

# GLOBAL ORGANISATION IN CIVIL SOCIETY THE EFFECTS ON POVERTY

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### Introduction

The 'global' in global civil society can mean many things. However, a global quality of civil society is commonly taken to entail *inter alia* an organisational infrastructure that encompasses widely dispersed locations across the planet. In this sense civil society is 'global' when an association of citizens comprises offices and affiliates that span multiple countries on several continents. On these lines Amnesty International (AI) is global for having branches in over 80 countries; the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) is global for having affiliates in 155 countries; and the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO) is global for encompassing representative bodies of 57 groups on six continents.

Proponents of social change—including the eradication of poverty—have held contrasting assessments of global organisation as a strategy for civil society activities. On the one hand, some commentators have championed transplanetary coordination as a key means to build strength in an emancipatory social movement. In this vein, Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* urged workers of the world to unite. On the other hand, sceptics have worried that global organisation causes civil society associations to lose touch with grassroots constituencies and become integrated into the very social structures that generate poverty. In this vein, critics bemoan alleged elitism and cooptation in transnational NGOs and instead extol the local as the principal site for effective resistance to oppression and impoverishment.

What does the record suggest in respect of this debate? When a civil society initiative 'goes global' in organisational terms, what does this move imply for its approach to, and impact upon, poverty and impoverishment? Does global-scale organisation yield greater strength in numbers for anti-poverty campaigns? Or does activism directed at global spaces narrow the scope of participation, in particular

by becoming more elitist and pushing poor people themselves to the margins of poverty politics? Do anti-poverty groups from low-income countries gain better access to policy makers (including those in their own national government) by organising globally? Or do activists from the South lose autonomy and initiative by entering global spaces that are generally dominated by actors, languages and cultures from the North? Are anti-poverty campaigners able to pursue more radical alternatives through global organisation, including approaches that are silenced in national and local politics? Or does 'going global' provoke charges of deserting one's country and siding with the enemy, thereby weakening the national and local position? Does global-scale organisation foster cross-cultural learning that generates new visions and tactics for more effective struggles against poverty? Or do civil society associations that organise on a global basis invariably lose their critical edges and become coopted into a ruling order that perpetuates poverty? Indeed, is global civil society in this way an engine of hegemonic legitimation: that is, it provides a veneer of purportedly progressive action on what remains a deeply unjust order and deceives people into believing that irreparably oppressive structures can benefit the poor?

This chapter greets the transplanetary organisation of civil society activism on poverty with neither globalist enthusiasm nor localist scepticism. Instead, it is argued that the fact of global organisation *per se* does little to determine the outcome of a civil society initiative on poverty. In some cases a resort to global unification, federation, coalition, and networking has indeed made civil society activity more elitist, less subversive and even hegemonic. In other cases a turn to institutionalised global collaboration has served to empower marginalised circles and promote new anti-poverty initiatives. In short, globally organised citizen action can work either negatively to perpetuate poverty or positively to counter it. The crucial point is not *that* civil society actors organise globally, but *how* they do so.

This argument is elaborated and illustrated below through an examination of diverse sectors of civil

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society. Successively the discussion considers globally organised civil society actors in seven areas: development NGOs, labour movements, business forums, women's organisations, consumer bodies, faith-based organisations, and indigenous peoples' associations. In respect of each of these clusters of civil society actors it is asked: a) why and how they have become concerned with global politics of poverty; b) whether global organisation has opened or closed space for marginalised circles; and c) whether global organisation has tamed or radicalised understandings of impoverishment and strategies to combat it.

As the cases below indicate, across the various sectors of civil society one can find some instances where global organisation of an initiative on poverty has done little to challenge the existing order and on the contrary may even have tended to further exclusion and cooptation. Yet in each sector there are also other instances where global organisation has advanced more inclusive participation and more transformative visions in respect of impoverishment. The implication is that it is simplistic and misguided either to celebrate or to vilify globalisation in the organisation of civil society activities on poverty. Rather, anti-poverty campaigners would do well to identify, understand and avoid the negative experiences, while building upon those approaches to global organisation that have encouraged more inclusive activism and more substantive change.

### Development NGOs

No sector of globally operating civil society is more directly and explicitly concerned with poverty than development NGOs. Poverty alleviation and eradication is the principal *raison d'être* for this class of civil society associations. Some of the largest global civil society bodies in terms of budgets and staff sizes are development NGOs. Prominent examples include ActionAid (working in 46 countries), CARE (operating in 66 countries), Oxfam (active in over 100 countries), and Save the Children (working in 42 countries).

Development NGOs address poverty through a mix of service delivery and policy advocacy activities. On the service delivery side these organisations execute projects to enhance the welfare of poor people with education, electrification, health, sanitation, shelter, etc. On the advocacy side these bodies attempt to shape understandings of and policies towards poverty by engaging governance agencies (local, national,

regional and global) as well as business enterprises, the mass media, political parties, schools and universities. Most development NGOs undertake service delivery and policy advocacy in tandem, although the relative emphases vary from one association to the next.

The global reach of some of the most influential development NGOs has generated some controversy, especially around the issue of accountability (Edwards and Hulme 1996). With their large material resources and dynamic policy activism these global civil society organisations have become major players in the political economy of development, exerting considerable power in many poor countries and poor communities. Enthusiasts welcome this trend, viewing it as a triumph of goodwill over subordination in global politics. However, critics charge that globally operating development NGOs do not sufficiently answer for their actions and impacts, particularly towards those who are meant to benefit from their work. As a result, say the sceptics, these global actors can end up perpetuating the dominance of certain countries, cultures and classes (Manji and O'Coill 2002).

In practice the situation with global development NGOs tends to be more complex and nuanced. Some of these civil society associations have indeed merely reproduced conventional policies towards poverty alleviation and in the process largely sustained or even deepened social inequalities. However, other civil society initiatives have used global organisation as an opportunity to experiment with new approaches and resist established hierarchies. In some cases the same global organisation can include both conformist and transformational elements.

Oxfam offers an example of a global development NGO that, while critiquing aspects of conventional anti-poverty strategies, also in some ways manifests prevailing hierarchies in world order. Created as a famine relief agency in Britain in 1942, Oxfam had by the 1960s and 1970s shifted its focus to long-term development with a particular emphasis on poverty eradication (Eade 2000: 9). In 1994 the seven national Oxfam organisations of the time decided to deepen their collaboration with the formation of Oxfam International (Oxfam International Annual Report 2007 URLa).

Today Oxfam International is a decentralised confederation of 13 organisations on three continents with the common purpose of 'end[ing] poverty and injustice, as part of a global movement for change' (Oxfam International URLb). Oxfam International has

also placed emphasis on global-scale campaigns and to this end has established advocacy offices in Brussels, Geneva, New York, and Washington. A further temporary office was established in Rome during 2009 to facilitate lobbying during Italy's Presidency of the Group of 8 (Oxfam International URLc).

Yet Oxfam remains strongly weighted towards the global North. To be sure, the coalition has given priority in recent years to promote greater initiative for Southern 'partners', *inter alia* with the creation of autonomous national Oxfam organisations in India and Mexico. Today a number of directors of Oxfam's in-country operations come from the global South, and locals hold many key staff positions in country offices. However, funding decisions remain largely with the head offices in the global North. Likewise, the Northern elements of Oxfam still undertake the overwhelming bulk of its research and advocacy work. Thus, although Oxfam has changed its rhetoric to one of 'putting people at the centre', as reflected in the title of its current five-year Strategic Plan, *Demanding Justice*, impoverished people themselves have had limited direct input in the design of development programmes and campaigns (Oxfam International URLd). To this extent, Oxfam has arguably failed seriously to challenge structures of global power (Pearce 2000).

The possibilities of an alternative approach to global organisation by development NGOs are well illustrated by Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI). Established in 1996, SDI is a confederation of associations of the urban poor covering some 3.5 million people in over 30 countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Its vision is 'to give voices to the urban poor, especially women, so that they can collectively find solutions to their problems of eviction, housing, sanitation and security' (SDI URLa).

Like Oxfam, SDI gives much emphasis to advocacy; in contrast, however, the poor hold much of the initiative in SDI campaigns. For example, SDI operates a 'horizontal exchange' system in which slum dwellers from different countries and continents can share their experiences and form a collective vision. The knowledge thereby generated is used by slum dwellers in their advocacy work vis-à-vis multilateral institutions and other actors. In the case of SDI, global organisation enables marginalised people to recapture 'sites of knowledge' and actively to shape policies that impact their livelihoods (SDI URLb). True, some slum dwellers may be more hesitant to participate in

dialogues with global institutions such as the World Bank. Nonetheless, SDI has enabled their voices to resonate in previously unreachable spaces.

Yet engagement with elite global forums is not the principal focus for SDI. It mainly concentrates on 'bottom-up' programmes that are created and executed by slum dwellers themselves. Initiatives that are successful in one locality are transferred through the SDI confederation to other sites, although the programmes are adjusted in accordance with the specific circumstances of each context.

One of SDI's pillar programmes are savings and credit projects. These schemes are run by slum dwellers living on the same street. The funds are obtained from within the community and dispersed on the basis of needs as determined by the community (SDI URLc). These locally generated funds have combined with external donations to create so-called Urban Poor Funds for larger-scale projects (SDI URLd). Again, decisions regarding the Urban Poor Funds mainly lie in the hands of the slum dwellers themselves.

In short, the experience of SDI demonstrates that, done in certain ways, global organisation can promote local initiative. Here is a confederation that empowers slum dwellers in the global South in both service delivery and advocacy activities. In this case a globally organised development initiative can be fully of, by and for the poor.

### Labour movements

Poverty is tightly interlinked with having access to employment, as well as the conditions of that employment; thus poverty is an obvious agenda item for labour movements. The present discussion focuses on global-scale organisations of workers themselves. However, many more global civil society associations campaign for or with workers on poverty issues, or include labour rights and remuneration as part of their wider remit (Waterman and Timms 2004). Also relevant as labour campaigns are peasant and farmers' movements, which are increasingly developing global networks in response to common global challenges to their livelihoods, such as international trade agreements (Edelman 2003).

Well-known examples of globally organised labour movements include the twelve sector-based Global Union Federations (GUFs), which work together through the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Meanwhile the World Federation of Trade



Unions (WFTU) encompasses seven sector-based Trade Union Internationals (TUIs). Some workers who are unable or unwilling to join traditional trade union movements as grouped in the ITUC and the WFTU also organise on a global scale. Such workers build 'new labour internationalisms' in collaboration with labour NGOs and social movement networks (Waterman and Wills 2001). Examples of these alternative labour movements include the global peasant alliance, Vía Campesina, and the network of mobile street vendors, StreetNet International.

Labour movements address poverty issues in three main ways: through research, advocacy, and substantive programmes. Regarding the first, research can develop an organisation's understanding of the causes of poverty, and can inform and strengthen its policies, campaigns and programmes. An example is the Global Union Research Network (GURN), which provides workers' organisations with information and analysis on common issues, including 'economic alternatives and poverty eradication' (GURN URL; Waterman and Timms 2004). In terms of advocacy, global labour organisations represent the interests of their members and strive to improve conditions of employment above poverty levels. In this vein global unions make regular submissions to United Nations agencies and multilateral financial institutions. As for substantive actions, some global labour organisations support anti-poverty projects for workers and their communities. For instance, one of the GUFs, Building and Woodworkers International (BWI), has set up 17 schools for child labourers, enabling 10,000 children to be taken out of work and into education (BWI URL).

Although these three broad areas of common activity can be identified, global labour organisations also exhibit considerable divergences in their engagement of poverty questions. They have contrasting understandings of poverty, different strategies towards its alleviation, varying views on the contribution that labour movements can or should make to these efforts, and different approaches to the place of the poor within these movements. The examples of the ITUC and StreetNet International illustrate this diversity.

The International Trade Union Confederation was formed in 2006 as a merger of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the World Confederation of Labour (WCL), both created in the 1940s. The ITUC is a solid example of civil society organisation on a global scale, with 311 affiliates

covering 168 million workers in 155 countries across the world. Meanwhile each of the dozen GUFs within the ITUC group national trade unions by sector worldwide, including metalworkers, public service workers, etc.

The ITUC regards poverty as being fundamentally linked with employment opportunities and rights. As such, poverty is bound up with the ITUC's mission 'to better the conditions of work and life of working women and men and their families, and to strive for human rights, social justice, gender equality, peace, freedom and democracy' (ITUC URLa). To this end the ITUC undertakes research and advocacy work on poverty and provides solidarity funds for trade unions who face hardship or repression. Examples of ITUC-supported campaigns include 'Decent Work, Decent Life', the 'World Day for Decent Work', and the 'Global Call to Action against Poverty'. Through each, the main message from the ITUC is that providing all people with the opportunity for decent work 'is the only sustainable way out of poverty' (ITUC URLb).

In developing leverage for change, ITUC strategy focuses on elite participation at the global level. The ITUC has established itself as an integral part of global governance institutions, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), other UN specialised agencies, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Therefore, while the ITUC declares itself to be critical of 'unbridled capitalist globalisation' and sees 'effective internationalism as essential' (ITUC URLa), the organisation in practice accepts the existing global economic institutions. Also, while the ITUC promotes global solidarity and appeals for 'workers of the world to unite in its ranks' (ITUC URLa), the membership tend to be less radical. Workers affiliated to the ITUC include many of the best waged and most protected people in the global labour force. Moreover, the ITUC leadership, staff, offices and budget are disproportionately drawn from the global North. Hence although the ITUC makes poverty a central concern, most poor people are not in labour unions, and most ITUC members are not poor. Questions might therefore be raised about the extent to which the ITUC empowers poor people and veritably contests the prevailing world social order.

In contrast to the ITUC, with its operations in formal labour markets, StreetNet International is a global organisation of informal workers. This initiative of 'new labour internationalism', launched in 2002, now covers over 300,000 street vendors, market sellers,





and hawkers (i.e. mobile vendors) in 34 organisations in 30 countries across four continents. Based in Durban, South Africa StreetNet International is an organisation of some of the poorest workers. Its members face all the challenges of the informal sector: low pay, unstructured work patterns, insecurity, lack of regulation and protection, and (usually) an absence of collective activism. Whilst 300,000 members is a small proportion of street vendors worldwide, StreetNet opens global political space for what has historically been a marginalised group of workers.

Being globally organised is a distinct asset for StreetNet. It facilitates the exchange of information, the development of strategies, and the execution of international campaigns for the rights of street vendors (StreetNet International URLa). Organising globally has also allowed StreetNet better access to institutions such as the ILO and has facilitated collaboration with several of the GUFs, including Union Network International (UNI) and Public Services International (PSI).

However, StreetNet claims that new strategies, different to those employed by trade unions from the formal sector, are vital for the survival of the international union movement (StreetNet International URLb). StreetNet aims to contribute to the development of these strategies by globally organising some of the poorest groups of the working class, albeit in solidarity with all workers rather than as a separate rival movement. StreetNet is testing a range of strategies, such as: litigation precedents to support the rights of mobile vendors; international campaigns and public dialogues to raise awareness of street vendors; promotion of collective bargaining within the informal sector; links with other social movements (for example, at the World Social Forum) to promote information sharing; field research and workshops with street vendors; and networks and databases of other organisations in the informal economy (StreetNet International URLb). StreetNet acknowledges that there is 'no blueprint' for its kind of work, suggesting that more new ways could be found to empower marginalised workers through organising globally.

### Business forums

Civil society associations representing capital are just as interested in poverty as those representing labour, albeit for different reasons. For one thing, business forums such as bankers associations, chambers of commerce and employer federations see poverty

reduction as a way to expand the consumer base for their members. Moreover, in the global economy more particularly, organisations representing transnational corporations (TNCs) are keen to rebut charges that they perpetuate poverty, especially inasmuch as such claims could provoke an increase in restrictive public regulation of TNC activities.

Globally organising business forums take many shapes. Prominent global associations of big capital include the Institute of International Finance (IIF), the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), and the World Economic Forum. Other global civil society organisations in the business sector involve enterprise on a smaller scale. Examples include the Grameen Foundation, Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO), and Global Community Currency Initiatives.

Globally organising business forums engage with poverty issues in three main ways. First, they advocate capitalist market enterprise throughout the world as an effective road out of poverty, particularly through the provision of employment and income to poor communities. Second, global associations of business promote assistance to the poor in developing their own commercial enterprises, for example, with expert consultancy and financial assistance. Third, global business forums champion corporate philanthropy as a means to oppose poverty, for instance, through foundations and donations to relief and development NGOs.

Yet, like the development NGO and labour sectors of civil society, globally organised business forums show considerable diversity in their approach to poverty. For example, the initiative Business Action for Africa (BAA) involves a more top-down strategy by larger capital. In contrast, the Grameen Foundation exhibits more of a bottom-up approach with a global network of micro-enterprises.

BAA is a global initiative that mobilises expert knowledge and influence to combat poverty in Africa. Of the 186 organisations that contribute to BAA, 100 are full corporate partners (many of them transnational corporations) who participate in the programme on an ongoing basis. Another 72 contributors are strategic corporate partners whose participation involves specific actions. BAA also includes 14 external partners from wider civil society and intergovernmental organisations (BAA URLa).

The three main aims of BAA are: 'to positively promote policies needed for growth and poverty



reduction; to promote a more balanced view of Africa; and to develop and showcase good business practice' (BAA URLb). To further these aims, BAA campaigns for governments of the world's richest countries to meet their commitments on official development assistance (ODA). BAA also advocates for policies on the continent that promote small businesses, urges responsible business practices, and publicises business successes.

Does global organisation in the case of BAA enlarge or narrow civil society participation in anti-poverty campaigns? In a step towards greater inclusion BAA through its African business organisation members reaches about 1000 individual African companies (BAA URLc). However, the sponsoring organisations that sit on the decision-making Oversight Group of the BAA include some of the largest TNCs, such as Shell, De Beers, Unilever, British American Tobacco, and Diageo. Moreover, inspiration for the BAA launch in 2005 came largely from established sites of power such as the Commission for Africa and the Group of 8 summit at Gleneagles. BAA has not included a decision-taking role for – or even much direct consultation of – poor people themselves.

Not surprisingly given these patterns of participation, BAA offers little in the way of alternative thinking on poverty eradication. It prescribes economic growth through business-led capitalist markets under leadership of the global North. The emphasis is placed on getting governments and global governance institutions to adopt policies that favour this course.

In contrast to Business Action for Africa, the Grameen Foundation works to encourage socially orientated enterprise that engages at the level of the very poor. This global business-oriented civil society organisation is inspired by the work of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, the micro-finance bank started in 1976 by Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus (for more see Box 1.1 in the Introduction to this edition). The Foundation was launched in 1997 and today involves 55 micro-finance institution partners covering 6.8 million clients in 28 countries across four continents (Grameen Foundation URLa).

In the perspective of the Grameen Foundation, poor people need to have opportunities to improve their own lives, and to this end it is crucial to be able to do business. With micro-finance the Foundation focuses on providing very small loans to enable the poor to start self-sustaining businesses and so escape

poverty. These loans usually involve less than USD 200 and often go to the very poor, mostly women. The Foundation also promotes technological development and social businesses, for example, to provide a public telephone in a rural village, on the premise that economic development depends on a strong community (Yunus 2008). The Foundation's 'Progress out of Poverty Index' measures the social performance of businesses (Grameen Foundation URLb).

The Grameen model has drawn some criticism, too. For example, critics claim that it promotes a culture of debt in which those with money to lend are the main beneficiaries. In addition, some women recipients of loans have come under pressure or violence from male relatives. It is not clear whether these failings are inherent to the programme or a result of the particular ways that it has been implemented.

How does being organised globally help the Foundation achieve its mission 'to enable the poor, especially the poorest, to create a world without poverty' (Grameen Foundation URLa)? Although the activities of its member organisations are very much focused on local level delivery of services, global networking through the Foundation enables each to achieve more than it could do individually. With strength in numbers as a collective global voice the Grameen Foundation can better promote and advance knowledge of the micro-finance movement and social models of business. In addition, global collaboration helps members to develop technologies and business practices that are particularly suited to small enterprise for the poor. As a global organisation the Foundation is also better able to connect micro-finance institutions with capital markets, which largely operate as a global financial system. For example, the Foundation's Capital Management and Advisory Service has promoted micro-finance as a viable commercial investment opportunity. It is developing a number of Grameen Foundation branded financial products with different risk levels for investors (Grameen Foundation URLc). Thus the Grameen Foundation uses a global footing to re-craft financial practices towards what it regards as more effective strategies of poverty alleviation.

### Women's organisations

The Grameen Foundation is far from alone among global civil society organisations in its focus on women. Some 70 per cent of the 1.3 billion people who live in extreme poverty around the world are women (Oxfam





International URLe). This reality results from pervasive gender inequalities that limit opportunities for women in respect of, for example, access to education and ownership of land (Bunch and Mehra 2008: 4). Other issues consequent upon poverty that disproportionately afflict women include poor health services and violence. Accordingly, poverty eradication is a high priority for many women's organisations. These groups press for recognition that women are engines of development without whose empowerment poverty eradication is complicated, if not impossible.

As in the other sectors discussed in this chapter, global-scale women's organisations that address poverty are numerous and diverse. Examples include the Women's Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO), the Global Fund for Women (GFW), Women for Women International, Women's World Banking (WWB), the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), and the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). Self-help women's groups with poverty concerns that have organised globally include Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood (GROOTS), the International Community of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (ICW), the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), and Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO).

Women's organisations address poverty at a global level in three main ways. One way – also noted in respect of other sectors discussed in this chapter – is research. Many women's associations document and analyse how poverty disproportionately affects women, highlighting what is commonly termed the 'feminisation of poverty' (Marchand and Runyan 2000).

A second way that women's organisations address poverty is through advocacy. In particular, these campaigners urge that policy makers use a gender lens when making decisions concerning poverty, and that women be included in decision-making processes. Advocates also campaign for equality of treatment and better conditions for women's labour. The global impact of this advocacy work is evident in the adoption by the UN of gender equality and women's empowerment as one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

A third way that women's associations tackle poverty is through concrete programmes to improve women's livelihoods. These activities include income generation schemes, education programmes, and the provision of basic resources that are otherwise out of reach for

impoverished women.

While many women's organisations share these three general ways of addressing poverty, they differ considerably in the more specific strategies that they adopt. For example, some women's organisations such as WWB focus on income-generating mechanisms, but neglect more transformative strategies that embed anti-poverty activism in a deeper gender analysis (Marchand and Runyan 2000). Meanwhile other organisations such as WEDO take a more holistic approach, addressing a full range of social, economic and political factors that impoverish women. These more transformative strategies also often bring the affected women directly into decision-making processes.

Founded in 1976, Women's World Banking is a global network that aims to increase the economic assets of the poor, particularly women, through micro-finance schemes. The WWB network is comprised of 54 micro-finance providers and banks in 30 countries worldwide. Three-quarters of WWB beneficiaries are women (WWB URLa). Much like the Grameen Foundation discussed above, WWB enables the poor (primarily women) to establish self-sustainable businesses by providing access to financial services and information that usually lie beyond their reach (WWB URLb). Through its global organisation, WWB is able to share some of the best practices, services, and training available on micro-finance (WWB URLc). Moreover, through its Global Network for Banking Innovation (GNBI), which includes large commercial giants as well as small finance companies, WWB advocates for the expansion of the micro-finance field and greater provision of financial services to low-income clients, especially women (WWB URLb).

By going global the network of micro-finance institutions supported by WWB and GNBI has been more able to reach and empower women, to promote lateral learning, and to improve living conditions for women and their families. WWB also promotes gender empowerment through its Women's Leadership Development Programme (WLDP). This scheme offers women leadership groups, thematic workshops, and virtual access to leadership resources and materials (WWB URLd). That said, the WLDP is exclusionary to the extent that it neglects women who lack Internet access.

This blind spot regarding available technology prompts larger questions about the extent to which WWB is able to overturn deeper causes of poverty.





Even though the network acknowledges the role that women play in poverty eradication, it does not challenge established global economic institutions; nor does it advocate at global forums for the adoption of policies that include a gender analysis. In this sense WWB does not challenge deeper structures that perpetuate the impoverishment of women.

Whilst WWB focuses on providing women with opportunities for income generation via micro-finance, the Women's Environment and Development Organisation focuses its efforts towards poverty eradication on deeper policy change in global forums, as well as on holding governments to account on their commitments for women's rights (WEDO URLa). Since its establishment in 1990, WEDO has mobilised women's participation worldwide to press global institutions to adopt gender perspectives and recognise that 'women's empowerment and gender equality are key levers of change' (WEDO URLb). Currently, the association campaigns especially on climate change, corporate accountability, and governance, with the overarching goal of improving women's livelihoods. Since 2008 WEDO has also co-facilitated the Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) campaign, which demands the creation of 'a stronger UN entity for women that effectively addresses the worldwide needs of women' (WEDO URLc).

WEDO stresses the importance of global partnerships and alliances in its advocacy for greater economic, political and social justice and inclusion for women. Over the years the organisation has worked collaboratively with 275 civil society associations in more than 50 countries. In 1992 WEDO organised a World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet that brought together more than 1,500 women from 83 countries (WEDO URLa). This model of active global collaboration allows women from different regions to advance awareness of and action on gender issues.

With this strategy of women's empowerment through altered structures and discourses of global governance, WEDO offers a more transformative approach to poverty eradication. WEDO might be criticised for taking limited measures to equip women with immediate concrete means to escape poverty, but it is not a projects-based initiative. WEDO instead promotes the fundamental message that poverty eradication is impossible without greater investment in women. In this way WEDO challenges the structures of gender inequality that perpetuate poverty and social injustice.

### Consumer bodies

Further civil society engagement of poverty concerns comes from consumer movements. Consumption is clearly relevant to poverty, since the availability, choice and quality of goods and services has major implications for standards of living. Consumer associations aim to promote and protect the rights of consumers and thereby to improve living standards, including the eradication of poverty. How these groups do so varies, with some consumer bodies addressing poverty more directly than others. Three main approaches can be distinguished among consumer movements that organise globally.

In the first approach, global associations work to improve consumer rights and consumer choice vis-à-vis business enterprises. In so doing they aim to influence the corporate social responsibility (CSR) of companies operating in poor countries. Consumer power can be exerted to change corporate behaviour that is deemed to be socially irresponsible, including actions that contribute to impoverishment (Oliviero and Simmons 2002). Consumer boycotts and other pressures can be applied on a global scale. Consumer bodies have also made a significant contribution to the development of corporate codes of conduct, particularly in respect of child labour, general working conditions, and the exploitation of natural resources from developing countries. Examples of globally organised consumer associations that are active on CSR include: Consumers International (CI), the Consumer Unity & Trust Society International (CUTS), CokeWatch, the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), and CorpWatch.

From a second angle, consumer movements have organised globally to address poverty through schemes for 'fair trade' and 'ethical shopping'. 'Fair trade' can support poor workers. Ethical consumers demand a clear indication of sources and standards in order to make informed purchasing choices. In addition, ethical consumerism can raise awareness of poverty issues by making visible the connections between consumers and poor producers. Some ethical purchases have also helped to fund poverty alleviation programmes.

In a third category are global consumer bodies that focus on social inequalities and work to ensure the availability for all of good quality and affordable essential goods and services, including water, energy, housing and food. Access to clean water has become a particularly dominant theme in this regard (Dicke and





Holland 2007). Often these organisations link failures to provide universal basic needs to the privatisation of public services, the sale of natural resources, free trade agreements, and financial instability. Whilst these matters are relevant to all consumers, they are especially important for the poor and particularly in developing countries. Strategies used by global consumer bodies in this area include: campaigns to raise public awareness, legal prosecutions, programmes to provide better access, and lobbying of global governance institutions to increase regulation and protection. Global consumer organisations that work on these problems include the Coalition Against Water Privatisation (CAWP), Slow Food, Waterjustice.org, and Friends of the Earth International (FOEI).

Global consumer bodies show much diversity not only in the issues that they address, but also in the ways that they address them. An example of a more conventionally organised and operating global consumer movement is Consumers International. CI was founded in 1960 and today covers 220 member organisations in 115 countries. Two-thirds of these members are based in developing countries (CI URLa).

CI has pursued both modest and more ambitious strategies. In its more conventional work, CI seeks to promote and protect consumer rights related to safety, information, choice and voice. In this vein CI has worked to improve regulations, trading systems, and the status of consumers. Organising globally has facilitated vital exchanges of information and monitoring practices, so that CI can work as a 'global watchdog' for consumers. The global presence of the organisation has also provided a platform from which to influence regulation, consumer policy and corporate behaviour. CI has represented consumer interests to a number of official global bodies, such as the UN. These aspects of CI's work – with their emphasis on choice and care for those who have the means to consume – tend to be less relevant to the very poor.

Yet CI has also recognised in recent years that consumer rights need to be understood more broadly, with the result that the association has raised issues of social inequality. In this vein CI describes the consumer movement as 'essential to secure a fair, safe and sustainable future for consumers in a global marketplace increasingly dominated by international corporations' (CI URLb). CI now lists the right to satisfaction of basic needs as the first consumer right, including 'access to basic, essential goods and services; adequate food,

clothing, shelter, health care, education, public utilities, water and sanitation' (CI URLb). This leads CI to be involved in campaigns concerned with, for example, the global food crisis and the debate on genetically modified organisms. This approach to consumer advocacy directly addresses poverty by highlighting the basic needs of all, including the marginalised in society. CI has therefore in response to globalisation reoriented its work to more directly engage with poverty issues.

A second illustrative case of global consumer associations shows the variety of organisational forms and strategies relevant to poverty. Waterjustice.org is a virtual 'meeting place', accessible globally via the Internet, for facilitating the exchange of information, experience, strategies and networking. This consumer movement concerns itself with the provision of accessible and clean water for all, with a special focus on the poor. Its campaigns and debates generally centre on issues of privatisation, corporate misconduct, the construction and use of large dams, and ensuring that public policies on water prioritise secure access to clean water for everyone. Each of these issues engages waterjustice.org with the situation of the poor.

Waterjustice.org was developed at the fourth World Social Forum in Mumbai, in January 2004. The inspiration came from the many seminars at this WSF on alternatives to water privatisation. Subsequently a range of civil society groups and activists from different places around the world 'committed to intensify their co-operation' on key water issues, through the development of waterjustice.org (Waterjustice.org URL). The virtual network provides a space for disseminating multimedia reports, articles, analyses, case studies and outlines of alternatives to privatisation. The site includes blogs and commentaries, notifications of protests, campaigns and events, and links to other organisations.

The decision to base this collaborative association on the web was taken to encourage global access and inclusion, regardless of an activist's geographical location. Of course this approach still excludes those without Internet access and those who do not operate in one of the nine available languages of waterjustice.org. Indeed, those activists able to attend the World Social Forum for the inception of the organisation were already privileged. Also, the website is currently co-hosted by the Transnational Institute and the Corporate Europe Observatory, both based in the global North. Nevertheless, the motivation to open up space to activists across the planet is evident. Waterjustice.org aims to





link related campaigning groups and activist networks and to encourage contributions from those facing water injustice, many if not most of whom live in poverty.

### Faith-based organisations

Global consumption of another (spiritual) kind involves religion, and faith-based organisations (FBOs) make up a significant sector of global civil society. Poverty is a key issue for many FBOs, as most religions (or at least some interpretations of them) promote the value of care for those in need. This principle can be 'lived out' in diverse ways, including humanitarian relief work, charitable giving, provision of social services, and anti-poverty advocacy. Some branches of religions (such as the liberation theology movement in Roman Catholicism) have been specifically founded on identification with struggles of the poor (An-Na'im 2002).

Spurred by desires to take their faith to others, many FBOs have long adopted a global organisation for missionary work. Some religious institutions such as the Anglican Communion are themselves globally organised. In addition, some religions have NGOs that are dedicated specifically to addressing poverty issues. Examples include Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) - the charity of the Worldwide Hindu Swaminarayan Movement, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), Christian Aid, and Islamic World Relief.

FBOs can utilise a global infrastructure to mobilise their religious community into action, to create wider global religious networks via inter-faith initiatives, and to engage secular audiences. A prime example in this regard is Jubilee 2000, which mobilised church groups to campaign for debt relief and also linked with non-religious groups to lobby governments and financial institutions (Jubilee Debt Campaign URL).

Global infrastructure also helps some FBOs to execute programmes of direct relief for the poor. These initiatives are sometimes directed towards poor people of any kind, regardless of their faith, although on other occasions the programmes only target people of the same faith. Religious belief may also influence the strategies that FBOs employ in their relief activities. Hence, as in other sectors of civil society, global organisation for FBOs can involve diverse ways of operating.

An example of a globally operating FBO that tends to work within rather than against prevailing power structures is World Vision. One of the largest

global FBOs, World Vision currently has 30,000 staff working in nearly 100 countries. It delivers aid to more than 100 million people, with a particular focus on children. World Vision describes itself as a 'Christian humanitarian organisation' motivated by faith to 'serve alongside the poor' (World Vision URLa). Started by an American Christian in the 1950s to help orphans of the Korean War, World Vision now maintains a strong global presence on six continents. The organisation works not only in countries that are readily recognised as poor, but also among impoverished people in 'rich' countries. In this vein World Vision operates eleven centres in the USA (World Vision URLb).

Global organisation has served World Vision well. It has created a planetary network of partnerships between the poor and donors, based on shared Christian principles, and involving close links with churches worldwide. The organisation has gained more than 3 million donors across the globe. A major strategy links individual sponsors with children in poverty. This approach aims to develop a global network of personal relationships between individuals as well as communities.

However, World Vision has not fundamentally challenged conventional approaches to poverty alleviation. It undertakes fairly standard work of disaster relief, advocacy, and provision of publications and resource materials, including a network of speakers able to 'spread the word' and get people involved. World Vision has also not been particularly visible or vocal in campaigns to change the global economic order.

On the other hand, the organisation has taken notable strides to empower intended beneficiaries. There is a particular emphasis on promoting participation in decision making and child welfare (World Vision URLc), and 97 per cent of the staff come from the country or region where they work. Therefore although the organisation derives its origins and founding principles from the North, it has with time come strongly to emphasize global partnership.

A still more alternative approach to poverty amongst globally operating civil society associations is offered by the Franciscan Order. The Franciscans are a group of Christians who follow the Rule of St Francis of Assisi, a thirteenth-century holy person who, on converting to Christianity, gave up all worldly goods to live in poverty with the poor. Francis stressed the importance of living simply and respecting the poor, as well as the need to eradicate deprivation. In this way Franciscans hold a



paradoxical attitude to poverty: they embrace it as a way to follow Christ; but they also cast poverty as 'evil' when it is not a chosen way of life (Matura OFM 2007:1).

The global Franciscan family is made up of 1.2 million Christians, in three Orders (Franciscans International URLa). The First Order consists of friars and sisters (currently numbering 35,000) who live in community to the Rule. This group links back to the original fraternity started by the Saint in 1209. The Second Order is known as the Poor Clares, founded in 1212 by Saint Clare, who inspired Saint Francis to follow a life of secluded poverty. There are currently over 18,000 sisters in this order, living in enclosed convents in 76 countries. To live in poverty is central to the vows taken by the First and Second Orders. The Third Order is the largest, made up of over 1.1 million men and women, ordained and lay, who follow a version of the Rule while living in wider society rather than enclosed religious communities. For the Third Order a life of poverty involves a commitment to 'live simply', without luxury and waste.

In the case of the Franciscans, therefore, global organisation revolves around a radical principle of a chosen life of poverty and identification with the poor. This stance has led many Franciscans to run hospitals, schools, health programmes, peace and justice offices, shelters, and other service provision for the poor (Franciscan International URLb). Franciscans also place value on campaigns, research and publications (cf. Mutzner and Aula 2007). In order to coordinate these efforts, Franciscans International was set up in the mid-1980s to represent the movement with General Consultative Status at the UN. In all of these ways, helping the poor is for the Franciscans a transplanetary mission.

### Indigenous peoples' associations

Given that impoverishment is often closely intertwined with questions of collective rights and land ownership, many associations of indigenous peoples accord a high priority to poverty issues. According to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), there are today more than 370 million aboriginal people in dozens of countries around the world (UNPFII URLa). These populations generally suffer disproportionately from poverty and usually play little part in policy making on poverty questions (Lovgren 2004).

Seeing that they face many of the same problems, on whichever continent they might live, a number of indigenous peoples associations have in recent

decades begun to organise globally as well as locally, nationally and regionally. Some examples of global associations of indigenous peoples include the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal People of Tropical Forests (IAITPTF), Survival International, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO), and the former World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP), which operated between 1975 and 1996. Through such global bodies indigenous peoples have addressed poverty in three broad albeit generally indirect ways: namely, by demanding rights and legal recognition; by representing otherwise invisible constituencies; and by establishing consultative mechanisms and procedures.

Regarding rights and legal recognition, historical denials in these areas have impeded indigenous people from gaining basic resources, land ownership and constitutional protection. Shortfalls of rights and legal status have allowed national governments easily to neglect or positively to harm the welfare of indigenous peoples (Plant 1998). In response, a number of associations of aboriginal peoples have in recent decades turned to global arenas as a channel through which to exert pressure on national and local authorities. One consequence of these globally oriented campaigns has been the International Labour Organisation Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, adopted by 19 states in 1989. A second important advance in global politics has been the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in by 143 states in 2007 (Ethical Investment Research Services 2007: 3).

Also on questions of representation, many indigenous peoples groups have turned global because they are not included in local and national government processes. Through global channels indigenous peoples' associations are able to voice their concerns, articulate their views, and highlight the human rights violations that they confront – many of which entail impoverishment. In order better to represent indigenous peoples, globally operating associations also conduct surveys to document population size, cultural practices, languages and modes of life.

A third way that indigenous peoples organisations address poverty in global spheres is by demanding the implementation of consultative mechanisms that will ensure that their perspectives on development are heard (Ethical Investment Research Services 2007: 8). Many indigenous peoples view development





as a holistic process that integrates the ecological, the spiritual, the cultural and the social with the economic. They therefore seek a sustainable balance between their survival and nature and may prefer a subsistence way of life rather than a market economy with its emphasis on monetary income and modern infrastructure (Sinafasi 2007). The establishment of consultative mechanisms and procedures in global governance gives indigenous peoples associations an opportunity to affirm their views on development and to participate in policy decisions that affect their lives.

Although indigenous peoples face broadly common problems and respond in some broadly common ways, their civil society organisations also make different strategic and tactical choices. To illustrate this diversity the following paragraphs examine more closely UNPO and the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC).

The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation was created in 1991 and maintains permanent offices in The Hague. Over the years UNPO has widened its global reach beyond the 15 founding member groups so that it now encompasses 57 peoples on six continents (UNPO URL). The common denominator for all members is a lack of representation in mainstream global governance institutions such as the UN. UNPO membership includes not only a number of indigenous peoples, but also groups such as the Greek minority in Albania and the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy.

Members use UNPO as a platform for participation in global politics. They share with one another their struggles, their information, and lessons learned from political successes and failures. UNPO also coordinates campaigns for greater inclusion of its members in global institutions and for greater indigenous rights (for example, lobbying for the ratification of the previously mentioned ILO Convention of 1989). Moreover, UNPO demands changes in global policy on behalf of its constituents, such as urging to incorporate 'the needs and challenges of indigenous peoples and minorities in relation to the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals' (UNPO 2008).

That said, poverty has not been a distinctive thematic focus for UNPO. Nor has the organisation taken specific steps to include poor people in its activities or to challenge reigning ideas about poverty and its alleviation. The MDGs discourse is arguably fairly alien to indigenous world-views. Indeed, UNPO's own *modus operandi* would seem to reflect modern western rituals more than aboriginal cultural practices. In this

sense, then, 'going global' with UNPO might indeed tend to take indigenous peoples away from their earlier way of life, and in this case greater global recognition could come at a price of less local identity.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council may do more to bring indigenous voices into global spaces, although the organisation itself has a regional rather than planetary membership. Established in 1977 the ICC aims to represent 150,000 Inuit people from Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Chukotka (Russia) in world politics. In addition to acquiring consultative status at the UN, the ICC has worked with other global governance agencies including the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). An International Training Center of Indigenous Peoples (ITCIP) in Greenland has worked since 1997 to equip Inuit and other activists from around the globe to use multilateral institutions and legal instruments to their advantage.

Resource constraints have limited ICC activities. In any case the impacts of its initiatives on poverty among Inuit people would be mostly indirect, as the ICC has not placed emphasis on social and economic programmes. ICC (Canada) has a research department and quarterly journal, *Silarjualiriniq*, which generate policy-relevant studies that are tailored to address Inuit needs. However, the ICC has not articulated a distinctive alternative (or even anti-) development paradigm as a way out of poverty in the Arctic region. Discourse on this subject at the ICC has instead run along conventional, hegemonic lines with a focus on business development, employment creation and trade (ICC URLa).

The ICC has shown greater innovation in developing participatory involvement for indigenous peoples in global politics. Every four years the organisation holds a General Assembly where delegates from around the circumpolar region elect a chair, develop policy and formulate resolutions to guide the ICC (ICC URLb). The delegates include representation from the Circumpolar Youth Council and the International Elderly Council to ensure that the young and the old have voice. Decentralisation to ICC offices in each member territory also encourages 'bottom-up' participation.







## Conclusion

The preceding discussion has shown that global organisation is a widespread feature of contemporary civil society activity relating to poverty. Multiple sectors of civil society have occupied themselves with questions of poverty, and all of them now contain significant elements that have adopted a global mode of organisation. This is the case whether one is considering development NGOs, labour movements, business associations, women's organisations, consumer bodies, faith-based organisations, or indigenous peoples' movements.

However, as also seen above, global organisation in and of itself does not reveal much about a civil society association's policies towards poverty. Some globally operating civil society organisations, such as Business Action for Africa and World Vision, largely accept existing structures. Yet other globally organised movements, such as the Women's Environment and Development Organization and [waterjustice.org](http://waterjustice.org), challenge those same structures as root causes of poverty. Still other global organisations in civil society, such as Consumers International, the International Trade Union Confederation and the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, question aspects of the prevailing order without on the whole actively subverting it. Meanwhile the Franciscans embrace chosen poverty as vital to a good life. In short, there appears to be no clear correlation between the scale on which a civil society association organises and the type of strategy that it pursues with regard to poverty. In particular, with the possible exception of indigenous peoples movements, it is not the case that a shift towards global organisation ipso facto leads a civil society campaign on poverty to become hegemonically captured. Such a development may occur, but it results from circumstances other than global organisation *per se*.

Likewise, 'going global' does not inherently make civil society activities more elitist and exclusionary. True, global operations can require substantial levels of resources that many actors lack (for example, in terms of communications infrastructure, travel budgets, and fluency in global languages). Moreover, some of the globally organised civil society initiatives on poverty examined in this chapter have offered little participation and control to poor people themselves. However, the overview has also covered initiatives such as Shack/Slum Dwellers International and StreetNet International that have created new spaces in global politics for

marginalised circles. Thus globality of organisation can either deepen or reduce social inequalities, depending on how the civil society association conducts itself. With critical self-awareness the association can decide for itself whether it slips into dynamics of exclusion or emphasises opportunities in global organisation for greater inclusion.

These conclusions provoke a set of compelling next-order questions. What specific conditions can encourage a globally operating civil society initiative to be more transformational and inclusive in its efforts to counter poverty? Conversely, what circumstances should a globally organised anti-poverty campaign resist in order to avoid a hegemonic and exclusionary course? Answers to these key questions require a larger number and a greater depth of case studies than have been possible here. Other chapters in this Yearbook include detailed investigations that suggest some of the factors in play. Hopefully this edition also inspires further research that can help to expand the progressive effects of global civil society in respect of poverty.





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