

Nongovernmental Organizations: An Alternative Power Base for Women?

Irene Tinker

Women since time immemorial have organized themselves into groups to support their own activities and to assist others. In modern states, women's formal or informal organizations at national and local levels have offered charity, raised societal issues, engaged in networking, and generally provided the glue that holds society together; men have occupied most positions of power in state institutions. Today, women have expanded their organizing to the global stage and broadened the scope of their concerns to include population, environment, technology, energy, and human rights, to name a few. This process was encouraged and enhanced not only by the four United Nations World Conferences for Women (Mexico City 1975; Copenhagen 1980; Nairobi 1985; Beijing 1995) but also by other UN world conferences since the early 1970s.

The impact of embracing this global agenda has been two-fold. First, the agenda of women's organizations now not only includes "soft" issues of family and charity widely regarded as appropriate for women's concern, but it also encompasses advocacy positions that confront what has been a predominantly male discourse on each of these topics. Second, women have joined the myriad single-issue nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and have taken with them their conviction that these issues are also women's issues. Today NGOs and women's organizations increasingly challenge the power and scope of traditional political institutions within the state and lobby international agencies to reinterpret development policies. As the civil society expands in most countries in response to this era of limited government, these new organizations are touted as the real arena for citizen participation and the foundation of present or future democracy. Are NGOs really the new panacea for contemporary government? Should women's organizations be considered NGOs, or do they form a distinct type of organization? Does women's involvement translate into greater political power, or does participation in NGOs once again marginalize women? Are women more

likely to influence major decisions facing society through separate or integrated organizations?

What Is an NGO Anyhow?

The use of the term "nongovernmental organization" was adopted by the United Nations when it agreed to provide a mechanism for citizen-based organizations to participate in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Such organizations are private and nonprofit; they represent people acting of their own volition and describe themselves in their formal documents as self-governing (Weiss and Gordenker 1996a). As a residual category, the term covers a wide range of groups that are not commonly thought of today as nongovernmental organizations: trade union federations, business councils, international unions of scholars, lay religious councils, and professional associations. Women's organizations are also often distinguished from NGOs as the term is now used; this point will be further explored later in the chapter.

NGOs and the United Nations System

Nongovernmental organizations may file for consultative status with the UN, a designation that allows them access to meetings of the committees and commissions of ECOSOC. Members of NGOs may participate informally in these groups, roaming the chambers and halls to talk to delegates; they may also, by request, be given the floor in formal debate. Further, NGOs automatically receive all documents from these discussions and may request that their own documents be distributed. This interaction between UN staff and governmental delegates on the one hand and the NGOs on the other was so valuable that other agencies in the UN system identified their own lists of NGOs and granted them similar privileges.

As development issues began to dominate the UN agenda, new types of NGOs, concerned with issues such as agriculture, community development, population, environment, energy, technological transfer, and housing, sought consultative status.¹ Most international NGOs (INGOs) have affiliates or chapters at the national level in several countries. The objective of the INGOs is to monitor activities within the United Nations system of concern to their membership and to persuade the General Assembly to pass resolutions stating goals for national as well as international action. While such resolutions lack the force of law, they provide the national NGOs with a powerful tool that can be used to alter policies in their respective countries.

This policy role of INGOs was greatly enhanced as a result of the series of

consciousness-raising world conferences that the UN convened, starting in 1972, on major development issues that had not been sufficiently addressed in the original UN Charter.² These world conferences are official meetings of the UN system; the delegates from governments, UN agencies, and official NGOs are charged with approving an official action document that has been discussed and debated in preparatory meetings in the preceding years.

Parallel to these official formal conferences, there have been open, unrestricted, often chaotic and contentious, NGO gatherings, called NGO forums. Loosely organized by the CONGO (Council of NGOs), these meetings typically feature seminars, panels, dances, films, and field trips, all meant to reflect the debates and disagreements among the wide diversity of interested people from around the world who are stakeholders in the issues under discussion. Some radicals considered even the NGO forums to be too close to the UN and its viewpoints and organized alternative NGO gatherings. During the UN Science and Technology for Development Conference in Vienna in 1979, the street theater groups set up an alternative to the "green" alternative to the NGO forum. Anyone, with or without affiliation to any group, could attend these NGO meetings, often without a registration fee.

In contrast, only "official" NGOs could attend UN conferences, although frequently NGOs working on the topic at hand could register for just the particular conference: fourteen hundred groups received recognition at the 1992 Earth Summit. Such accreditation allows NGOs to participate in the series of preparatory committees, or prepcoms, where the official document of an upcoming conference, often called a world plan of action, is discussed and refined, and where many of the most significant changes are made. NGOs not familiar with UN procedures often ignored these prepcoms and then became frustrated at the world conference when they realized the limitations placed on substantive changes at that time. At many conferences, about the middle of the first week when NGOs realized their impotence, some would organize a march on the official conference. At the 1980 women's conference in Copenhagen, activists actually invaded the chamber and halted debate. Usually, NGOs as well as many official delegates preferred the spirited discussions at the NGO forum to the measured minuet of official conference procedures.

Access to delegates is another matter. National and international officials are more available during the conference than in their protected home bureaucracies. NGOs lobby them about themes of the conference as well as on national policies. Often the delegates, official NGOs, and issue-oriented NGOs find common ground despite their earlier antagonisms. Commenting on the Earth Summit of 1992, Kakabadse and Burns write that "even NGOs that initially tried to work around their national delegations discovered that they would eventually have to find ways to work with them. The same holds for

governments: Some that initially ignored NGOs ultimately found that they needed the substantive help of NGOs . . . or their political support back home" (1994).

Out of these world conferences have come global networks of activists from international and national NGOs. The Union of International Associations lists over fifteen thousand NGOs that operate in three or more countries and draw their finances from sources in more than one country (Gordenker and Weiss 1996). A measure of their effectiveness is the frequent efforts of some authoritarian governments to reduce or abolish the role of INGOs in the United Nations system in order to reduce the global reach of many powerful NGOs that are able to challenge national sovereignty on some issues. Another measure of their effectiveness is the growing attention given to these NGO networks by UN development agencies. From its inception in 1973, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) sponsored the Environmental Liaison Committee to maintain a link with NGOs organizing at both the national and international levels. Following its creation in 1976, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, or Habitat, established the Habitat International Coalition, an umbrella group for NGOs and community-based organizations interested in shelter issues. The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) was until recently the major funder of the International Planned Parenthood Federation and many of its national affiliates. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sponsored a new global organization in 1992 called SANE (Sustainable Agriculture Network). NGO relationships with the World Bank are discussed below.

The proliferation of NGOs active in the UN has led to demands by the organizations themselves for a greater say in the overall deliberations; some are even calling for an assembly of NGOs to parallel the General Assembly with its governmental representatives. Such a demand is based on the claim that NGOs reflect people better than do governments, a widespread but unproven assumption (Gruhn 1996; Tinker 1996; United Nations Development Programme 1993; ECOSOC 1994b). Yet a question persists: To whom are NGOs accountable? As elements of social movements, NGOs are rooted in a particular set of beliefs. At what juncture are they perceived as interest groups that may as often undermine the political process as support it?

The report by the Open-Ended Working Group on the Review of Arrangements for Consultations with Non-Governmental Organizations supports the desire of international NGOs to participate in global governance, using their expertise and practical experience in "the formulation of international legal instruments, policies and programmes, and [in] their implementation nationally and globally" (ECOSOC 1994a, 38). The working group stresses, however, that the vast growth in NGOs has occurred primarily at the national and local

levels, an observation that led United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to recommend that efforts be made "to build on and share experience and enhance multilateral agency/NGO/government operational collaboration at the country and grassroots level" (ECOSOC 1994c, iii). Support for NGOs is perhaps stronger than ever under the administration of the present UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. When 637 NGOs from sixty-one countries assembled in New York in September 1997 for the opening session of the first General Assembly under his leadership, he told them that UN/NGO partnership is "not an option, but a necessity" (Maran forthcoming).

NGOs and the World Bank

Collaboration between NGOs and governments is increasingly fostered by the World Bank as a condition for loans. Since early in the 1980s, the Bank has had an NGO committee that specialized at first on environment but has more recently enlarged its concerns. Finding consultation with NGOs extremely useful, by the end of 1980s the World Bank had begun to include NGO participation in 50 percent of its projects (Beckmann 1991). The committee has funded support staff and maintains a list of over eight thousand NGOs in its data base. Sunshine rules allow NGOs access to most internal documents of the World Bank, facilitating critique of proposed projects (Malena 1995). In an official Bank publication on NGOs, Samuel Paul acknowledges "the positive contributions of NGO interventions . . . to poverty reduction"; he notes the extremely limited knowledge available on this sector as of 1991 and calls for a "careful and dispassionate assessment of NGOs' distinctive competence and role in the development process" (Paul and Israel 1991, 1-2).

Debate continues within the NGO community about such close cooperation. Are the organizations working with the Bank being co-opted? The June 1991 issue of *Lok Niti*, the magazine published by the Asian NGO Coalition, ANGOC, is entitled "GO-NGO partnership: a marriage of convenience?" Its cover shows the groom, GO, and the bride, NGO, being married by the World Bank! Chandra De Fonseka asks, "What is the World Bank's interest in forming partnerships with NGOs? At the outset, altruism and similar philanthropic motivations can probably be rejected immediately. After all, the World Bank itself would wholeheartedly agree that as a bank, it does not operate in such rarified lines of business." He concludes that "poverty is bad for business" (1991, 4-5).

Paul Nelson, an NGO activist in Washington, D.C., reports on his observations over several years of NGO-World Bank interactions and suggests that the Bank promotes NGO connections to minimize criticism of its commitment to market solutions. Widespread complaints about disastrous social

impacts of most structural adjustment policies convinced the Bank to attach policy conditions to loans to prevent all reductions of government spending from being taken from budgets for social programs. In his book, Nelson seeks the answers to two basic questions: "Are NGOs becoming tools of a development paradigm that most do not support? Or can NGOs shift the World Bank's practice and performance in areas of environmental impact, popular participation, and structural adjustment?" (1995, 4). He concludes that organizational rigidities minimize NGO influence and that NGOs' goals are "inevitably reshaped" by their relationship with the World Bank. NGOs, for their part, seek to influence programs and institute policy shifts without sufficient clout to implement them.

The Bank's program cycle has also been criticized within the institution. Noting that most NGOs are brought in to assist in implementation after the project has been designed, Carmen Malena (1995) supports consultation of NGOs "upstream," before the project is set. She argues that the current process does not allow NGOs to apply their distinctive attributes: their closeness to the community and knowledge of local circumstances and people. Involving NGOs early on would change the quality of NGO involvement.

NGOs' castigation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund reached a crescendo during the celebrations marking the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945. A coalition of NGOs called *Fifty Years Is Enough* put forward demands for restructuring both institutions and rethinking their single-minded devotion to a single economic model (Danaher 1994). The role of these institutions in stabilizing the economies of East Asia in the financial crisis of 1997-1998 has propelled criticism from the NGO community into the U.S. Congress during debates about replenishing funds for the IMF. The value premises of the critics contrast with the narrow economic principles that continue to dominate the thinking within the World Bank. Will the humanitarian predilections exhibited by most NGOs alter the market-oriented paradigm so dominant today? Does this soft approach reflect traditional women's values, or are these values themselves becoming more central within the civil society? Does this mean enhanced power for women in NGOs?

Challenging the State

Not only are NGOs confronting multilateral agencies and the UN itself; the Open-Ended Working Group of ECOSOC is urging these intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) to work with INGOs *above* and *within* the state. The implication is that national NGOs, through international networks, have a mechanism to make an end run around the state and in the process contribute

to undermining state sovereignty. As IGOs and bilateral agencies increasingly promote NGOs as the panacea for all the inequities and problems encountered when governments in the lower-income countries of Asia, Latin America, and Africa pursue rapid economic growth, they are offering an alternative decision-making structure within these states. Economic transition in many of these countries has been characterized by a withdrawal of the government from significant sectors of the society, thus fostering a civil society between government and market and providing space for NGO activities (Tinker 1996). Promoters argue that citizens, often constrained by oligarchical or authoritarian governments from participation in the formal institutions of power, can influence policies that directly affect their daily life and so help create a political culture and the social capital necessary to sustain democracy (Clark 1991, 1995; Diamond 1993; Renshaw 1994; Ritchey-Vance 1996).

Concerns about citizen activism and international interference have led many authoritarian governments, such as China and Vietnam, to prohibit the creation of indigenous NGOs and exclude international NGOs or limit their operation in their countries (Tinker forthcoming). Yet many tightly controlled governments find that they must trade greater openness to NGOs for international funding. Countries such as Indonesia try to contain NGOs by allowing them to function as service providers or advocate relatively safe issues, such as women's rights or environmental protection but not human rights, as long as their positions do not challenge the government (Walker 1996). When several environmental NGOs documented that a major source of the disastrous fires in Kalimantan in the fall of 1997 was linked to corporations controlled by people close to President Suharto, these critics were protected through their international networks, which ensured reporting in the global media.

In sum, the change in nongovernmental organizations from a focus on relief to a concern with sustainable development is a significant trend. More critical to global governance is the tendency of these increasingly articulate organizations to segue into advocacy and criticism of current international and national policies. While governments in many developing countries feel a loss of control, NGO networks and coalitions are propelled by great expectations for increased power and prestige.

Women in Nongovernmental Organizations

Historically, women have been more active than men in voluntary organizations, whether at the village level or with the International Red Cross. As the power of NGOs surges into the growing space of the civil society, do women themselves and women's issues in general benefit? After all, NGOs proclaim

greater participation and broader democracy than other top-down institutional forms. If women and their concerns are in fact being integrated into NGO debates and programs, what is the role of women-only organizations? These questions are central when examining the functioning and efficacy of NGOs at all levels. Because this chapter focuses on global governance and power, I discuss first the origin and current roles of women-only organizations as they interact with the United Nations and other IGOs. Next I review methods women have chosen to influence debates on such societal issues as population and the environment. Finally I consider women's roles in mainstream NGOs.

Women's Organizations on the Global Stage

International women's organizations were founded over a hundred years ago to enhance women's attempts to influence governmental policies on social justice and temperance before they were granted suffrage; the first was set up by a Swiss woman in 1868. Leaders in many of these organizations served as delegates to the League of Nations, which did not have specific arrangements for NGO representation. Women from auxiliary wings of trade unions joined those from the women's organizations to set up in Geneva a Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations, which monitored sessions of both the League and the International Labor Organization (ILO). These women, along with women from the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Pan American Union, were instrumental in adding language about women to the UN Charter in 1945 and securing the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 1947 (Galey 1995b). Many of these same women's organizations registered for consultative status at ECOSOC and continue to provide leadership in CONGO (Stephenson 1995).³

Organizationally, these first-wave women's organizations are formally structured with hierarchical officers and procedures that often reflect *Robert's Rules of Order*. Although these groups now have members from around the world, their leaders are drawn from the elite; their headquarters, and some would say orientation, are in the North. Most would consider women to have similar concerns everywhere for civil rights, education, and fair working conditions and so assume that there is one international women's movement.

Second-wave women's organizations have discarded tight structures in favor of more egalitarian forms and have preferred networks or coalitions to formal international organizations. These groups tend to be more active in outreach to the poor or disadvantaged (Basu 1995). Focused on issues in their own countries and skeptical of any generalized category of woman, these new-wave groups have worked together at UN World Conferences for Women and associated meetings, such as prepcoms, and have participated in invitational

seminars and professional meetings. Given their preference for networks, they have not sought consultative status at ECOSOC; but many registered as NGOs for the women's conferences; the final list of organizations attending the Beijing NGO forum at Huairou numbered 1,761.⁴

Yet these newer women's organizations have had a profound influence on global governance. Two types of organizations predominated among those set up early in the 1970s: action-research centers, and groups working as agents to change the way women think or act. Both sought to alter the way donors conceived and implemented development programs and projects so that women's concerns and needs were included. Their activities were readily apparent, and both approaches were given recognition when the General Assembly agreed at its 1976 meeting to set up two new institutions for women as a result of resolutions at the International Women's Year Conference in Mexico in 1975 (United Nations Office of Public Information 1977). The UN Fund for Women, now renamed UNIFEM, was created to support grassroots women's groups. The International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, INSTRAW, was designed to conduct, collect, and disseminate research on women in development and to use this information to train government officials and NGOs to improve their projects.

Research Centers. The research groups were set up to assist in collecting data for the national reports on the status of women requested by the UN following the 1975 world conference. Founded by committed feminists, these groups sought new ways of creating knowledge that worked with poor women, not only to collect information, but also to collaborate with them in finding solutions to their problems instead of treating them as research objects (Tinker 1983, 1997). The report from DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), presented to the Nairobi conference by women scholars from the South, maintains that research organizations were the most effective of the new women's organizations in influencing policy and that they "aim to eliminate the distinction between the researcher and the researched, so that research becomes a process of mutual education" (Sen and Grown 1995, 92).⁵

Documenting women's invisible work in subsistence households, agriculture, and the informal sector was crucial if women's economic activities were to be acknowledged and supported by the development planners. The need for such data was immense, and funds were readily available from donor agencies, population organizations, and foundations. Free-standing research centers were not the only ones involved; university faculty formed women's studies centers whose research went beyond scholarly endeavors to action projects.⁶ Agencies of the UN system such as UNESCO, ILO, and FAO commissioned studies; INSTRAW and UNIFEM supported research on basic needs such as

water and technology. The secretariat for the 1980 UN Women's Conference funded research by women from the South to ensure a balanced interpretation of data.

Within the decade 1970-1980, the amount of research on women conducted throughout the world by women of all countries was indeed substantial. Internationally, the research findings influenced policies and programs of donor agencies and INGOs. Locally, these efforts spawned new organizations designed to work with poor women to ameliorate their problems; these groups were both integrated and women-only and focused on many issues new to more traditional women's concerns, such as community health, appropriate technology, household energy, and agriculture including crops and small ruminants. Women in these groups took their insights to the UN conferences on these topics, inserting language into official documents that ensured that women as well as men would benefit from new initiatives.

The excitement and legitimacy of the new research on women encouraged most international professional associations to hold panels on women and often to set up a women's caucus or committee to encourage women scholars to attend conventions. Frequent invitational conferences were held; the first conference on women in development was held in Mexico City in 1975, just before the UN's world conference. Participants were visible as delegates and presenters at both the official and the NGO meetings. The idea of creating Women's World Banking, an NGO that promotes credit for women, was formed during these discussions (Tinker and Bo Bramsen 1976). The action-research aspect led to the formation of the Association of Women in Development, which holds biennial conferences of scholars, activists, and practitioners from around the world.

The Copenhagen conference in 1980 was the site of the first meeting of the women's studies movement. The International Interdisciplinary Congress of Women was established to hold periodic meetings around the world on women's research and education. Typically decentralized, the Feminist Press publishes *Women's Studies International*, and the National Council for Research on Women maintains a roster of women's research centers around the world. The DAWN group of Third World scholars had begun meeting prior to the Nairobi conference and presented its report to the NGO forum; its leading scholars continue to influence development policy individually and through the organization.

Change Agents. The second type of women's organization that has had a global impact has concentrated on changing women's lives. Leaders of these groups often come from research organizations and academia. Emerging during the 1970s, they initially focused on the growing poverty among women,

especially those heading households. Working as separate organizations or within NGOs, they organized poor women in rural and urban settings and assisted them in earning money, improving their housing and services, gaining access to health and family planning clinics, receiving agricultural extension information, and attending literacy classes; that is, they worked to include women in all aspects of development programs. Debate over the "success" of such programs continues among scholars and practitioners; activists know that the mere fact of organizing is empowering (Kabeer 1994; Tinker 1990).

Most women's organizations aim at more egalitarian decision making, though evidence suggests that this is difficult to accomplish; educated leaders often believe that they have the answers and manipulate, if they do not decree, certain decisions. Nevertheless, participation in groups outside the patriarchal family is mind-blowing for many women. Just hearing about new ideas, knowing that their problems are not theirs alone, and discussing alternative approaches to addressing their problems are provocative and stimulating. If at first most issues these groups took on related to poverty, relationships within the family and women's legal rights became more critical when households disintegrated. Domestic violence and rape became global topics openly discussed and addressed. Such issues span class and ethnicity and provide a foundation for a global women's movement encompassing many diverse institutions with their own issues. The global feminisms described by the authors in Basu (1995) attest to the many competing, and often conflicting, perspectives found among women's organizations.

In many ways, the network of research scholars provided the base for the contemporary international women's movement that embraces diverse feminisms. Grassroots groups at first tended to be fragmented over goals and ideology, but they have all emphasized participation and information, and their goal has been empowerment. As a result of all these activities, change is clearly happening at the local and state levels. What are the international implications of women's activism underscored by our greater understanding of women's roles and their economic and social contributions to society?

Women Influencing International Issues

International networks of women's organizations and coalitions have focused on identifying and inserting women's viewpoints into broader societal interests. Leaders of these groups often have their roots in women's organizations or research centers. Other groups were founded by women who previously worked within mainstream NGOs on issues such as population, environment, technology, energy, housing, and water and sanitation and who felt that their perspectives were ignored by the dominant male leadership. These

groups have been influential in many recent international conferences.

For example, in January 1985, the Environmental Liaison Committee of NGOs, which advises the United Nations Environment Programme, held a meeting in Nairobi to consider how to include in its proceedings more voices of women and people of the South. Invitations had gone out to leaders of development and population organizations that had a better record of including women. During the first day, men from Europe and the United States dominated the debate, insisting that priority be given to global environmental issues such as acid rain and pesticides. Discouraged by the silence of contesting views, especially from women of the South, someone brought a procedural motion: speakers from North and South would have to alternate, as would male and female speakers. Before they could speak, the men of the North had to encourage, even beg, women of the South to talk. The tone and direction of the debate changed abruptly. Not only were issues of health and sanitation in squatter areas added to the agenda of UNEP, but also a women's caucus was established.

The Nairobi Women's Conference, which followed in June, featured a panel on women's stake in the environment. Presenters were members of Women in Development and Environment (WIDE), an organization that had been set up a few years before by the UNEP representative in Washington, D.C. Preceding the UN Conference on Environment and Development—the Earth Summit—in Rio de Janeiro in 1994, UNEP assembled over two hundred examples of successful environmental projects and brought the women who initiated them to a conference in Miami. A more political role for women at the Earth Summit was orchestrated by the recently established Women for Environment and Development (WEDO). This increasingly visible international coalition of women convened the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet in November 1991 to plan strategies for the Earth Summit and write a women's version of the official conference document, Agenda 21. Over fifteen hundred women from eighty-three countries attended. At the summit, WEDO held daily caucuses, just as the NGOs do for their members, to alert women about decisions taken and issues on the upcoming agenda. The visibility and sophistication of these efforts ensured that women's interests were included in the final document. Such briefings have become a permanent feature of subsequent UN conferences and prepsoms (Chen 1996).

In Rio, a division occurred among women's organizations over wording on family planning. In the following two years, leading up to the 1994 World Population Conference, women active in these overlapping issues met frequently to address the conflicting views. The International Women's Health Coalition coordinated the organization of meetings around the globe to draft and debate the Woman's Declaration on Population Policies. A final strategy meeting was

held in January 1994 to rehearse individual and group responsibilities during the Cairo conference. The U.S. Network for Cairo '94 coordinated the activities of a broad spectrum of population, environment, and development organizations in support of the women's agenda. In Cairo, WEDO set up its daily caucus, briefing NGOs, official delegates, and the media (Chen 1996). The result was possibly the most feminist document to emerge from any UN conference. Principle 4 builds on previous UN conferences when it declares: "Advancing gender equality and equity, the empowerment of women, the elimination of all kinds of violence against women, and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility, are cornerstones of population and development-related programmes." Other principles declare women's rights to health and education to be prerequisites for all population programs (Germain and Kyte 1995; see also Higer this volume).

Long-term preparation for the UN World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993 also was instrumental in introducing the revolutionary concept that women's rights are human rights. In 1991 the Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University in the United States began planning for Vienna by convening women from twenty countries first to decide on goals for the conference and then to orchestrate a campaign to secure support for this new initiative that brought domestic violence into public view. In Vienna, WEDO held daily briefings for NGOs, while UNIFEM arranged daily meetings for delegates. A mock tribunal that heard women's own stories of human rights abuses provided dramatic documentation of the need to include women's rights in the final document (Chen 1996; Bunch and Reilly 1994; see also Joachim this volume).

The pace of UN meetings increased in 1995, when the World Summit for Social Development was scheduled for March in Copenhagen. WEDO joined with DAWN to coordinate daily caucus meetings and also arranged panels and dialogue sessions during PrepCom II. After the successes for women's issues at Rio, Vienna, and Cairo, women continued to stress unity in the face of attempts by religious and culturally traditional groups to roll back these advances. Although similar defensive strategies characterized much of the activity at the governmental conference in Beijing, the NGO forum in Huairou provided active NGOs with the opportunity to disseminate information about crucial issues to the twenty-five thousand to thirty thousand women attending (see also West this volume).

The women's groups that took the lead in coordinating lobbying at the four UN conferences were U.S.-based organizations with savvy leadership able to secure funding to enable women from around the world to participate in planning meetings as well as in the final conferences. All continue their activities; but while the International Women's Health Coalition and the Center for Glob-

al Leadership maintain a focus on health/population and on human rights, respectively, WEDO has expanded its membership abroad and broadened the scope of its policy papers to include issues of globalization and global governance. WEDO's primers on transnational corporations, the World Trade Organization, and the structure of the world and regional development banks were widely circulated in Beijing.

In 1996, perhaps the last of these major world conferences took place when Habitat II convened in Istanbul. Women's concerns came late to issues of shelter. The Habitat International Coalition was founded in 1976, but not until one of its few women members organized panels that promoted shelter issues for the 1985 Women's Conference in Nairobi did the topic gain recognition as a basic women's issue. A Women and Shelter group was formed and began publishing a newsletter that reported on both community programs and scholarly publications (Tinker 1993). This caucus held meetings and participated in precoms for the 1996 Habitat Conference in Istanbul; at the conference, it worked with NGOs to ensure that delegates considered women's rights to housing.

Since the beginning of the UN Decade for Women, leadership for women's issues has shifted from the older formal women's organizations to networks and coalitions of more diverse activist groups. Unlike earlier UN conferences, starting with the 1974 Population Conference, when changes in wording in the conference documents were the result of individual or ad hoc group efforts by NGO and government delegates, these new groups are diligent in their preparations for each topic and each conference. Not only are organized women more effective in changing policy statements, but also their national or local affiliates are able to lobby their own governments to follow the UN recommendations. The specialized groups, whether caucuses within mainstream NGOs or women-only NGOs, eloquently presented their perspectives at the most recent series of UN world conferences.

How much influence does all this lobbying activity have? If women's issues must first be inserted into single-interest or development policies, which in turn become the subject of negotiations at the agency or state level, do women's concerns simply fade away? At the 1995 NGO forum in Huairou, China, women working within the bureaucracies of bilateral agencies spoke at a plenary panel about problems in mainstreaming the women's development agenda. The speakers expressed great dismay and discouragement at their lack of progress toward including women and their issues at every stage of program design and implementation.⁷

One of these institutions was the World Bank, whose new president, James Wolfensohn, attended sessions at Beijing.⁸ The Bank has been widely accused of fostering economic reform in countries undergoing structural adjustment in

such a manner that social services are reduced and the social safety net for the poor is torn. Indeed, the reduction of government provision of these services is a major factor propelling the growth of existing service NGOs in those countries and the expansion of new NGOs into the provision of services. A group of women formed Women's Eyes on the Bank to monitor the implementation of the pledges made by Wolfensohn in Beijing. In addition, the World Bank set up the External Gender Consultative Group to work closely with policymakers. Leaders of women-only and mainstream NGOs have agreed to work within the Bank for reform in a symbiotic relationship with others involved in the Fifty Years Is Enough campaign.

Can external women's groups influence World Bank policies more than the long-existing but informal women's group within the Bank has been able to do? Women consultants have complained that policies concerning women are simply "tacked on" to program designs, if they are mentioned at all. The members of the External Gender Consultative Group want to start with a focus more on gender justice than on specifics of the project cycle (Alexander 1996). In some ways this is a more radical position than just proposing to restructure the Bank.

Women's Impact on Global Governance

Women today are charting several apparently contradictory paths to power and influence on the global stage. They are joining political parties and running with increasing success for elected office (Jaquette 1997), and once in office they are contesting everything from the rigidities of rules to the lack of women's restrooms to the juvenile verbal assaults in the British House of Commons. Women also hold many leadership positions within national and international NGOs that champion values that resonate with women's traditional concerns and provide a countervailing force to traditional state power. Although male dominance may still be present in organizational structures and decision-making processes in state institutions and NGOs, women's voices and leadership are increasingly evident.

An alternate route to wielding power is to appeal as women and mothers for a change in the values that underlie government policies and programs. Repelled by corrupt parties and patriarchal leadership, some women turn their backs on existing formal institutions and concentrate on forming organizations and networks of women outside the normal channels of power (Brasileiro and Judd 1996; Tripp 1996). In every country, women are taking charge of their lives; protesting domestic violence, sexual harassment, and male drunkenness; and demanding access to land and housing, microcredit and markets, employment and child care. The sum of these activities has pro-

duced the women's social movement that is fundamentally altering established institutions of society. The power of this social movement has enhanced the role of women's organizations as they operate at the global level. At the United Nations and its agencies, in discourse with the World Bank, in negotiations at meetings of all types of NGOs, women have new presence and authority.

Women-only communities or self-help groups benefit from the global noise raised by the elite leadership within and outside mainstream institutions. But women leaders working within national legislatures benefit from the rising public voices of women demanding a gentler and more equitable world for women, their children, their families, and their communities. NGOs, with their growing influence in an expanding civil society, are yet another route for influence.

Is outside influence more likely to bring change in outmoded state institutions? Is the backlash against current trends toward gender equality a desperate attempt to stop an inevitable shift in patriarchal relationships between women and men? Is the lack of enthusiasm for women's issues among the younger generations in the United States, for example, a reflection of women's improved position? Around the world, male as well as female scholars and activists believe that the women's movement has already irrevocably changed society.

After a quarter of a century, the cumulation of women's activities globally has challenged male control in the family by reducing women's economic dependence on men. While women worry that such changes leave mothers with the double roles of nurturer and provider while letting fathers off the hook (Summerfield and Tinker 1997), many male scholars emphasize how these changes alter the basic fabric of society. Amartya Sen reconsiders approaches to the household with his discussion about women's improved bargaining position within the household (1990); Ken Kusterer proclaims the imminent demise of patriarchy (1990); Manuel Castells writes that "the transformation of women's consciousness, and of societal values in most societies, in less than three decades, is staggering, and it yields fundamental consequences for the entire human experience, from political power to the structure of personality" (1997, 136).

Translating the value shifts caused by the women's movement into new political, social, and economic institutions is a monumental task. Women need to pursue all available paths to power and influence, in women-only and mainstream NGOs, in nonconventional community organizations, and in political parties. The expanding civil society gives greater space to people's organizations and so allows greater opportunities for women to mold their own future.

Notes

1. The number of NGOs registered with ECOSOC in Categories I (global organizations with broad social and economic interests) and II (those with narrower issue or geographical concerns) has increased from 7 in 1948 to 42 in 1993 for the first category and from 32 to 376 during the same years for the second category, while other registered NGOs rose from 2 to 560, for a total of 978 NGOs in consultative status in 1993 (ECOSOC 1994b). The UN Web page on the Internet now lists 1,500 organizations in consultative status.

2. E.g., Environment, 1972, 1992; Population, 1974, 1984, 1994; Food, 1974; Women, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1995; Habitat, 1976, 1996; Water, 1978; Desertification, 1978; Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, 1979; Science and Technology for Development, 1979; New and Renewable Sources of Energy, 1981; and the World Summit on Social Development, 1995.

3. The International Alliance of Women and the International Council of Women have suffragist roots; they have run development projects in the South, but their major international activity focuses on UN affairs in Geneva and New York. The International Young Women's Christian Association, Zonta International, and Soroptimist International are charitable groups that provide grants to women's groups globally and promote their issues at the UN. International Federation of Business and Professional Women and International Association of University Women continue holding world conferences and have less presence at UN meetings. Some fifty women's organizations now have consultative status.

4. Information exchanges, although based initially in the North, were often international in reach. In 1975 the *Women's International Network (WIN) News* began publishing excerpts from UN documents and conference reports, as well as updates on issues of interest from women contributors. About the same time, two European women, one in Geneva and one in Rome, set up Isis as a clearinghouse and newsletter for information on women's health and violence issues. In London, Change produces reports and a magazine. The International Women's Tribune Center in New York City was set up to support the NGO community following the Mexico City conference.

5. Researchers are still struggling with the difficulty of carrying out feminist fieldwork that produces knowledge of use to those studied. For an excellent collection of opinions on this process, see Wolf 1996.

6. In Latin America under military dictatorships, university-sponsored projects were less vulnerable than those run by social change organizations. In Nepal before the restoration of democracy, for-profit consulting organizations provided a cover for action research and projects when activities of both NGOs and the university were constrained.

7. The panel was entitled "Institutional Mechanisms and Financial Arrangements" and was held on 5 September 1995. The chair was Rounaq Jahan, whose book reports her findings on mainstreaming efforts in two bilateral donors, Norway and Canada, and two multilateral agencies, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank (1995).

8. For background on women's offices in the World Bank, see Winslow 1995a.