

Trends

There are numerous domestic and international factors that have aided NGOs in their policy evolution:

NGO recognition of the importance of policy work has grown.

NGOs acknowledge that adverse macro economic trends (and their social impacts) have offset efforts to scale-up NGO program initiatives; "this has led to more attention being given by NGOs to macro-policy advocacy and stronger links between micro- and macro-level action."²

In-house policy capacity has expanded. Many NGOs (and NGO sub-sectors) have dedicated increasing staff resources to policy work. Most visible in this regard have been the ecumenical church coalitions which coalesced increasing interest in social justice issues into small staff-based institutions that manage research and policy dialogue activities.³ There were parallel secular (and secular-ecumenical) coalitions as well, including the 1978-79 People's Food Commission and the 1991-92 Citizen's Inquiry into Peace and Security. Buttressing these coalitions have been the policy interests of secular NGOs as diverse as Alternatives, Care Canada, CUSO, Partners for Rural Development, Physicians for Global Survival, and the labour humanity funds.

Ideological polarization has declined. The demise of the Cold War has removed ideological polarization (but not ideology) from much of the policy terrain. This has made it easier for NGOs of different backgrounds to work together on increasingly complex and inter-related policy areas.

The NGO policy role has been legitimized and enhanced by

² Horacio Morales and Isagani Serrano, "Common Ground in Asia-Pacific Development", in David Hulme and Michael Edwards, NGOs, States and Donors: Too Close for Comfort, Macmillan, Houndmills, 1997, p 100.

³ See Christopher Lind and Joe Mihevc, Coalitions for Justice, Novalis, Ottawa, 1994