Charity Navigator uses an organization's website and its expanded IRS Form 990 to find the answers to these critical questions. The information that Charity Navigator is looking to find is that an organization makes pertinent information available on its website including board members, key staff, audited financials, Form 990, and privacy policy. On its Expanded IRS Form 990, Charity Navigator looks for information about loans, material diversion of assets, conflict of interest policy, whistleblower policy, records retention policy, board meeting minutes, CEO and salary information, audited financials, and the existence of an audit committee.

While expanding the information provided by raters is beneficial, this expansion continues to focus on basic facts about an organization and its financial information. Since the activities of human rights INGOs vary greatly, information about their practices would be beneficial to individuals making decision about donations and participation in an organization.

Since nonprofits' missions, tactics, and structure vary greatly, it is difficult to compare effectiveness. But "even if one could develop hard measures of finance, mission, record keeping, and operations, [funders of nonprofits] would be hard pressed to demonstrate a link between any single measure and overall organizational effectiveness.

There is no evidence, for example, that having a merit pay system for staff is related to organizational effectiveness, or that holding a strategic planning process is somehow going to improve outcomes” (Worth, 125). With no clear method to measure nonprofit success, various techniques have been developed. In response to the limited knowledge garnered from financial data, Worth suggests measuring against peers and measuring against mission as more significant methods of understanding organizational effectiveness. Measuring an organization’s accomplishments against other similar organizations is referred to as “benchmarking.” This sort of assessment is difficult because it requires detailed analysis and understanding of both an organization and others in the same field. Measuring against mission tends to be a simpler and more common method. By looking at program outcomes based on inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes, an organization can more thoroughly understand how resources being consumed benefit participants.

Research

In response to my work on global civil society and the study of many prominent scholar’s views on the topic, I am persuaded that it would be desirable for all human rights INGOs to dedicate some level of funds, staff time, and efforts to contributing to the creation of a global civil society. As my discussion above shows, creating this type of society could in turn help organizations accomplish their goal of ending human rights violations and achieving peace. Many individuals in developed countries are ready to embrace civil society and are currently seeking change that will result in a fairer and more equal society. Guidance by human rights INGOs would help foster this energy and strengthen the human rights movement.

As I showed, watchdog organizations influence human rights INGOs to structure their organizations in more business-like ways, which is not conducive to building an activist network. Before proposing changes that would shift watchdog ratings from financial to organizational, I believed that it was important to determine if the ratings of watchdog organization impact the decision-making process of human rights INGO leaders.

My research question was: do watchdog organization rankings influence leaders of human rights INGOs decision-making processes, and if so, how? My expectation was that human rights leaders do take watchdog rankings into consideration when making decisions for the organization. I hypothesized that many human rights leaders would rank the influence of watchdog organization rankings as having significant influence on their organizations' decision-making.

I relied on interview data with executives at leading human rights INGOs based in the U.S. This type of data collection “allows the use of a variety of questioning techniques (visual aids for example) and gives interviewers a chance to pursue questions in order to ensure appropriate responses and prevent respondents from misunderstanding questions or instructions” (Lewis, 163).

In order to create a representative sample of U.S. human rights organizations, I relied on the list of human rights INGOs that are registered with the UN. including only organizations based in the U.S.. Next, I eliminated all organizations that are not evaluated by at least two of the three dominant watchdog organizations. I divided this substantially smaller list of organizations into three main categories based on annual program expenses to be sure that small, medium, and large organizations were represented in the sample. I

randomized each category and began to contact organizations starting from the top of each list. The large category was slightly larger than the medium and small categories, so I allocated an extra interview for this category.

After creating this sample, I contacted the president or another high ranking leader at the organization requesting an interview in order to explore not only the numbers, but also the officials' views of how they run their organizations, what they believe the importance of interaction with constituents is, the role of NGOs in creating a global civil society, and how they feel about the pressure on NGOs for financial efficiency. I promised anonymity to each respondent in order to protect their identity and their organization's identity. When contacting organizations, only one person at one organization declined an interview and I was told that this was due to a hectic schedule.

With each of the subjects I utilized intensive interviewing techniques. This type of research method is used "not to obtain precise measures of concepts for testing theories, but as a means of gaining *in-depth understanding* of a phenomenon and discovering aspects of that phenomena that researchers did not anticipate" (Lewis, 365). Such interviews and this data collection method are reserved for "elites" (for example political representatives) or for specific subsets of a defined population (for example, cult members). In this case I focused on a very specific group: presidents and CEOs of international human rights NGOs based in the U.S.. Being able to have in-depth conversations with these individuals added to the depth of the project and offered a glimpse into how those running these organizations perceive their roles in and influence on global civil society.

I divided the interview questions into two sections. First, I focused on answering my research question concerning watchdog organization influence on INGOs. These questions can be seen in Table 1. In addition to these questions, I developed a series of questions about human rights INGO leaders and their opinion of global civil society, which can be seen in Table 2. This information allowed me to look at “success” as defined by efforts to create a global civil society. It also gave me a substantial amount of insight into the functions of INGOs and the desire for contributing to a global civil society.

Interview Analysis

I interviewed leaders at 10 human rights INGOs based in the United States and working internationally. Each organization whose officials I interviewed has been ranked by at least two of the three watchdog organizations I have researched.

For the first segment of my interviews I focused on the influence of watchdog organizations on decision making at human rights INGOs. During this part of my interviews I attempted to discover if leaders at these organizations believed that organizational decision-making was influenced by watchdog rankings. The first question I asked respondents was the most significant: “On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being not at all and 10 being influences every decision the organization makes, how would you rate the impact of watchdog organization’s ratings of your organization?”

As Figure One indicates, it is very clear that the majority of responses suggest that watchdog rankings do have a relatively high level of influence on decision making at human rights INGOs. Although this information makes it clear that the watchdog industry does make an impact on these organizations, I attempted to use the next four

questions to address how these rankings influence organizations and how any changes in the ratings system would impact the organizations. The four questions addressed during this segment of the interview included:

1. Can you expand on how a watchdog organization's rating of your organization influences decision making for the organization?
2. If a watchdog organization developed new criteria for rating nonprofit organizations, would your organization make it a priority to adapt to this change?
3. Do you feel like there is pressure on your organization to be more efficient as defined by society? If so, do you feel that this pressure impacts decisions about what programs you focus on and invest in financially?
4. On a scale of one to ten, how much information do you feel that donors receive from watchdog ratings? Do you feel that watchdog organizations provide donors with adequate information about human rights organizations to aid them in the process of deciding which organizations to donate to? And do you feel that watchdog organization's strongly influence donor decision-making?

The responses were relatively consistent. When asked to identify the ways that ratings influence their decision making, organization leaders gave similar answers. Figure 2 includes the factors that were mentioned most frequently. Nine out of ten of the organization leaders identified program finances, eight out of ten responded their board of directors, and seven out of ten mentioned administrative/salary decisions. These factors are consistent with the factors that watchdog organizations emphasize. All organization leaders agreed that they would likely make changes depending on how watchdog ratings changed. One respondent remarked:

The ratings we get by each of these organizations impact decisions we make as an organization because they've become the industry standard. These organizations supposedly tell us what is

right and how donors want us to behave organizationally—and yes, particularly when it comes to finances. I may not always agree with what they think is a priority, but as long as we keep our finances in order, maintain their standards, and act ethically—meeting the standards is not a problem. At the end of the day, we still carry out our mission just as any other organization is—just within these parameters. It doesn't make us robotic. There's nothing robotic about this sector, and that may be why it's difficult to really set up standards.

This attitude appeared throughout the interviews. Organization leaders evidently agreed that although they strive to meet the standards and will continue to do so as they change and adapt, the standards do not define the organization.

Although the leaders agreed that the standards are influential in decision making within the organization, they had mixed opinions on whether watchdog ratings are helpful to donors, activists, and volunteers. Responses can be seen in Figure 3. One respondent remarked that the ratings are not helpful to donors, explaining:

For a lot of Americans there seems to be an innate desire to help others. Everyone has their issues that they care about—human rights, environmental issues, animals, aid, religion. Identifying that is the easy part for most people, but once they decide they want to make a donation it's a jungle. There are so many organizations working on each issue that it becomes nearly impossible for a donor to really grasp which organization they would most identify with and support. Financial statistics are definitely important, but are you aware that they only put about a paragraph of information on their sites about what we actually do as an organization? Oftentimes all a donor is really seeing is a mission statement, but they have no idea what types of programs we run, what other organizations we support, what type of work we're really doing. I think that's the type of thing that people truly care about. Once we get donors on board, we can inspire them with stories of our work—but when all they have in front of them during decision making time is a computer screen filled with information about our financials, well, there's really nothing inspirational about that.

On the other hand, a leader from a different organization asserted that these web sites are quite helpful for donors:

Donors have the rights to know how accountable, transparent, and financially efficient the organization they are donating to is—and these web sites put that information right in front of the public. It pressures organizations that have accountability failures to fix their problems, and it recognizes efficient organizations.

During the next segment of my interviews I aimed to determine how organization leaders thought about human rights INGOs and their role in global civil society. After finding that organizations are clearly influenced by watchdog organization ratings, I believed that it was important to get a better understanding of leadership views of global civil society. The five questions I asked included the following:

1. Is working with the public to build a network of individuals who are dedicated to achieving human rights a priority for your organization? Do you feel that in the future this will become more or less of a priority for your organization?
2. What do you think is the role of human rights INGOs in creating a global civil society?
3. What do you feel are the benefits of working on community building versus the benefits of working on creating specific change, whether structural, environmental, or legislative?
4. In your experience working with activists and the public in developed countries—is there an opportunity for more engagement beyond simply fundraising which would make a difference in your campaigns and in achieving human rights?
5. In your opinion, what are the best ways to connect those in developed countries with those in developing countries in order to create a higher regard and increased respect for “the other”?

When discussing these questions, each of the organization leaders stated a commitment to global civil society. Many asserted that simply by addressing human

rights issues and educating the public their organizations are contributing greatly to a global civil society. However, what became clear during this aspect of the interview that I had not anticipated was a divide between different types of human rights INGOs. Several organization leaders suggested that there are two distinctly different types of human rights organizations, one that works primarily on achieving legislative and structural changes and the second that focuses on community building and education about social justice issues. One leader eloquently stated:

There is a striking difference between development organizations and human rights organizations which is noted by both the public and scholars. Where development organizations provide direct relief, human rights organizations tend to address long term social justice issues on a structural level... Within the human rights campaign, there are two groups that work together harmoniously in a way that actors and technicians on a play may. Organizations which run massive educational campaigns, perform demonstrations in the streets protesting human rights violations, and work with suffering communities are the actors on our stage... Organizations like mine, on the other hand, tend to be behind the scenes working on legislative issues, meeting with government and state officials, and researching growing issues internationally.... With social networking, typically backstage organizations are coming out to the public, but this is going to be a slow process. Both types of organizations are necessary—and different types of organizations appeal to different donors.

Many noted that this split often occurs not only as a result of mission, but also funding. A leader from another organization stated:

Organizations that depend primarily on government funding have less reason to really interact with the public. Organizations that come from the grassroots though, those are the organizations that are fighting for supporters here in the U.S. and internationally. These are the organizations where global civil society has its best chance.

Interview data from human rights leaders make it clear that watchdog organization ratings do influence decision-making. In light of this information, it is evident that watchdog rankings put pressure on nonprofit organizations to appear financially efficient, which in turn leads to eliminating programs that do not produce visible success. That said, during interviews with officials from these 10 human rights organizations, it became clear that there are two significantly different types of human rights organizations. [both of which were included in the organizations you focused on?] First are organizations that work mostly on legislative issues both domestically and internationally. These organizations oftentimes have a basic social media presence, but very limited staff and programs dedicated to working with activists. Such organizations can be termed “legislatively driven.” The second type of organization identified is one that focuses on working with individuals on the ground in both developed and developing countries. These types of organizations have strong domestic activist networks and also tend to work closely with communities abroad. These organizations often have strong ties with other smaller international human rights organizations. These organizations can be termed “activist driven.”

Conclusions

How Watchdog Organizations Can Be Improved

In light of this research, I suggest that watchdog organizations should develop new techniques for evaluating human rights INGOs that indicate how heavily legislative or activist driven they are. Past research about how to improve watchdog methods has continued to focus on financial figures and other seemingly “objective” methods. In addition, this work has suggested a focus on evaluating programs, successes, and social

outputs. I strongly agree with this assessment. In addition, I advocate that watchdog organizations be required to provide an increased amount of information on each organization in order to educate potential donors about how each organizations functions and its role in society.

Currently, donors who use information from Charity Navigator, BBB, and AIP receive little more than mission statement information about each nonprofit organization they investigate. Without an understanding of what an organization contributes and how it operates it is difficult to understand the financial and other material provided.

From my interviews with leaders of U.S.-based human rights organizations, I learned that many view human rights organizations as focusing on either activism or legislation. Offering an analysis of how much focus an organization puts on each of these fields would be beneficial to donors. Not only would it provide donors with an understanding of an organization's operations, but it would give them an idea of how they could get involved if they were interested in pursuing activism and volunteer work with an organization. I suggest that a star system for each of these categories be developed based on the information below.

Providing opportunities for interaction and engagement with constituents, "activist driven," could be measured by how many of the following elements each organization has available to its members and the public:

1. A regular e-news
2. Access to free materials to distribute
3. Invitations to regular demonstrations and/or events including speakers, fundraising events, galas, petition deliveries, and canvassing

4. Assistance in setting up demonstrations in their hometowns
5. Representatives from the organization who are willing to discuss the issue and help activists get involved
6. The ability to connect with the organization on social networking sites, the ability to sign petitions and action alerts targeting specific legislators, governments, or companies
7. Domestic volunteer opportunities
8. Opportunities to travel abroad with the organization
9. Relationships and partnerships with other international human rights organizations
10. Involvement with community building in one or more location internationally

Interaction with the state , policy, and legislation, “legislatively driven” features, might be measured by how many of the following elements each organization participates in:

1. Strong focus on research into human rights violations
2. Relationships with government entities internationally
3. Proven track record of introducing and passing legislation and policy
4. Relationships with politicians internationally
5. Detailed information about legislation available on the organization’s Web site

By measuring each organization in these two fields and detailing which elements an organization is actively involved in, donors would be given a substantial amount more insight into the operations of an organization. It would be critical for watchdog organizations to explain that it is not required, nor always beneficial, for an organization to work on each point in every category. Instead, such information is meant to provide a

roadmap for donors on what their preferences for an organization are so that they may be able to donate to what they believe is the most vital work being done in the field of human rights—whether activist, legislative, or some combination.

A Vision for the Future

One significant benefit to this system would be a potential increase in U.S. activism. It is possible that being exposed to the opportunities for activism provided by human rights organizations would promote an involvement with these organizations beyond providing monetary donations. Although many donors may prefer legislatively-driven organizations based on preferences for more measurable outcomes, it is possible that individuals in the U.S. may be inspired by this increased information about ways to get involved with human rights organizations. Scholars discussed in this thesis have noted that many individuals in the U.S. do have strong desires to get involved in the human rights movement—and this increase in information provided to them may be a significant factor in bridging the gap between the desire and an increase in action.

In addition, the leaders of human rights organizations interviewed for this thesis expressed that human rights organizations respond to watchdog methods and that these methods have a significant impact on organizational decision-making. As a result, it may be possible that with this new system of evaluation more organizations would offer ways for individuals in developed countries to get involved in their work. An increase in ways to become involved in human rights activism would provide individuals in the U.S. with more opportunities for understanding "the other" and be more educated about global issues. These opportunities would likely contribute to a growth in global civil society and

lay a foundation for increased understanding between individuals in developed and developing countries.

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Appendix A, Figures and Tables

Table 1—First Set of Interview Questions

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| <p>First Set Of Interview Questions Interviews with INGO Leaders</p> |
| <p>1. Does a watchdog organization’s rating of your organization have an impact on decision-making?</p> |
| <p>2. On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being not at all and 10 being influences every decision the organization makes, how would you rate the impact of watchdog organization’s ratings of your organization?</p> |
| <p>3. If a watchdog organization developed new criteria for rating nonprofit organizations, would your organization make it a priority to adapt to this change?</p> |
| <p>4. Do you feel like there is pressure on your organization to be more efficient as defined by society? If so, do you feel that this pressure impacts decisions about what programs you focus on and invest in financially?</p> |
| <p>5. Do you feel that watchdog organization’s provide donors with adequate information about human rights organizations to aid them in the process of deciding which organizations to donate to? And do you feel that watchdog organization’s strongly influence donor decision-making?</p> |

Table 2—Second Set of Interview Questions

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|--|
| <p>Second Set Of Interview Questions Interviews with INGO Leaders</p> |
| <p>1. Is working with the public to build a network of individuals who are dedicated to achieving human rights a priority for your organization? Do you feel that in the future this will become more or less of a priority for your organization?</p> |
| <p>2. What do you think is the role of human rights INGOs in creating a global civil society?</p> |
| <p>3. What do you feel are the benefits of working on community building versus the benefits of working on creating specific change, whether structural, environmental, or legislative?</p> |
| <p>4. In your experience working with activists and the public in developed countries—is there an opportunity for more engagement beyond simply fundraising which would make a difference in your campaigns and in achieving human rights?</p> |
| <p>5. In your opinion, what are the best ways to connect those in developed countries with those in developing countries in order to create a higher regard and increased respect for “the other”?</p> |

Figure 1—The Influence of Watchdog Organizations on INGO Decision Making



Figure 2—Type of Influence of Watchdog Organization

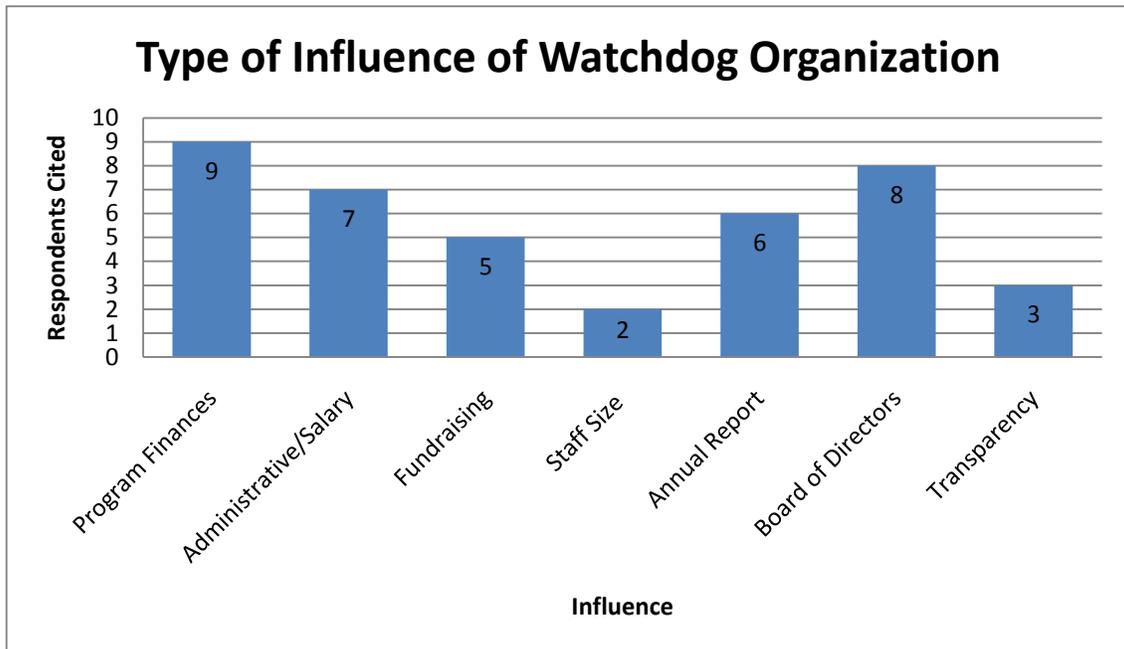


Figure 3—How Much Information Do Donors Receive from Watchdog Ratings?

