

and at home, was reflected in an address by Monique Vézina, Minister of International Relations, to the 1985 CCIC Annual Meeting. "New fields of action are opening up," the Minister said. "Look at their possibilities! For example, micro-enterprise development focuses on the poorest on the most individual level . . . . To a development agent, the micro-enterprise approach implies great freedom of action, because there is no format imposed from above . . . . You have all the qualities needed for those enterprises. I hope you will put these qualities at the service of this type of project." With such encouraging words from one of the Ministers responsible for the allocation of funds, it may be expected that some NGOs will be tempted to grasp the opportunity and expand their programming into new fields, even if they have not yet been able to evaluate these fields on their own terms.

### Partnership, cooptation or marriage of convenience?

The cooperative "partnership" model of the Canadian governmental and non-governmental sectors has received international praise, but it has not been without its problems. Many NGOs have become very dependent on public funds, and the principle of "you shouldn't bite the hand that feeds you" can be felt in instances of subtle self-censorship or conflicting priorities. In 1983, the federal government decided not to extend funding to SUCO, a Quebec-based, politically very active NGO that had suffered from continued internal crisis. Justified or not, the example of SUCO has laid bare the power structure underlying the partnership principle and the vulnerability of NGOs that rely almost entirely on federal contributions for funds. It also demonstrated the crucial importance of cooperation and information-sharing for the survival of the entire community.

The question of NGO autonomy and the ability to formulate independent policy-stands becomes especially important in cases where official government policy conflicts with the views of the voluntary agencies, such as in the case of Canadian aid and foreign policy in Central America. Many NGOs have over the years combined their advocacy efforts for changes in Canadian policy towards the region. Briefs were presented to a succession of External Affairs ministers, and most of the time the ministers took great care to meet personally with the NGO representatives.

One would be mistaken, though, to interpret the minister's willingness to listen to the NGO point of view as NGOs having significant impact on foreign policy. When it comes to *real politik*, where US security interests come first, Canadian NGOs have been politely received, but their submissions, by and large, have not been translated into official Canadian aid or foreign policy. To date no Canadian embassy has been established in Nicaragua, and aid to El Salvador has been resumed despite the violent protests of NGOs with experience in that country.

Political scientist Cranford Pratt maintains that "government does not deal with critical internationally-oriented public interest groups in the same way as it deals with business and industry because it neither attaches the same importance to the issues they raise nor is it seriously concerned to incorporate them into the government-led consensus . . . . Foreign policy is primarily shaped by commercial interest and promotion of trade. The government goes through the process and sets up consultations, but in the end these consultations are only pro-forma."

NGO leaders, by and large, agree with this assessment, although they add that there has been progress, that cooperation between organizations is getting better and better, that they are learning to understand the political process and that there have been far more consultations than in the past.

### Cooperation means strength

NGOs have been most successful in their advocacy efforts when they have been in alliance with other community groups or with larger networks. For example, international development NGOs were successful in their efforts to redefine what Revenue Canada considered to be "political activity" before it would grant charitable status to a voluntary agency. This success, however, was based on a large alliance of voluntary agencies coming together under the auspices of the National Council for Voluntary Organizations, which coordinates a large part of the domestic and international voluntary sector.

In the health field, NGOs have also been able to make some inroads. Recently, a coalition of international development organizations, consumer organizations and health groups successfully lobbied against changing the law that would limit the production of generic drugs. But the tug-of-war between multinational drug manufacturers and community groups is far from over. In another example, consumer groups and development organizations have successfully protested against the permission to market the contraceptive Depo-Provera, banned in the US, which has been linked to cancer, and which affects the health of Canadian women as much as of women in the Third World.

It will take a great deal of energy and creativity to transform the vision of social justice, international responsibility and harmony, first conceived in the minds of nineteenth-century missionaries, into the reality of the twenty-first century, where superpower interests regularly clash in the Third World and the threat of international nuclear war is ever present. Voluntary movements within society have been compared to the cells that fight infection in the human body or the cells that help the larva turn into a butterfly. The driving force behind this metamorphosis will undoubtedly be provided by the dreams of some obstinate private citizens in the voluntary sector. And in the process we may expect to see a few ugly moths among the beautiful butterflies. □