Bridging gaps or 'a bridge too far'? The management of advocacy within service providing NGOs in the UK

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Summary

The increased involvement of NGOs in advocacy has resulted in changes to organisational structure and strategies, with implications for internal and external relationships. This study explores the research literature on NGO growth, the emergence of different organisational forms for advocacy and collective action, and organisational change. In doing so, it seeks a better understanding of the issues faced by service providing NGOs based in the UK, that are engaged in advocacy work. The emphasis is on the organisational consequences of giving advocacy a more prominent role. Advocacy management differs from the management of the primary service providing function and the implications warrant more consideration. A structural approach facilitates consideration of how the integration of an expanding advocacy function could strengthen organisational links. A survey involving seventeen NGOs is a first step, and enables some initial observations concerning appropriate organisational structure and strategies for managing the advocacy function of service providing NGOs.

Introduction

The management of advocacy receives far less attention from researchers than direct service-provision or fundraising. This paper considers organisational responses to the challenge of reconciling the increased emphasis placed on advocacy work with the predominant service-providing role of UK NGOs.[1] The intention is to clarify the nature of advocacy activities practised by UK NGOs, and consider the scope for expanding their advocacy role. Whilst the impact of advocacy must be assessed in terms of the influence achieved, this is dependent on the adoption of structures and strategies to reinforce organisational links. The potential of the advocacy function to strengthen internal and external relationships is considered from the perspective of UK NGOs.

Organisational understanding of advocacy requires clarification. The terms 'advocacy', 'campaigning' and 'development education' can be used by NGOs to describe similar activities. UK NGOs engaged in advocacy activities adopt different organisational forms. Advocacy can be the responsibility of an existing department or several departments. Alternatively, some UK NGOs have established a new unit. It is important to establish a working definition of advocacy and to distinguish between different types of 'Advocacy Organisation'. This paper examines the management of the advocacy function in the context of recent organisational developments and functional relationships associated with the growth of UK NGOs over the last ten years. The legitimacy of criticisms of UK NGOs' failure to realise the potential of advocacy is investigated. There are lessons to be learnt from the 'Non-Profit' and 'Social Movement' literature from the UK and US. This paper draws on the work of Brown, Jenkins, Young and Kriesi concerning types of 'Advocacy Organisation'; and MacKeith's work on functional relationships to introduce the internal dimension.

A questionnaire survey involving eighteen UK NGOs enabled some practical observations to be made concerning both appropriate organisational structures and strategies for managing the advocacy function and the management response. An explanatory model has been developed to portray representative and bridging roles for UK NGOs as 'Interest Group Organisations'.

The advocacy role of UK NGOs

The advocacy rationale

This paper is concerned with UK NGOs whose primary purpose is the provision of services, either directly or indirectly, that are engaged in significant advocacy work. The activities of some UK NGOs are restricted almost entirely to service-provision, often with a specific clientele and / or highly specialised services, and only a nominal advocacy role. It is important to establish the analytical differences between advocacy and service delivery: 'Advocacy focuses on changing policies and securing collective goods, whereas service delivery creates divisible or individual benefits and may be provided without actual changes in policy' (Jenkins, 1987: 297). A common identity is by no means clear.

The rationale for engaging in advocacy work is based on a concern for the wider public interest. A representative argument for engaging in advocacy can be challenged on the grounds that it is difficult for the advocates 'to claim a privileged insight', but upheld because action ensures all interests are represented, particularly as achieving influence in the face of opposition from advantaged groups is problematic (Jenkins, 1987: 296). Whilst the geographical separation between beneficiaries and advocates might at first sight appear to make it more difficult to justify a representative role, this need not be the case for UK NGOs that have developed close working relationships in the South.

The growth of the advocacy function

Both the number and size of UK NGOs have grown at an unprecedented rate over the last ten years (Burnell, 1992 / 3, Smillie, 1995, Smith, 1994); and many more UK NGOs have realised the potential for achieving greater influence by mobilising public opinion within their own countries (Edwards, 1993, Minear, 1987, Mitchell, 1991 and Wilkinson, 1996). Historically, Mitchell describes a cyclical process with two periods where the public and political profile of advocacy rose, with the publication of the Brandt Report in 1980 and the African famines in the mid-1980s, involving 'the largest lobby of Parliament for more than a decade' and 'the largest ever lobby', respectively.   Lemaresquier (1987) observes a more gradual increase in activity from marginality to legitimacy and then internationalisation with the formation of global networks.

The growth of the advocacy function did not prevent the steady erosion of the Aid

Budget, and Mitchell's conclusion that 'there is now a real chance of mobilising new and powerful sources of public support' has proved over-optimistic. (Mitchell, 1991: 157). Several constraints have restricted the impact of advocacy concerning development issues, and prevented UK NGOs playing a wider role through participation in a broader 'movement':

- the complexity of global hunger and poverty issues
- the high cost of advocacy and the failure to mobilise or reallocate resources
- the challenge to independence and integrity presented by dependence on government funding
- the political nature of advocacy and confusion concerning legitimate charitable activities

The failure of NGO campaigning on trade issues concerning the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) illustrates the dangers of 'duplication', the 'complexity' of the issues raised and the difficulties of engaging a 'direct action style' with an inadequate resource base. A CIIR Study found over 150 NGOs were active on trade issues, ranging from boycotts of specific products to long-term, Europe-wide campaigns around GATT; and several NGO 'trade' networks had been formed (Wilkinson, 1996). NGO contributions at the 1996 World Food Summit focused on the complex underlying problems of poverty and inequality rather than the key issues of food policy reform, where practical solutions are possible (Maxwell, 1996: 5). There is a need for balance between securing practical commitments and campaigning on complex issues to influence global policies.

There are significant lessons to be learnt in respect of organisational structure and strategies. UK NGOs can use their experience to focus on securing practical commitments, but must ensure their efforts are part of a well researched, co-ordinated and resourced campaign, which seeks to popularise the development message using mass communication techniques that concentrate on public perception, and give more emphasis to long-term processes rather than short-term events.

If the opportunities for NGO advocacy on a significant scale are to be pursued effectively, Clark argues they must develop new skills, manage the move from project work to the information age and form a more genuine global partnership with grassroots movements, with SNGOs becoming equal partners. He concludes that

when planning strategies NGOs must: 'balance macro-analysis with the use of first-hand experience'; 'choose the issue carefully'; construct 'the expert case'; 'generate public support'; and 'strive for bargaining power' (Clark, 1992: 201/2).

The organisation of international advocacy

Service-providing NGOs are distinguished from NGOs whose principal or only activity is campaigning, that act as pressure groups, networks and coalitions; and broader Social Movements. A Social Movement can be defined as 'a collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interests --- distinguished from other collective actors, such as political parties and pressure groups, in that they have mass mobilisation, or the threat of mobilisation, as their prime source of social sanction, and hence of power' (Scott, 1990: 6).

There has been a remarkable increase in the number and size of 'International Advocacy Associations' dealing with 'issues that are truly global in character' and 'presumably can't be resolved by people in just one or even a few countries' (Young, 1992: 2). Other commentators argue that the impact of 'humanitarian organisations' is problematic, and their performance does not compare with social movements in a 'global civil society', such as the feminist and peace movements (Shaw, 1994: 663). Long refers to 'alternative development' associations and groups that have launched campaigns against 'inappropriate' products or technologies. This is a more specific form of action different in scope from a movement involving 'mass mobilisation', where 'globalisation processes generate a whole new range of conditions and socio-political responses at national, regional and local levels' (Long, 1996: 42). It would be stretching the imagination to describe development advocacy in the UK as a 'social movement' (Edwards, 1993 and Wilkinson, 1996).

The emergence of 'new social movements' can be contrasted to traditional or 'working class' movements (Lachenmann, 1993). There are two theoretical perspectives which are distinguished by the relative emphasis placed on 'resource mobilisation' or 'political processes' (Scott, 1990: 9).   Within the 'political process approach' a further distinction can be drawn between Touraine's analysis of social movements acting outside the political system and a more integrative approach. 'A crucial factor in the future development of the "new social movements" (through an integrative approach) will be the reaction of already institutionalised forms of interest intermediation' (ibid: 11). Touraine argues 'new social movements' are 'pacific' with

the emphasis on 'conscious raising', the rights of the individual and democratic associations. He calls for a renewed interest in contesting the principal forms of social organisation and recognition of opposed social interests (Touraine, 1995: 393).

Levels of advocacy

 Approaches to understanding social movements help us to distinguish two different levels of advocacy. The first tackles global level processes, structures and ideologies with strategies being determined by an 'abolitionist approach' and action in the form of mass protest. The second is concerned with specific policies, programmes or projects with the intention of achieving 'incremental reform' and action in the form of 'constructive dialogue'.
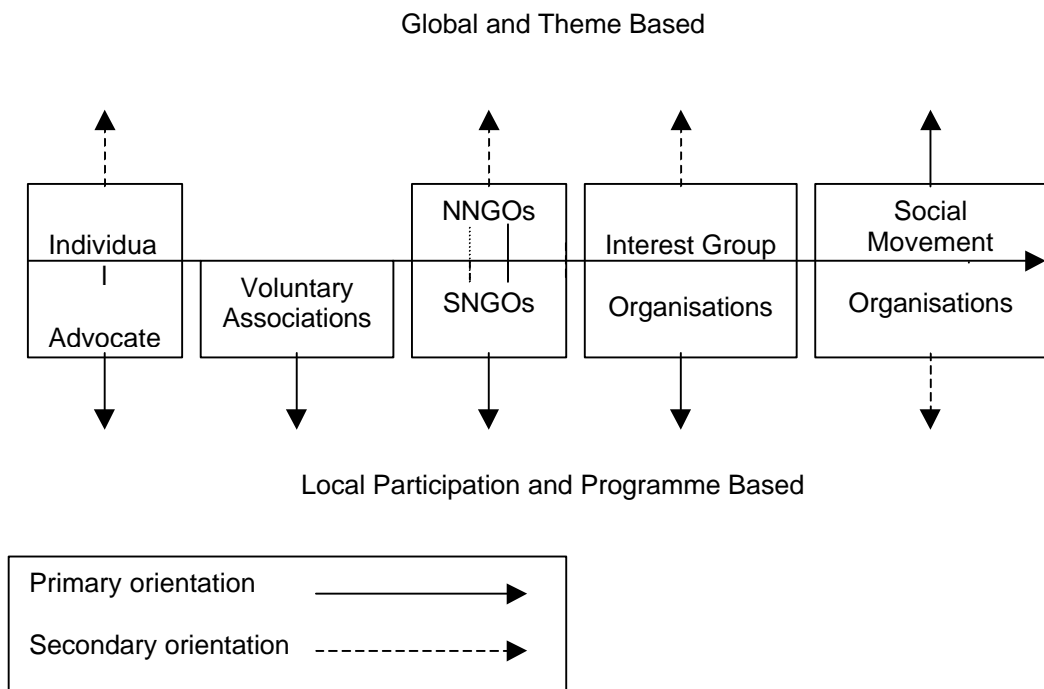
Paradoxically, whilst UK NGOs tend to avoid confrontation and pursue their goals through communication, they do so by drawing attention to the inequities associated with governments and global institutions pursuing policies that are not in the interests of the most disadvantaged. Movements emerge within civil society in the 'South' and the 'North' as local or national groups attempt to form new links and move away from traditional roles. There is increasing recognition of the need to form wider alliances to provide a foundation for advocacy work that is rooted firmly in the 'South' (White, 1995); with NGOs as 'one type of actor frequently identified as part of an evolving global civil society' (Macdonald, 1994: 268). Schuurman contends the role of SNGOs in bridging gaps between civil society and the political system should be of greater importance. He argues against an emphasis on any agenda that emerges from the 'North' and for a much greater emphasis on the part of Northern development agencies on political empowerment (Schuurman, 1993: 204). If UK NGOs are to be more successful in pursuing an advocacy mission they will need to determine the most appropriate form of organisation to meet their objectives as 'one type of actor' within an emerging 'movement'.

Jenkins and Young distinguish between 'Interest Group Organisations' (IGOs) that are 'politically recognised', and those that lie outside any institutionalised system or 'Social Movement Organisations' (SMOs). UK NGOs clearly fall into the first category. A further distinction between membership organisations, with a formal membership that contributes most of the resources, and those that lack a genuine membership, divides UK NGOs into two distinct groups. Although in reality there exists 'a spectrum of political influence' not a clear dividing line, 'the concept of "social movement" and the definition of a "voluntary advocacy association" must be

reconciled (Young, 1992: 5).

Within the development arena, these differences assist us in distinguishing types of Advocacy Organisation; which could form individual elements of a complex international advocacy effort concerning 'global issues'. Figure 1 is a simple representation of the different levels at which advocacy takes place, and the primary orientation of advocacy strategies.

Figure 1   Levels of Advocacy

Global and Theme Based

| Individual Advocate | Voluntary Associations | NNGOs SNGOs | Interest Group Organisations | Social Movement Organisations |

Local Participation and Programme Based

| Primary orientation   ———————▶ |
| Secondary orientation   ------------▶ |

Kriesi (1996: 152/3) provides a useful typology of 'movement-related organisations' which (like Jenkins and Young) distinguishes between IGOs and SMOs. Mobilising structures include informal networks and centre on SMOs as 'the crucial building blocks'. The application of this model to the UK NGO context allows a useful distinction to be drawn between political mobilisation SMOs and specialist representation or interest groups, on the basis of participation. The dominant orientation of both types of organisation is towards 'authorities', whereas that of both 'supportive organisations' and 'voluntary associations' is towards a constituency or their clients. Rucht observes 'the heterogeneity of movement structures', in differentiating three models: 'Party-oriented'; 'grassroots' with a 'relatively loose, informal, and decentralised structure'; and 'interest-group', 'characterised by an emphasis on influencing policies and a reliance on formal organisation' (Rucht, 1996: 188). 'In general, a social movement may include elements of the "grassroots", "interest-group" and party models, all to different degrees' (ibid: 202). In practice it may be difficult to distinguish between interest groups, political parties and social movements.

In the NGO context, the implications for organisational structure are very different for 'grassroots' mobilisation of clients in the South or members / supporters in the North, or lobbying as an 'interest group'. UK NGOs serving these two constituencies operate, simultaneously, as part of the UK voluntary sector and as international agencies within a global framework. The organisational development of UK NGOs is influenced strongly by these dualities (Billis and Mackeith, 1993; Butler and Wilson, 1990).

Definition

Advocacy, defined broadly as 'any attempt to influence the decisions of any institutional elite on behalf of a collective interest' (Jenkins, 1987: 267) can take place within an organisational continuum, ranging from an individual advocate, through NGOs, with different levels of participatory or geographical involvement and orientation towards direct experience, to IGOs and on to SMOs. For UK NGOs it involves 'an attempt to alter the ways in which power, resources and ideas are created, consumed and distributed at global level, so that people and their organisations in the 'South' have a more realistic chance of controlling their own development' (Edwards, 1993: 164). Some UK NGOs could develop a more significant advocacy role as 'formally constituted international associations' that form

'one element in a complex international advocacy effort or movement' (Young, 1992: 5). If it is accepted that real progress can only be made against powerful 'special interests' and 'elite control', through such collective action as part of a 'mass movement', UK NGOs are in a good position to use their political recognition, established relationships in the 'South', membership base and direct experience to contribute as 'Interest Group International Advocacy Organisations'.

Organisational structure and strategies

In order to be effective advocates UK NGOs must consider whether or not their existing organisational structure and strategies are complementary and facilitate effective participation. It is useful here to adopt a modern metaphor. 'If we conceive of strategy as a kind of software application ---, we realise that the software cannot "run" without the hardware called structure' (Rucht, 1996: 191).

A study of organisational structure confirmed 'the fundamental importance of both structure and strategy in the management process' (Butler and Wilson, 1990: 22).[2] Divisional structures were found to be most common within UK NGOs, although elements of other structural forms were often apparent. In a more recent survey all but one of ten UK NGOs were found to be departmentalised by function, with division by region or programmes within departments but not overall, and characterised by a high level of 'formalisation' (Billis and MacKeith, 1993: 13).[3]

Butler and Wilson found that competitive strategies prevailed over cooperative strategies, with 'Third World' organisations becoming increasingly competitive over fundraising.[4] In contrast to competitive strategies adopted by UK NGOs to secure inputs, advocacy work centres on a common mission of social change rather than securing a share of the market. If cooperation is neglected as a strategic choice, potential benefits in terms of 'economies of scale' and 'increased political potency when lobbying government agencies' could be lost (Wilson, 1991b: 178). The development work of operational UK NGOs provides a solid foundation for contributing to advocacy initiatives based on experience. Cooperation is essential to avoid duplication and to provide mutual support.

Greater emphasis on advocacy forces an organisation to face these dilemmas. Focusing attention on improving inter-organisational relationships places cooperative strategies centre stage, but will require a flexible intra-organisational structure to be successful. The efficient management of advocacy may well require structures that

are 'loose and tight', incorporating 'the flexibility of decentralisation and the control and discipline of centralisation' (Wilson, 1991a: 154).

Edwards distinguishes between an 'abolitionist approach' requiring mass protest and 'incremental reform' based on 'constructive dialogue' (Edwards, 1993). This distinction parallels the two types of Advocacy Organisation identified by Jenkins and Young. Some organisations may slip comfortably into a unimodal 'Interest Group' or 'Social Activist' role. If they are not to be mutually exclusive, the UK NGO must distinguish between the two, and the strategic approach will depend on a collective view concerning the chances of reforming the target. In reality the two forms often do merge, but they require different strategies based on confrontation or cooperation. It may well be that 'pressure groups' are best placed to take the lead for confrontational strategies, and UK NGOs to make use of 'real experience' by engaging in 'constructive dialogue'. Different structures are required for taking part in 'strategic networks' and direct lobbying or negotiations with government, and the implications of adopting particular strategies for organisational structure will be crucial (Edwards, 1996: 88).

The real choices concern the extension of its activities into the public arena. If UK NGOs wish to perform both roles, they must devise clear strategies that are consistent, establish the development agenda of the organisation and are based on sound research, and organisational structures that are sufficiently flexible to manage what are essentially very different activities, and allow effective participation in strategic networks. UK NGOs need to devise appropriate strategies and structures, that depart from established practices associated with their normal mode of operation in service-provision, in response to the organisational challenge of strengthening internal and external relationships, in order to integrate an advocacy function, which has been given greater prominence.

Advocacy strategies

Lobbying and campaigning are recognised advocacy strategies (Action Aid India, 1993; Edwards, 1993). An NGO engaging in advocacy uses different skills and strategies in campaigning to mobilise public opinion, and the effective lobbying of governments and international institutions (Edwards and Hulme, 1992 and Clark,

1992 and 1995). The former is essential for getting issues 'on the agenda', but once there, 'lobby organisations with a bureaucratic structure, a skilled permanent staff, an elaborate communications system, and a large membership were most effective' (Jenkins, 1987: 308). Jenkins warns of the dangers of political control through 'elite patronage' and failure to counteract 'special interests' for centralised lobbying organisations without grassroots support, and argues for a balance between establishing legitimacy at the grassroots level and centralisation to improve organisational effectiveness for working within the system. These warnings and the need to counterbalance lobbying by campaigning to achieve public support are of considerable relevance to UK NGOs engaged in advocacy.

Research and development education to increase understanding are essential prerequisites to successful advocacy. Lobbying and campaigning must be backed up by well researched information and effective education on development issues to enhance the learning ability of society (Brulle, 1995: 324). Success is dependent on public understanding and support from the Northern public for costly structural change (Smillie, 1995: 135). Development education by UK NGOs can be seen as attempts to change the attitude of their constituencies and influence government policies on development issues indirectly, rather than being restricted to school-based activities; although an even wider definition embraces awareness raising, evolving from a Frierian interpretation of empowerment on the one hand and coalition and network building on the other. Where important environmental factors are charity law and donor relations, 'development knowledge' based on experience is the principal advantage of UK NGOs, and must be used to good effect to gain public support and influence decision-makers.

In practice, campaigning, lobbying and development education can be viewed as complementary strategies that aim to achieve influence on behalf of Southern constituencies. If UK NGOs engage in their own and / or joint campaigns more than networks and broader coalitions, this may well have implications for effectiveness, if the crucial role of strategic networks is accepted (ActionAid India, 1993 and Korten, 1990a and b). This paper considers the implications of the weight given to different strategies by UK NGOs.

A broad definition of advocacy embraces campaigning, lobbying, networking and development education strategies, rather than a narrower definition that includes only

campaigning and lobbying. These four main advocacy strategies of UK NGOs are mutually reinforcing. They involve getting a message across, either to those the organisation is trying to influence or a wider public, or both. Public support is essential to campaigning and lobbying, and there is no point in NGOs engaging in education without seeking support for change, in accordance with their mission, through both networking and development education. This mutuality, however, may not be reflected in the organisational structure of UK NGOs.

Different activities are associated with one or more of the four main strategies. They include mobilising supporters or public opinion; influencing the media; lobbying of politicians, government officials and others; negotiations with government or multi-lateral institutions; building global or regional networks and coalitions around specific or general development issues; public and / or supporter education; and activities to develop relationships with pressure groups, networks and 'movements' as well as supporters and those they seek to influence. Some UK NGOs would extend the list to include activities with more than one purpose, such as research and information and publicity to seek financial contributions or improve relations.

An expanding advocacy role, involving an increasing range of activities, that seeks to change the status quo, creates dilemmas for UK NGOs that remain primarily service- deliverers working within the status quo. The common element for all advocacy strategies is communication.

Organisational structures

 A synergetic approach requires the internal organisational structure of UK NGOs to focus on incorporating advocacy work as an integral part of a single system, rather than being separated from programme work (Edwards, 1993: 174). There must be some concern that this would inhibit the development of advocacy skills and strategies as programme work and immediate deadlines take priority. Dolan argues that NGOs tend to opt for piecemeal reform rather than fundamental change, and linkages between programme work and advocacy are, in practice, weak (Dolan, 1992). He questions whether NGOs can overcome the absence of 'a shared vision and ideology' and achieve cooperation in the face of increasing competition for funds.

'Internal structuration' centring on the processes of 'formalisation' and 'centralisation'

is crucial to 'organisational maintenance'. 'External structuration' is dependent on building up relations with its constituency, allies and the authorities. Rucht argues a weak 'alliance structure', particularly a lack of conventional allies, 'forces a movement to compensate by developing its own organisational bases for ongoing and quick political intervention'; whereas 'a movement with strong and well-organised allies can keep its informal structure and thus profit from a division of labour based on differential resources' (Rucht, 1996: 192). SMOs and IGOs should be aware of the dangers of 'oligarchisation' and 'goal transformation', leading to 'the accommodation of goals to 'the dominant societal consensus', and a shift to 'organisational maintenance' (Kriesi, 1996: 154/156).

UK NGOs should note the preference of 'International Voluntary Associations' for a federated structure 'characterised by a variety of mechanisms to elicit participation, achieve goals and maintain flexibility', that is 'effective in developing and maintaining support and coordinated action by participating members in different countries' (Young, 1992: 10).   Finding the right blend of 'centralised bureaucratic organisation and decentralised participatory organisation' (Jenkins, 1987: 304), to accommodate both clients and members / supporters as participants in the advocacy function, is fraught with difficulties. An efficient organisation structure and the desired level of participation may not be compatible; and 'once in place these organisational structures set severe limits on the tasks that can be pursued' (Jenkins, 1987: 306).

Internally, the management of relationships between diverse stakeholders requires an explicit and dependable account of the actions of the organisation to prevent unplanned change, and a realisation of the potential impact on other stakeholders. The mission of the organisation should be translated into explicit policies (Billis, 1993). UK NGOs need to learn from the experience of unplanned change, manage organisational growth more effectively by adopting a flexible learning approach, and participate in 'Strategic Networks' (Campbell, 1988 and Korten, 1990a).

Billis and MacKeith suggest conflicts between participatory and hierarchical forms of management could be resolved through closer attention to the principles of social change; and confirm friction between 'raising awareness' and the continuing pressure to raise more money. They observe organisational convergence based on a process of 'structuration' within an increasingly defined and homogeneous organisational

field, but confirm an increasing level of competition between UK NGOs. More recently there is some evidence of emerging organisational divergence reversing this trend, with UK NGOs specialising in service delivery, fundraising or advocacy, and the larger organisations at variance in terms of a different balance between these three broad areas of work.

NGOs must be aware of the broader political system and constraints which determine the opportunities for collective action. They should seek to establish a framing process for advocacy work which facilitates shared understandings to legitimise and motivate collective action, in the context of a better understanding of an evolving mobilising structure for a movement concerned with development issues. The internal organisational consequences of adopting a broader definition of advocacy and giving it a more central role require management responses to ensure that the growth of this function is compatible with service-provision and other functions of the UK NGO. Internal and external organisational structures must enable linkages to evolve that maintain continuity and ensure the effective coordination of advocacy strategies.

Building bridges: theoretical perspectives

External relationships

Brown examines the role of 'bridging organisations' in creating the institutional arrangements to enable influence on national policy-making through horizontal and vertical linkages. 'Bridging Organisations' and their 'constituent networks' act as vehicles for innovation sharing and public education about development alternatives to influence policy-makers (Brown, 1991). UK NGOs are in a position to play a leading role in helping to forge vertical and horizontal linkages, as constituents of 'Bridging Organisations'. In order to do so, they require flexible organisational structures capable of accommodating activities at different levels (global, national and local); ensuring these activities are fully coordinated with those of other development organisations engaged in advocacy; and securing participation by members in the 'North' and, on an equal basis, partner organisations in the 'South'. It is possible to envisage UK NGOs as elements of an international movement, participating in coordinated networks, but specialising in campaigns based on their own experience. UK NGOs would have to adapt their own organisational structure to

facilitate their participation in such a federated structure.

Internal relationships

Advocates are more likely to take a confrontational attitude towards government than service-providers, and internal confrontation is more likely over policy implementation than policy development or agenda setting. NGOs have to make strategic choices between confrontational, complementary or collaborative strategic relationships with government (Najam, 1995). Larger and / or more independent UK NGOs are more likely to regard confrontation as a realistic option. This can place severe strain on relationships within an NGO.

The process of making these strategic choices gives rise to internal tensions concerning expenditure priorities, the conflicting demands of clients and donors, which result in disagreements over an appropriate balance between quality services and meeting fundraising targets (MacKeith, 1991 and 1992). Service-deliverers are pulled towards clients and fund-raisers towards donors. The result can be a split within the organisation, which can be resolved by the voluntary organisation acting as a mediator or bridge between donor and client (MacKeith: 1992: 14).[5] The introduction of advocacy into the equation may produce more conflict if fundraising and advocacy 'campaigns' produce conflicting images (McCormack, 1990); but, alternatively, if advocacy holds a more prominent role within an NGO, it could draw those responsible for different functions closer together by clarifying the mission of the organisation and responding to calls from SNGOs and some 'home' supporters to review priorities. Internal conflicts observed by MacKeith, concerning 'raising money or raising awareness', could be eased if images used in highlighting the plight of the poorest in fundraising campaigns were tested against an advocacy mission statement, which sought changes in global development policy and promoted democratisation as well as positive efforts to achieve self-reliance.

UK NGOs must ensure advocacy strategies reflect the primacy of their support for the Southern constituencies they claim to represent, and flexible organisational structures accommodate advocacy as an integral part of the work of the organisation, involving these constituencies in advocating global change. Advocacy can help to build bridges between the 'North' and the 'South', within the context of an emerging 'new social movement', and to improve inter-departmental relations between the main functional groups within UK NGOs. Research concerning the recent

experiences of UK NGOs focuses on this contention, and examines the effectiveness with which changes in the advocacy function are being managed.

UK NGOs and advocacy: the findings of a recent survey

Understanding the advocacy function

The use of exclusive definitions for advocacy can be explained in terms of a perceived need to relate advocacy to the work of the organisation. Most of the respondent organisations used their own work to demonstrate the inequities of development. It would appear that smaller UK NGOs adopt more exclusive definitions, but several comment that they are considering a wider advocacy role.

A number of UK NGOs describe advocacy as an overall term to include campaigning, lobbying, and, less certainly, development education. For example: 'an over-arching term for all activities designed to influence or change policies or institutions or the processes of decision-making by which policies are formed, involving research, analysis, lobbying, briefing target audiences, campaigning and coalition building'. Others focused on achieving more direct influence over decision-makers, restricting advocacy to promoting the mission of the organisation or work on behalf of 'beneficiaries', an 'interest group' or 'Southern partners'. One UK NGO emphasised a partnership based 'on a common agenda, using a shared analysis'; and another

'seeks to have its advocacy work "mandated" by Southern partners', but comments that 'even this does not convey or guarantee legitimacy'.

Most respondent organisations adopted a wider brief for campaigning to include 'changing public opinion' and 'encouraging public action'; but a more exclusive approach to lobbying, 'working with decision-makers to advance a cause', 'involving dialogue with officials and decision-makers regarding specific policy changes'. Development education is seen as 'the process of making people aware of development issues'. This analysis does not reveal a similar inclusive relationship, involving direct linkages between development education to achieve greater 'public awareness' and both campaigning and lobbying under an overall banner of an advocacy function.

Funding and longevity

There is some evidence of a gradual increase in overall funding for advocacy, with a clear emphasis on development education. This may be due to a reluctance on the part of charities to highlight advocacy work in Annual Reports and Financial Statements. There is limited evidence of an apparent under-funding of campaigning, networking and lobbying, and a preference for funding development education. There is a need for a more detailed investigation of the allocation of funds to the four main areas of advocacy work.

Campaigning and to some extent lobbying were relatively new areas of work. Most UK NGOs claimed to have been involved in networking and development education over a longer period, confirming the findings of Lemaresquier. Although it is not known how many UK NGOs would consider advocacy to be a primary motivation for networking, it is reasonable to question the effectiveness of networking, bearing in mind recent criticism of the failure of NGOs to exercise collective influence. Only one NGO respondent had been involved in development education for less than five years. This bears out a longer tradition of working on education, but raises questions about the effectiveness of this work in providing a sound base for other advocacy strategies.

Advocacy strategies and activities

Lobbying on a specific issue, development education and campaigning based on 'own experience' were ranked as being of most importance in terms of achieving the strategic aims of UK NGOs. Campaigns involving 'Social Movements' and lobbying targeted at government on general development policy were of least importance. Both campaigning and lobbying on broad development issues or policy were viewed as being of less importance than those based on specific issues.

UK NGOs attached greater importance to more conventional advocacy activities: educating and mobilising existing members and / or supporters, research and information concerning development issues. Equal significance is placed on publicity to seek financial contributions. If such publicity is designed both to raise funds and pursue an advocacy mission, there is the danger that these two aims may not be compatible. Mobilising public opinion was ranked last and educating the

general public only tenth of fifteen activities by respondent NGOs. Furthermore, building networks and coalitions in the UK and / or Europe was ranked only thirteenth, and building global networks involving Southern NGOs only eleventh.

The relative importance of strategies is perhaps not surprising, and there is evidence of engagement with Southern and Northern partners. There should be concern, however, that the overall impact will be less, if linkages to the work of other NGOs, including 'pressure groups' are weak. The low priority given to activities that are essential to achieving a wider impact raises questions concerning the overall level of commitment and effectiveness of advocacy undertaken by UK NGOs.

Organisational structure and inter-departmental relationships

Departmental responsibility

Organisational structures associated with the management of advocacy are characterised by their diversity. Responsibility for all advocacy strategies rests with a single department in only three UK NGOs and is divided between two departments in two other UK NGOs. For the remaining respondent NGO staff from several departments contributed to advocacy work, and the division of responsibility is more difficult to understand. It is by no means clear who holds overall responsibility for each of the four main advocacy strategies. There is potential for disagreement if the pursuit of the advocacy mission conflicts with upholding a public image or maximising fundraising potential; particularly if the corporate responsibility for key advocacy activities rests with the head of a 'Marketing', 'Publicity', 'Media' / 'Press Relations' or 'Fundraising' department. Where staff engaged in campaigning, communications and fundraising are within the same Directorate, this facilitates coordination and continuity, and may well help to resolve tensions between fundraising and advocacy; but grouping the two functions could have the opposite effect, in the absence of strong advocacy leadership backed up by a corporate strategy that emphasises the advocacy mission.

Contact with fundraising and public relations staff is most frequent, with the exception of regular contact with the Directorate or Executive. The apparent recognition of the need to coordinate a range of communications activities is tempered by the potential for conflict if 'image' or fundraising priorities do not sit

easily with the advocacy message. UK NGOs should consider the influence of organisational structure on any consequent management problems. Contact with service-delivery staff and those responsible for liaison with main donors occurs much less frequently. The absence of a regular dialogue may indicate that some UK NGOs are not making the most effective use of their experience.

Whereas UK NGOs appear to display a strong tendency towards 'isomorphism' in terms of the organisational structure that has evolved to manage other functions; the four principal advocacy strategies can be located within different departments (e.g. Communications, Fundraising, Information, Policy, Programme, Marketing, Public Relations Departments or a central Directorate) or form their own department, with different degrees of involvement for regional offices in the UK. The more complex the division of responsibility the greater the need for an organisational mechanism that coordinates all advocacy activities to ensure accountability to mission and organisational effectiveness.

Number of staff

Of the six UK NGOs with over ten staff, the only clear division was between development education staff and those involved in work relevant to other advocacy strategies. For smaller UK NGOs fewer staff performed a wider range of activities. With the exception of one NGO, there is no evidence of any real bias towards development education in the allocation of staff or volunteers working at Head Offices. One larger UK NGO had fewer staff engaged in public education than ten years ago, and more staff are being appointed to work on other advocacy activities, including policy development, campaigning, press and media work and supporter development and relations.

Organisational structure

It was found that the categorisation of organisational structures into 'functional', 'divisional', 'federal' and 'matrix', following the approach of Butler and Wilson, was difficult to apply. In practice, the characteristics of both functional and divisional

structures can be observed. The findings of this survey confirm the predominance of departmentalisation along functional lines, with divisional groupings occurring within these departments (Billis and MacKeith, 1993: 13). Some UK NGOs incorporate regional offices in the UK and overseas within international federations, but the UK Head Office retains a directive role. The decentralised structure found in 'International Advocacy Associations' is not evident in the management of the advocacy function by UK NGOs. The findings of the survey support the view that an element of decentralisation is more likely to be introduced as Overseas Regional Offices are given more autonomy for service-provision.

It is difficult to get beneath the surface of an organisational structure in the absence of an in-depth survey involving direct interviews and wider staff participation. It is clear, however, that managers in most UK NGOs have a degree of autonomy and flexibility within a system defined by overall strategies.   Greater flexibility and the more effective coordination of advocacy work may require the further adaptation of the predominant 'functional' and / or 'divisional' structures of UK NGOs. Although there is little evidence of decentralisation in respect of advocacy, the existence of a federal

structure linking members and clients places the UK NGO in a stronger position to take on a 'bridging role' in respect of advocacy.

The response to the questionnaire suggests several UK NGOs are seeking a focus for advocacy. Three larger UK NGOs had established a new department: a Communications Division, a Communications Department, and a new 'International Policy Department'. Another was undergoing a reorganisation to create 'a global programme with an advocacy capacity', greater reliance being placed on a 'communications strategy' to provide corporate direction and a sharper focus. The more fundamental organisational structure of smaller NGOs is typified by the concentration of responsibility for a lesser number of advocacy activities with only one or two staff, often the Director, in order to achieve a more focused approach to advocacy. Other UK NGOs could consider the practical implications of placing communications centre stage for both internal and external relationships, and the priority given to different advocacy activities.

Management problems

The analysis of the most common problems confirms the need for advocacy management to concentrate on inter-departmental relationships, funding priorities and staff development; but, in addition, ranking reveals an awareness of the importance of the effective coordination of advocacy work, as a larger number of UK NGOs get more involved in a wider range of advocacy activities. There is less concern about the management of external relationships. If the profile of development advocacy is to be raised, than the failure to achieve wider public support and establishment of more effective working relationships with 'Southern' and 'Northern' partners are critical management issues. If service-providing NGOs are to play a broader advocacy role in the context of an emerging 'development movement', a failure to give due recognition to the significance of problems associated with achieving wider public support and working within consortia and networks does give cause for concern.

There was general agreement that advocacy work should be linked to experience of providing services in the South. Many UK NGOs confirmed that they concentrate on their identified area of experience and concern. Some do not campaign on general development issues. One argued 'as a specialist agency we see our niche in building on our field experience and arguing specific cases'. Typical responses were that 'advocacy is driven by our field work'; and that 'the key challenge is to "get it right" with our Southern partners; our advocacy agenda is rooted in their experience as well as our own'.

Whilst some UK NGOs have recognised that advocacy 'demands a more coherent communications focus'; a few appear to adopt a different position in criticising the assumption that the advocacy function can be separated out, arguing that 'advocacy is integrated into all our work'. In recognising a practical management problem, which is associated with 'synergy', these UK NGOs arrive at the same solution of identifying a focus for advocacy, but in the form of a strategy or, in the case of one larger UK NGO, 'specialist communications and policy research staff'. Several UK NGOs recognised that these working relationships can be problematic. One referred to 'a constant tension between selecting policy areas that arise from the concerns of our field programmes and those policy staff see as being key in international development'. One response is 'to reduce these tensions by providing more information on emerging issues to field offices as well as plans to upgrade the

advocacy capacity of field programmes'.

The difficulty of raising funds for 'thematic' advocacy, as opposed to work involving a specific country or project base is highlighted by one larger UK NGO; but many smaller NGOs argue that their main problem is distinguishing between fundraising and advocacy campaigns. One recognised that 'because of a limited number of staff our advocacy work suffers from discontinuity', and responded by re-defining their advocacy role 'in order to focus on a few but clear and achievable activities'.

Building bridges: analysis and discussion

UK NGOs concentrate on developing a distinct competence based on direct experience, and recognise the need for a close working relationship with Southern partners, in pursuit of an advocacy mission to change the relative position of the poor in global society. They seem content to act as IGOs pursuing 'incremental reform' through 'constructive dialogue' and education; and there are few examples of UK NGOs seeking to become more active through establishing stronger links within more broad-based global networks. Networking is given a low priority, and there is little evidence, either of attempts to distinguish where collective action is necessary, or to devise appropriate strategies to ensure effective coordination with the advocacy work of other organisations. The implications of not following through a broader-based approach to development education through advocacy strategies involving campaigning and lobbying warrant serious consideration by UK NGOs, particularly in terms of the overall impact of advocacy.

UK NGOs' experience lies in informational lobbying backed up by supporter / member campaigns and public education. Involvement in campaigns to influence and then mobilise public opinion appears to be limited more by funding and staffing constraints, particularly in respect of thematic work, and difficulties in achieving an appropriate balance when allocating resources between the service-providing, fundraising and advocacy functions, than political restraints and perceptions of restrictions imposed by their status as charities. In addition to tensions between the service-providing, fundraising and advocacy functions, there is some evidence of disagreement between operational and policy staff, concerning advocacy priorities. The survey revealed a need for more regular contact between advocacy and service-

providing staff.

The lack of resources devoted to the advocacy function raises questions concerning UK NGOs' commitment to achieving a wider impact and the overall effectiveness of advocacy work. Although the available evidence is that development education receives most financial support, a similar bias in respect of staff allocation is not apparent, although networking appears to be under-resourced.
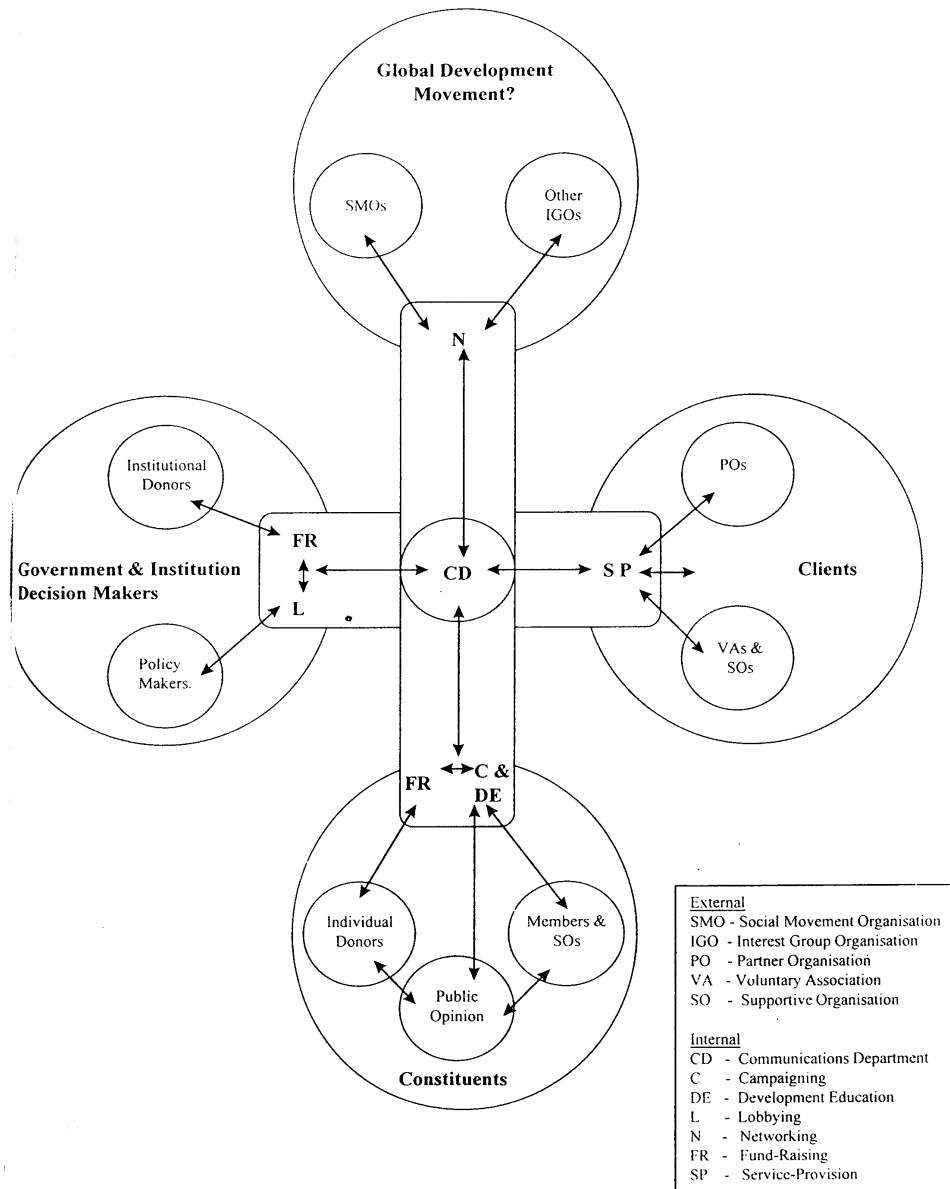
The survey confirmed the predominant organisational structure of UK NGOs to be 'functional', with 'divisional' characteristics evident within individual departments. In contrast to organisational trends associated with service-provision, the main characteristic of advocacy management has been organisational divergence, with a gradual acceptance of the benefits of synergy for maximising the effectiveness of inputs from several departments. More recently, there is evidence of a number of UK NGOs establishing a more central role for a Communications Department, and a recognition of the need for an organisational mechanism that coordinates all advocacy activities to ensure accountability to clients, constituency and mission, and improves organisational effectiveness. An apparent difference in emphasis between restructuring around a new communications strategy and the establishment of a new department warrants further investigation. The right combination of strategic 'software' and structural 'hardware' is an essential prerequisite for achieving wider impact through an extended advocacy role. Externally, UK NGOs are in a good position to contribute to more effective 'collective action' through cooperative strategies to extend linkages, and by establishing a niche for their expertise within global networks.

An exploration of the literature and the findings of the survey enabled the formulation of the theoretical representation of the internal and external relationships of UK NGOs shown in Figure 2. The model builds on the work of Kriesi and MacKeith to portray UK NGOs as one type of 'bridging organisation', with established external linkages through their main functions of service-provision, fundraising and advocacy. The importance of the four main advocacy strategies of campaigning, development education, lobbying and networking to the bridging role is emphasised.

The model captures the pivotal position of 'Communications'. By providing a focal point internal and external linkages are strengthened. In order to have practical

value, the model simplifies a complicated organisational system by keeping the number of actors to a minimum. Within UK NGOs the application of this model has the potential to bring about improvements in continuity and communication, with the service-providing, fundraising and advocacy functions being co-ordinated more effectively. Externally, this organisational framework can help achieve strategic cohesion through building stronger alliances with partner organisations, other IGOs and SMOs, and facilitating the process of learning. Duplication can be avoided and the benefits of synergy retained, with advantages for both internal and external relationships. Although this study has concentrated on organisational structure and strategy, in recognising the importance of communications, the crucial role of both media relations and new communications technology are encapsulated by the model.[6]

Figure 2: Building Bridges

Global Development Movement?

SMOs

Other IGOs

N

Institutional Donors

FR

Government & Institution Decision Makers

CD

S P

POs

Clients

L

Policy Makers.

VAs & SOs

FR

C & DE

Individual Donors

Members & SOs

Public Opinion

Constituents

External
SMO - Social Movement Organisation
IGO - Interest Group Organisation
PO   - Partner Organisation
VA   - Voluntary Association
SO   - Supportive Organisation

Internal
CD   - Communications Department
C   - Campaigning
DE   - Development Education
L   - Lobbying
N   - Networking
FR   - Fund-Raising
SP   - Service-Provision

The model can be used by UK NGOs to explore the policy and practical implications for their own organisations. Many of the problems experienced by respondent NGOs, both small and large, centre on combining a management approach, which allows closer working relationships to develop between advocacy, programme and fund- raising staff, with the need for a focal point for advocacy work within the organisational structure. A combination of 'loose and tight' coupling in order to co-ordinate the work of several departments or individuals, involve Southern partners and Northern constituents, and to ensure consistency in relation to the NGO mission. The model facilitates more effective external relationships, enabling the advocacy work of the NGO to be linked with a wider 'development movement', if or when it evolves. The most appropriate management structure for advocacy may well involve the retention of an appropriate level of synergy; but with a Communications Department in larger NGOs, or a Communications Officer in smaller NGOs, playing this central role. If the 'hardware' is to provide the means of co-ordinating a matrix of relationships, high performance software in the form of an effective communications strategy is essential.

In the context of their changing role, UK NGOs should explore the potential of the advocacy function to bridge gaps between 'North' and 'South', between decision-makers and 'clients' or 'constituents', and between departments responsible for different functions. Whilst recognising the need for more in-depth research involving case studies, it is hoped that the model will be of some practical use.

Notes

1. The acronym UKNGOs is used throughout to refer to UK based NGOs with a principal or significant service-providing role. The acronym NNGOs follows the literature in embracing European and North American NGOs; and SNGOs is used for Southern NGOs. Billis and MacKeith (1993) argue three characteristics shared by all UK NGOs lead to distinct management challenges: non-profit status, mission of social change and organisational structures spanning large distances.

2. Three common structures were identified: 'functional', involving a hierarchical form but with departmentalisation by task; 'divisional', usually with separate responsibility for home and regional or overseas areas and central service departments and a directorate, with the potential for conflict where HQ has a policy as well as a coordinating role; and 'matrix', with the work organised around projects as opposed to a fixed hierarchy or divisions, but with an in-built dual control problem and the potential for conflicts between the project manager and functional HQ manager.

3. This survey revealed the influence of a series of independent and mutually reinforcing changes: rapid income growth, professionalisation, bureaucratisation and the emergence of federalism.

4. 'Competitive' strategies included efficiency, innovation and image creation, and 'co-operative' strategies included co-optation, contracting and coalescing. Amongst British voluntary organisations Butler and Wilson observed an emphasis on establishing a 'niche', concluding that the 'tendency was to secure distinctive competence and not to engage in joint ventures or collaborate to a great extent with peer charities'; although they did observe occasional co-operation for lobbying between three UKNGOs (Butler and Wilson, 1990: 168).

5. The actual model depicts the voluntary organisation bridge being stretched, due to different interpretations of donor preferences and client needs, with a gap between fundraisers and service-providers eventually causing a split, with the organisation itself becoming disconnected from either its clients or donors.

6. Two problems warrant further consideration in relation to the management of

advocacy. They are media relations and new communications technology. Edwards (1994) highlights the importance of managing information; Deacon, Fenton and Walker (1995) the importance of understanding the media and journalists' perceptions of the voluntary sector for organisations engaging in a more active campaigning role; and Wilcox (1996) the potential of new technology.

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