

## 1 Introduction

In the 1970s, the World Bank and development NGOs inhabited largely separate universes. During the 1980s, several factors converged to bring these highly divergent development actors into more intimate contact. Disappointed with the poor results of traditional, state-centred, 'hardware'-dominated development approaches, and in line with the 'New Policy Agenda'<sup>1</sup>, the World Bank (along with other official donors) 'discovered' NGOs.<sup>2</sup> The attraction of NGOs lay in their dual role as supposedly more effective and efficient (than state) deliverers of development services and, as members of civil society, vehicles of democratisation and good governance. Simultaneous to these developments (and at least in part due to the new-found attention and available resources) the numbers and size of development NGOs (both in the North and South) began to explode.<sup>3</sup> With donors putting their hopes in NGOs as the new 'magic bullet' and many (though not all) NGOs anxious to take advantage of the influx of funds and recognition, operational relations between NGOs and the Bank (and official donors more generally) began to be more systematically developed.

During the same period, many NGOs became more advocacy-oriented and began to turn their attention towards the World Bank. They decried the devastating environmental and social impact of certain Bank-financed projects, criticised the negative consequences of structural adjustment programmes and called for major reforms (or, in some cases, abolition) of the institution. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, NGO advocacy campaigns against the Bank continued to grow, both in number and impact. At the same time NGO 'collaboration' in the field expanded rapidly.

Over the past twenty years, and particularly in the 1990s, issues related to Bank-NGO interactions have been monitored and analysed by observers both within and outside the Bank. On the whole, however, NGO advocacy activities have tended to attract more attention than NGO involvement at the operational level. Of the two, the former seems to be the sexier, more exciting and morally satisfying story – with NGOs acting on the side of 'good', defending poor people and protecting the environment against the capital-driven, market-oriented agendas of the World Bank.

# Beneficiaries, Mercenaries, Missionaries and Revolution- aries

## *'Unpacking' NGO Involvement in World Bank- Financed Projects*

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IDS Bulletin Vol 31 No 3 2000

When it comes to ‘operational collaboration’ between the Bank and NGOs the situation is more ambiguous. What is the real extent of this collaboration? Which NGOs are working with the Bank and why? Are they contributing to or undermining the efforts of NGOs involved in advocacy work? What do these relationships look like on the ground? What has been their experience and impact?

Part 1 of the article reviews the theoretical benefits and risks of NGO involvement in Bank-financed projects. Part 2 reviews what we know (and don’t know) about Bank–NGO cooperation in practice on the basis of current information and analysis. Part 3 proposes an analytical framework for distinguishing between different forms of Bank–NGO operational collaboration based on the *purpose* of that collaboration. Finally, part 4 concludes with recommendations for both the Bank and NGOs.

## 2 Theoretical Benefits and Risks of Bank–NGO Cooperation

According to the World Bank’s Operational Manual (‘Good Practice’ 14.70), the primary purpose for seeking collaboration with NGOs is to enhance the effectiveness of the operations it supports. NGOs are attributed with social proximity, field-based development expertise, ability to innovate and adapt, participatory methodologies and tools and emphasis on sustainability and cost-effectiveness. Correspondingly, they are expected to: make projects more responsive to beneficiary needs; enhance beneficiary participation throughout the life of the project; extend project reach; and improve sustainability. Other Bank documents also link cooperation with NGOs to loftier goals such as improvements in governance and the strengthening of civil society (Clark 1993). For NGOs, potential benefits in working with the Bank are identified as the opportunity to access funds, scale-up their operations, obtain enhanced recognition, and influence the decisions and actions of the Bank and governments.

On the other hand, the literature on development NGOs has identified important potential risks related to direct funding of NGOs by official (multilateral and bilateral) donors. These include:

- the risk of NGOs being diverted from their

mission (as they focus on implementing the funder’s mission)

- weakening downwards accountability (as upwards accountability to donors takes precedence)
- the depoliticisation of NGOs (as development agendas focus more on service delivery and less on social transformation)
- over-extension of organisational capacities due to excessive scaling up (leading to breakdowns in management and operating systems)
- loss of flexibility and innovation (due to predefined development agendas and rigid project plans and procedures)
- undermining participatory approaches and eroded relationships at the community level (leading to loss of development effectiveness and, eventually, loss of credibility with both clients and donors).

Due to its unique nature (as the only global multi-lateral development bank (MDB)) the World Bank differs from other donors in a number of important ways. These particularities, of which NGOs are not always well aware, present unique opportunities, but may well also exacerbate risks.

First, as NGO advocacy campaigns against the Bank vibrantly attest, the development practices of the Bank and the development paradigm and values on which they are based are frequently perceived as being at odds with those of the NGO community at large. Neither NGOs nor the World Bank are homogeneous in their ideological beliefs and Bank rhetoric has changed significantly in recent years. Nevertheless, the Bank remains a financial institution with an economic, capital-driven vision of development. Relatively few Bank staff members have experience in working with NGOs or have expertise in socially-oriented, community-led development. If shared vision and a common understanding of development issues are considered important factors in promoting successful working relations, then the World Bank and NGOs are, in most cases, far from being natural partners.

Second, unlike most donors, the World Bank does not directly fund NGOs. The Bank’s clients are developing country governments and (with the exception of some small grants) all resources are channelled through them. Governments ‘own’ and

are responsible for projects financed by the Bank. While loan and project design may permit varying levels of autonomy and flexibility for participating NGOs, the overall framework in which their activities take place is defined and managed by government. For NGOs, 'working with the Bank' usually means 'working with government'. Depending on the nature of NGO–state relations (that vary enormously from country to country, regime to regime and NGO to NGO) such interaction may be neither feasible nor desirable. NGOs must be aware that World Bank funds are given as loans (not grants) and, as such, may be subject to stringent monitoring and relatively complex disbursement procedures.

A third characteristic of the World Bank, compared with other donors, is the extremely large scale of its development interventions. In 1999, for example, the average size of an international development assistance (IDA) loan was approximately US\$47 million, while the average size of a loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) over three times that (World Bank 1999: Appendix 14). The potential problems associated with rapid or excessive scaling-up of NGO activities are well described in the development literature.<sup>4</sup> When NGOs become involved in a World Bank project, targeting tens or even hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries, the chances of an NGO over-stretching its management capacities, being tempted to 'bite off more than it can chew', or being forced to compromise quality for quantity, are that much higher.

A fourth important difference between the World Bank and other donors is its operating procedures. World Bank procedures regarding, for example, the procurement of goods and services and accounting and reporting requirements are geared towards large-scale interventions and private sector firms. Most NGOs are largely unaccustomed to such procedures that, especially when combined with the bureaucracy of government procedures, can prove excessively rigid, cumbersome and slow.

A final distinctive feature of the World Bank is its status as a high-powered and 'high rolling' international player. The World Bank carries a lot of influence. It tends to be arrogant about its own knowledge. It is better at talking (or dictating) than

listening and is used to getting its own way. Such a stance can be extremely intimidating to NGOs and does not facilitate the establishment of trusting, egalitarian, mutually respectful partnerships. The imbalance in power, influence and resources that characterises most donor–NGO relations is thus extreme in the case of NGO–Bank interactions.

### **3 Bank–NGO 'Operational Collaboration' in Practice**

Despite annual reporting by the Bank on its cooperation with NGOs, and the publication in recent years of numerous (Bank and non-Bank) documents and case studies on the subject, a review of the literature reveals important gaps in our knowledge and understanding. It is still difficult to determine the real extent and nature of NGO involvement in Bank-financed projects and the purpose and impact of that involvement. This is due, on the one hand, to a lack of reliable empirical information. While, on the other, there is a tendency to treat 'NGO involvement in Bank projects' as a monolithic phenomenon, failing to adequately distinguish between different forms of Bank–NGO interaction.

#### **3.1 Extent and nature of NGO involvement**

The Bank has monitored 'operational collaboration' with NGOs since 1973 and has published annual progress reports on its work with NGOs since 1989. On the basis of these reports, the Bank claims 'a remarkable increase in interaction and collaboration between the Bank and the NGO community world-wide'. Progress reports show a steady increase in Bank–NGO cooperation over the past 25 years – with only 6 per cent of Bank projects having NGO involvement in 1973, compared to 20 per cent in 1989, 30 per cent in 1993 and 50 per cent in 1998.

Unfortunately, the information contained in the Bank's annual progress reports is subject to two serious shortcomings. First, information on which numbers are based derive from project appraisal reports that are prepared before project activities even begin. The figures reported, therefore, represent intended rather than actual NGO involvement. As a result, they are very unreliable. A recent study by the Bank's Evaluation Department concludes

that, 'by reporting planned involvement rather than actual results, claims regarding NGO involvement in Bank operations are inflated' (Gibbs *et al.* 1998: xi).

Second, while the progress reports provide information (albeit unreliable) on the quantity of Bank-NGO cooperation, they tell us nothing about the quality of that cooperation. As currently recorded, 'NGO involvement in a Bank project' could indicate anything from the genuine and sustained participation of a large number of NGOs through all stages of the project cycle, to the contracting of an NGO for purposes of service delivery, to an informal lunch meeting with the local Oxfam representative.

The progress reports do provide information regarding the stage of the project cycle (identification, design, implementation, etc.) at which involvement occurs. They report that, while most NGOs are involved in project implementation, NGO engagement during project design stages has increased significantly in recent years. This data gives some hint as to the different roles that NGOs are playing but still tells us nothing about the purpose, intensity or results of their involvement. Bank staff in the NGO Unit who prepare the annual reports are well aware of these weaknesses and openly acknowledge the limited reliability and usefulness of the information they contain. However, the Bank has as yet to adopt a more meaningful form of monitoring.

Aggregate-level information regarding the quality and intensity of NGO involvement in Bank projects is extremely sketchy. One independent review by Nelson (1995) of 304 Bank projects with 'NGO involvement' estimates that NGOs played a 'major role' in only one quarter of these projects. In three times out of four, NGOs were involved solely as project implementers.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, among the 37 projects assessed in the field by Gibbs *et al.* (1998:Annex C), only six (16 per cent) are reported to involve 'substantial' NGO/CBO (community based organisation) contributions. In all other cases, NGO contributions are described as 'small', 'limited', 'modest', 'minimal' or 'negligible'.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.2 Types of NGOs involved in Bank projects

In monitoring its 'operational collaboration' with NGOs, the Bank distinguishes between community-based organisations, national NGOs and international NGOs. Since the mid-80s, it reports a steady increase in the involvement of CBOs and national NGOs and a decline in the proportion of projects involving international NGOs.

Apart from this basic 'geographical' breakdown, the literature on development NGOs proposes numerous more 'qualitative' systems for distinguishing among NGOs, for example on the basis of their purpose, function, development ideology, scale of operations or proximity to or independence from government (Korten 1987; Clark 1991; Gow 1979). Some writers have distinguished between market-driven and society-based NGOs or have placed NGOs on a public-private continuum (Salmen and Eaves 1989). Unfortunately, at the present time, no information-gathering or analysis has been undertaken at the aggregate level to determine what types of NGOs (in qualitative terms) involve themselves in Bank projects. Despite a lack of empirical evidence, it has been hypothesised that larger-scale, service-oriented NGOs, and those that enjoy collaborative relations with governments, are probably more likely to become involved in Bank-financed projects than smaller-scale empowerment-oriented NGOs that see development as a process of social transformation, or openly oppose mainstream policies or actions.

### 3.3 Purpose of NGO involvement

The Bank has multiple purposes for seeking cooperation with NGOs, just as NGOs have a variety of possible motivations for working with the Bank. Some NGOs, for example, may simply seek to win contracts as service deliverers while others may have a more strategic interest in influencing Bank projects. Bank staff may seek NGO involvement because they want to better understand 'grassroots needs', or because they need a low-cost service provider or because they simply want to cover their bases and be able to put a tick in the 'NGO involvement' box of their project brief.

Unfortunately, few serious efforts have been made to assess and analyse the diverse set of purposes for

which NGO involvement in Bank projects is pursued. As mentioned above, the Bank's annual progress reports tell us nothing about the purpose of NGO involvement in Bank projects. Based on information from the Bank's NGO project database, Gibbs *et al.* (1998:8) report that the reasons most commonly cited by Bank staff for involving NGOs/CBOs are 'to enhance beneficiary participation' (72 per cent) and to 'capture expertise'<sup>7</sup> (64 per cent). 'Surprisingly', according to the authors, 'innovation and flexibility – commonly cited as NGO strengths – are not commonly cited as reasons for involving NGOs/CBOs (9 per cent)'. Virtually no aggregate information is available concerning NGO motivations for becoming involved in Bank projects. Anecdotal evidence indicates that NGOs frequently enter into such arrangements without thinking through, in a serious way, their own purpose and goals.

### 3.4 Experience and impact of NGO involvement

Operational experiences of NGOs working with the Bank have been described in a number of project-level case studies (or, in some cases, sectoral or regional-level reviews) undertaken by the Bank and NGOs since the mid-80s.<sup>8</sup> While confirming the significant potential benefits of NGO involvement, these studies have tended to emphasise the numerous institutional and administrative constraints that impede successful Bank-NGO collaboration. Problems that appear repeatedly in the literature include: poor communication and information-sharing, lack of mutual understanding between 'partners', lack of clarity regarding NGO roles and responsibilities, lack of participation, complex and rigid procedures and delays (in particular in relation to procurement and disbursement activities). These studies, while providing valuable information regarding the operational experiences of NGOs working with the Bank and the level of success or failure of individual projects, tell us little about the overall impact of this collaboration.

The study by Gibbs *et al.* is the Bank's first serious attempt to evaluate the operational impact of NGO involvement at the aggregate level. This study, which 'sets out to determine if NGO involvement increased the effectiveness of Bank-supported projects', is an important and timely piece of work. It

involved a desk review of 107 projects with NGO involvement and a more detailed field review of 37 projects in five countries. While concluding that the Bank's guidelines on promoting collaboration with NGOs are sound, the study reports many serious shortcomings in current practice, identifies key determinants of successful outcomes and makes valuable recommendations for improved Bank-NGO collaboration in future.<sup>9</sup>

A limitation of the study, however, is that (like the Bank's progress reports) it does not distinguish between different forms of NGO involvement in Bank projects at the aggregate level. Since 'NGO involvement' can vary so enormously, take on so many distinct forms, with such a wide range of diverse organisations and for so many different reasons, seeking to measure impact at this level becomes an extremely difficult and, arguably, potentially not very meaningful exercise. Among the different projects assessed by the study, for example, we do not know what kind of NGOs were involved, what their purpose was for becoming involved, and what the Bank's purpose was in involving them. No distinction is made between those projects where NGOs were explicitly invited to contribute to project design as opposed to those where NGOs were attributed a simple implementation role. The body of projects evaluated (through desk review and field study) includes such a wide range of different experiences that it is not surprising that '... at the aggregate level, OED was unable to link provision for NGO/CBO involvement to overall outcomes, institutional development or sustainability of projects' and that 'NGOs/CBOs appears to have no significant effect on meeting development objectives or making implementation progress' (Gibbs *et al.* 1998:xii).

Work undertaken in recent years by practitioners and scholars (both within and outside the Bank) has contributed significantly to our knowledge of NGO-Bank operational relations. However, our understanding of the true nature, extent, purpose and impact of these relationships remains superficial. On the whole, monitoring continues to focus on quantity rather than quality and, due to a failure to distinguish adequately between different forms of NGO involvement, current efforts to predict and evaluate impacts are of limited usefulness.

#### 4 'Unpacking' NGO Involvement in Bank-Financed Projects

NGO involvement in Bank-financed projects can be categorised in different ways. As mentioned above, the Bank's annual progress report provides a breakdown by type of NGO involved and the stage of the project cycle at which that involvement occurs. Nelson (1995) categorises projects according to 'major', 'implementation' or 'minor' roles for NGOs. This article proposes an alternative system of distinguishing between different forms of NGO involvement, differentiated by primary objective or purpose of the interaction. Instead of focusing on who is involved, when or how much, its point of departure is to ask why NGOs are involved in a given project.

Such a system of categorisation is important for three reasons. First, at an analytical level, it is important to acknowledge explicitly that NGOs and the Bank choose to work together for a variety of, sometimes contradictory, reasons. Some forms of interaction may bring anticipated theoretical benefits while others most certainly will not, and may result in negative impacts. This acknowledgement, in itself, is important in order to move away from the current tendency to treat 'NGO involvement in Bank-financed projects' as a monolithic phenomenon with one common set of characteristics and benefits.

In addition, experience shows that, too often, the Bank and NGOs enter into working relationships without any prior discussion or agreement concerning the ultimate purpose of their collaboration. For example, Gibbs *et al.* (1998:xiv) report that 'in half the projects assessed, the partners had divergent objectives, did not understand well how each other worked, did not match capacities with appointed roles, and did not adjust their administrative procedures to meet the needs of others'. The system of classification proposed here emphasises that, in working together, both the Bank and NGOs are free to make choices. There is no one predetermined form of operational cooperation. Each actor must reflect on its own goals, expectations, capacities and needs and negotiate its terms of engagement. Being aware of one's own primary objective and that of operational counterparts is the first step towards achieving more honest and productive working relationships and developing appropriate administrative arrangements and procedures.

Third, since judgement of outcomes of Bank-NGO collaboration depends upon the purpose for which that collaboration is undertaken, this system allows us to predict more accurately the type of benefits that are likely (or not likely) to result. Particularly, at this stage in time, with NGO involvement in Bank-financed projects becoming the norm and the Bank beginning to assess the operational impact of this involvement, it is increasingly important to distinguish more rigorously between different qualities and purposes of collaboration. This should help to avoid the creation of unrealistic expectations and subsequent dismissal of 'collaboration with NGOs' as an empty promise that failed to deliver hoped-for results.

On the basis of the primary purpose of Bank-NGO cooperation, four distinct forms of NGO involvement are identified. These are NGOs as 'beneficiaries', 'mercenaries', 'missionaries' or 'revolutionaries'. As 'beneficiaries', the primary objective is for NGOs to absorb resources or receive services. As 'mercenaries', their primary purpose is to deliver services on behalf of the Bank. As 'missionaries', NGOs seek to work with the Bank or use Bank resources to fulfil their own defined development mission. In order to do this, they must normally negotiate or retain some level of operational independence or influence over project design. When NGOs intervene or collaborate as 'revolutionaries', their primary purpose is to challenge or change some aspect of Bank (or government) policy or action. This might involve, for example, strategic research, interventions to block or modify a project or independent monitoring to ensure compliance with existing policies or agreed safeguards.

As described in Part I, 'NGO involvement in Bank-financed projects' in reality implies a tripartite relationship between NGOs, governments and the Bank. Each of these actors may have their own distinct purpose in seeking (or accepting) to interact. Since, to date, most discussions and analyses have focused on the Bank's motivations for seeking collaboration, the system proposed here purposefully emphasises the various objectives of collaboration from the point of view of NGOs. In some cases, all three parties may share the same primary objective (e.g. improved service delivery). In other cases, the resulting mode of NGO involvement may be the product of a process of negotiation between the

parties, e.g. NGOs negotiating influence over project design. Most often, however, the objectives of the various parties are not openly defined and discussed. As a result, NGOs who consider themselves 'missionaries' may find themselves operating in 'mercenary' role. In order to avoid such misunderstandings, and the resulting frustrations and failures, it is essential to acknowledge objectives and agree to appropriate terms of engagement prior to establishing working relations.

The four identified categories of NGO involvement are not necessarily mutually exclusive and the distinctions between them are not rigid. The same NGO may intervene as a 'mercenary' in some cases and a 'missionary' in others, or even intervene simultaneously as a 'beneficiary/revolutionary' or 'missionary/revolutionary'. A single project may involve several or all of the identified forms of NGO interventions. Some of the roles are clearly complementary (evidence shows that NGO roles as 'beneficiaries' are enhanced when facilitated by 'missionaries') and impacts may be greatest where several types of NGO interventions are combined.<sup>10</sup> The key characteristics of each of these different forms of involvement are summarised in Table 1. The theoretical benefits, constraints and likely outcomes of each are summarised in Table 2.

#### 4.1 NGOs/CBOs as 'beneficiaries'

When NGOs act as 'beneficiaries', the ultimate objective (for both the Bank and the NGO) is for the NGO to be the end recipient or user of Bank services or resources. The type of NGO involved in this mode is typically a CBO or other grassroots membership organisation, sometimes created for the express purpose of receiving project funds.<sup>11</sup> Examples of this type of NGO involvement are numerous and include almost all Bank projects with activities at the community level including, for example, social funds, rural development projects, community health education, water and sanitation projects. Available evidence suggests, in fact, that this particular form of interaction accounts for a large percentage of reported NGO–World Bank collaboration. The Bank's most recent annual progress report states that out of 'NGO-involved projects' 79 per cent involve CBOs – either existing or newly created. In terms of funding, Gibbs *et al.* (1998:xi) report that 'Bank-assisted projects support CBOs far

more often than NGOs', with over 80 per cent of funds going to CBOs and only 5 per cent to national level NGOs. Although CBOs can play other roles, the primary objective of their involvement is almost always that of project beneficiary.

As indicated in Table 2, targeting and working through CBOs can bring important development benefits – depending on how they are involved in project activities. If trusting relations are established with these groups, if participatory methods are used to understand their true needs, and if they are encouraged to take the lead in defining their own development agenda and empowered to do so (through institutional support, training, coaching, etc.), then the development results can be impressive. If, on the other hand, they are simply involved as passive recipients of goods and services, then no special benefits can be expected to accrue. In this case, targeting CBOs simply becomes a convenient way of targeting individuals<sup>12</sup> – not necessarily drawing on or investing in the potential of the collectivity.

Unfortunately, available evidence indicates that, for the moment, the Bank's participation rhetoric far surpasses its actions, and that examples of meaningful primary stakeholder participation and empowerment are rare. Participation of primary stakeholders is often limited to implementation stages and aimed at 'mobilising' beneficiaries to fulfil predetermined roles rather than 'empowering' them to influence and share control over development activities. Preliminary findings from a current monitoring exercise by the NGO Working Group on the Bank, for example, found that only one of ten 'participatory' projects reviewed involved primary stakeholders in design stages. (Tandon and Cordeiro 1998). Nelson (1995) reports that 'participation by NGOs and affected people is generally limited'. He observes that, 'what is sought are not views, priorities or wishes of affected populations but their 'full commitment to the project' once it has been sketched out'. Evidence does show that the chances of achieving meaningful beneficiary participation are enhanced when this mode of interaction is combined with the involvement of 'missionary' NGOs as project intermediaries/facilitators.<sup>13</sup>

Table 1: Classification of different forms of NGO involvement in Bank-financed projects

NGO role	Primary purpose of NGO involvement	Type of NGO	Stakeholder status	Nature of involvement	Typical stage of involvement	How involvement initiated	Financing	Frequency
Beneficiary	To receive benefits/services	Typically a CBO or GRO (existing or created)	Primary stakeholder (target group)	Normally cooperative (often passive recipients vs active participants)	Ideally during design but most often limited to implementation	Targeted or created by project	CBO receives project resources (usually with cost-sharing requirement)	Most frequent
Mercenary	To deliver services/implement Bank's mandate	Market-driven NGOs, technical NGOs, public service contractors, non-profit consulting firms	Secondary stakeholder	Conformist/co-opted	Implementation	Contracted through competitive process	NGO paid for services from project budget	Frequent
Missionary	To influence project activities/implement NGOs own mandate	Operational value-driven or society-based NGOs, NGOs with a defined development mission	Secondary stakeholder (sometimes representing primary stakeholder interests)	Reformist (often critical)	Design and implementation	Often selected on basis of specific strengths	NGO paid for services from project budget or preparation funds. NGO may provide unpaid advice/services or co-financing	Less frequent
Revolutionary	To challenge or change Bank/government actions, decisions and policies	Advocacy or research NGOs, operational NGOs with strategic interests, often in collaboration with directly affected GROs or their representatives	Often primary and secondary stakeholders working in consort	Strategic/political (often conflictual)	Any stage (pre-identification through M&E)	Normally initiated by NGO (often in objection to Bank or government decisions or actions)	Costs normally borne by NGOs. Sometimes NGOs contracted to conduct research, contribute to design or oversee project implementation	Least frequent

#### 4.2 NGOs as 'mercenaries'

When NGOs behave as 'mercenaries', their primary purpose is to sell their services (as project implementers, executing agents or managers) to donors or governments. Here the World Bank 'uses' NGOs in an explicitly instrumental way. The type of NGO most frequently involved in this mode of interaction are what might be called non-profit consulting firms and what Brown and Korten (1989) refer to as

market-driven public service contractors (PSCs). Unlike more value-driven, constituency-based NGOs, these organisations typically lack a popular support base. Moreover, although they may adhere to certain social principles, their primary aim is to implement the development programme defined by donors, as opposed to setting their own development agendas and goals.

Table 2: Principal benefits and constraints of different forms of NGO involvement in Bank-financed projects

NGO role	Theoretical benefits	Conditions for realising theoretical benefits	Key constraints	Likelihood of realising theoretical benefits
Beneficiary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enhanced beneficiary participation</li> <li>● More relevant project design</li> <li>● Enhanced ownership and sustainability</li> <li>● Empowerment of CBOs</li> <li>● Improved development impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Genuine participation of primary stakeholders throughout the project cycle</li> <li>● Effective knowledge and use of participatory techniques by the team</li> <li>● Adequate capacity of CBOs and/or investments in CBO capacity-building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bank's capacity to promote meaningful participation of primary stakehold remains limited</li> <li>● Weak capacity of CBOs</li> <li>● Limited investment in CBO institutional assessment and capacity-building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● For the moment, <i>low</i></li> <li>● Significantly higher when combined with the involvement of <i>missionary</i> NGOs</li> </ul>
Mercenary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Cost-effective service delivery</li> <li>● Extended project reach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Adequate NGO capacity (especially technical and management skills)</li> <li>● Effective working relations and appropriate procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● NGO capacity/ effectiveness as service deliverers is mixed</li> <li>● Excessive scaling-up often problematic</li> <li>● Bank/government procedures often slow and cumbersome</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Benefits are limited but likelihood of realising them is relatively high</li> </ul>
Missionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enhanced beneficiary participation</li> <li>● More responsive, demand-driven projects</li> <li>● Better downwards accountability</li> <li>● Better poverty targeting</li> <li>● Innovation and flexibility</li> <li>● Improved development impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Adequate NGO capacity (including popular base, participatory expertise, technical and management skills and ability to negotiate)</li> <li>● Sufficient flexibility/autonomy for NGOs in project design</li> <li>● Effective working relations and appropriate procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Only a subset of NGOs have requisite capacities</li> <li>● NGO influence over project design remains limited</li> <li>● Current procedures often thwart innovation and flexibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● For the moment, <i>medium to low</i></li> <li>● Still many institutional, relational and procedural obstacles</li> </ul>
Revolutionary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Prevents negative environmental/social impacts</li> <li>● Incorporate alternative perspectives</li> <li>● Promote downwards accountability</li> <li>● Ensure compliance with Bank's environmental and social policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Adequate NGO/CBO capacity including relevant expertise, credibility and (sometimes) networking and lobbying skills</li> <li>● Bank/government willingness to acknowledge alternative viewpoints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Only a small number of NGOs have adequate skills, time and resources to devote to such activities</li> <li>● Bank/government not always receptive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● NGO engagement of this type is relatively <i>rare</i>, but when it occurs results are significant</li> </ul>

According to Brown and Korten (1989:62), while 'a value-driven NGO defines its program based on its social mission and then seeks the funding required to implement it, the market-driven PSC starts with an assessment of prospective funding sources and defines its program on that basis'. Indeed, many such NGOs are 'entrepreneurial'. In other words, they are created in direct response to a demand for such services and the availability of funds.<sup>14</sup> Value-based NGOs who *do* have social roots and *do* have an independent development mission may also find themselves working in this mode with the World Bank. This occurs either due to a conscious decision to play such a role or due to a poorly understood, poorly negotiated or poorly managed agreement of collaboration.

Evidence indicates that, after NGO involvement as 'beneficiaries', this is the second most frequent form of Bank-NGO collaboration. Nelson's review of 304 projects, for example, found that in most projects (three out of four) NGO roles were limited to project implementation. In terms of funding, Gibbs *et al.* (1998:xi) report that while almost all projects with NGO involvement include financial support to NGOs for implementation purposes, only 17 per cent include support for project preparation activities.<sup>15</sup>

It is unclear whether the prevalence of NGOs in simple 'service delivery' roles (as opposed to more influential roles) is primarily due to Bank/government impositions or due to weak vision and capacity on the part of NGOs or a willingness on their part to be 'used' by the Bank. No doubt, both the instrumentalist tendencies of the Bank/governments and NGO weaknesses play a role. Nelson (1995), for example, finds clear evidence that Bank staff focus on NGO's role as service deliverers, with little consideration for their 'representative' or 'political' roles – as defenders of the interests of affected groups and communities. He finds that 'the [Bank's] official policy is not collaborative but tightly controlled, making room for NGO involvement on the World Bank's terms'. On the other hand, Nelson also finds that NGOs in Latin America tend to play more influential roles, while African NGOs are twice as likely as those in other regions to be involved only in 'minor roles' – indicating that NGOs' relative level of development and capacity also play a role in determining the nature of their involvement.

Governments are also influential in determining the nature of NGO involvement in Bank projects. While information is lacking and the situation varies enormously from country to country, governments (like the Bank) have generally been observed to favour a limited service delivery-oriented role for NGOs. For example, in assessing civil society participation in multilateral lending operations in Latin America, Tuozzo (1999:12), concludes that, 'governments tend to embrace forms [of CSO involvement] that involve distribution of goods and services and handouts that can bring electoral benefits'.

While the potential benefits of NGOs acting as 'mercenaries' are somewhat limited, the likelihood that successful working relations can be established and the desired outcomes realised are relatively high. Because the purpose of 'mercenary' NGOs is not to challenge or change Bank policy and procedures but rather to support them, this type of Bank-NGO interaction is most likely to be cooperative. The NGOs in question often resemble the private sector firms with whom the Bank is accustomed to working and are normally familiar and able to cope with the Bank's private sector-oriented procedures. 'Mercenary' NGOs may be able to bring specialised skills and cost-effective implementing capacity but, since they do not possess those characteristics normally associated with the NGO sector (ties to local communities, commitment to poverty reduction, independent development vision), this type of collaboration should *not* be expected to bring value-added in terms of innovative/alternative approaches or enhanced community participation and ownership.

### 4.3 NGOs as 'missionaries'

As 'missionaries', NGOs seek to be valued not just for what they *do*, but for who they *are*. In this mode, the objective of NGOs is not only to deliver services (though their role may involve that) but also to influence the objectives, design and operational procedures of the project and to apply their own operational methodologies and tools. In addition to technical skills, NGOs in this case have their own explicit development mission, goals and values and, in some cases, a clearly defined constituency base. Rather than implementing a donor's development mandate (as NGOs operating as 'mercenaries' set

out to do) here the objective of NGOs is to implement their own mandate with the use of donor funds. They may also aim to encourage Bank and government to adopt approaches they have pioneered and to listen to their advice regarding development priorities and strategies. In order to do this, these NGOs must be able to negotiate a certain level of operational independence and/or influence throughout the various stages of the project cycle. Situations where NGOs have the opportunity to intervene as 'missionaries' include: projects that are based upon NGOs innovations or where NGOs have encouraged the Bank to take their tested experiences/approaches to scale;<sup>16</sup> projects where NGOs participate actively in identification and design; NGO-managed pilot phases; projects that fund NGO-designed and managed sub-projects or components; and NGO participation in project boards, steering committees or other management or decision-making structures.

As discussed above, however, this mode of involvement occurs much less frequently than NGO interventions in 'mercenary' mode. This is due both to 'supply' and 'demand' factors. On the supply side, only a subset of NGOs has the commitment and capacity required to offer innovations and resist donor domination. In order for this mode of interaction to be effective, NGOs must have: a clearly defined mission, relevant operational skills (including participatory expertise), adequate knowledge about the Bank, and negotiating prowess (typically underpinned by private sources of income).

On the demand side, as has been shown, both the Bank and governments have a tendency to seek to 'use' NGOs for their own purposes (rather than supporting NGOs' own mission and goals). Even when the Bank and/or government do genuinely seek to benefit from NGO 'innovation and flexibility', predefined project frameworks and rigid procedures often hamper NGOs' ability to innovate and, in practice, reduce their role to that of project implementer.

Evidence regarding NGOs' ability to negotiate conditions conducive to flexible, participatory interventions is not encouraging. Gibbs *et al.* (1998:xv), for example, find that 'even when agreements on working relationships are reached ... many are poorly grounded or so prescriptive as to overwhelm

the flexibility that makes NGOs/CBOs attractive partners in the first place'. Nelson (1995) finds that 'the World Bank's organisational culture is incompatible with the participatory, flexible operation that many NGOs require'. The literature on Bank-NGO interactions contains numerous accounts of NGO attempts to intervene as 'missionaries' – some of them successful but many of them frustrated.<sup>17</sup> Because this form of involvement implies challenging the Bank's standard *modus operandi* and requires some level of shared operational control, the potential for complications and conflict is considerable. This form of interaction represents, therefore, greater opportunity to draw on NGOs' comparative advantages, but also greater challenges and risks.

#### 4.4 NGOs as revolutionaries

As 'revolutionaries', NGOs seek involvement in Bank-financed projects for strategic or political reasons. Their objective is to influence Bank and/or government decisions and actions – often in relation to issues such as poverty reduction, social justice, environmental protection and indigenous peoples' rights (or human rights more broadly). Such strategic engagement can take the form of operational cooperation. Examples are: NGOs contracted by the Bank to carry out environmental or social assessments, to organise or facilitate public consultations (on proposed policies or national strategies), to implement a resettlement plan or to monitor a project's compliance with defined environmental or social safeguards. It can also involve independent action on the part of NGOs, for example, independent monitoring of Bank activities or strategic NGO-financed research or impact assessments.<sup>18</sup> The best publicised examples are those where NGOs intervene in outright opposition to Bank/government activities, for example in order to block or significantly modify a planned project or to draw public attention to projects that have caused negative impacts, demanding corrective or compensatory measures.<sup>19</sup> Such interventions often involve coalitions of directly affected groups (or their representatives) and national or international NGOs who share their concerns. This mode of interaction is closely linked to NGO advocacy activities aimed at the Bank, with the difference that it seeks to affect change by combining policy dialogue with actions (collaborative or confrontational) at the field level.<sup>20</sup>

NGO interventions as revolutionaries are no doubt the least frequent of the four identified forms of NGO involvement in Bank projects. Although examples of this type of NGO intervention are relatively rare, those few NGOs that have invested time and energy in seeking to influence the Bank in this way have met with considerable success. In particular in the case of independent protest, high levels of commitment and capacity are required on the part of NGOs. This must include in-depth knowledge of the issues, well-developed networking and advocacy skills, visibility and credibility (at local, national and, sometimes, international levels) and adequate resources (human and financial) to devote to the cause.

#### **4.5 Are these different forms of NGO involvement in Bank projects 'partnership'?**

This article has purposefully *not* used the term 'partnership' to refer to NGO involvement in Bank-financed projects. Like other donors, the Bank has a tendency to (mis)use the 'p' word liberally in referring to its various interactions with NGOs. (The Bank also refers to borrowing governments, private sector contractors, civil society organisations, project beneficiaries, regional multilateral development banks, UN agencies, bilateral donors, etc., as its 'partners'.) For years now, development practitioners and, in particular, southern NGOs have expressed increasing frustration with official aid agencies that preach partnership but practice something different (Muchunguzi and Milne 1995; Malhotra 1997; Eade 1997; Abugre 1999). Fowler (2000) refers to the 'pathology of partnership' and points out that the term is frequently used to mask unhealthy and disempowering relationships.

If we accept the basic principles of partnership (as defined in the NGO literature) as mutual goals, long-term commitment, shared decision-making, and reciprocal accountability, then it is probably incorrect to refer to *any* of the four identified modes of NGO involvement as 'partnership'. The fact that Bank-NGO operational interaction is limited to the confines of a predetermined and time-bound project cycle and that, during the life of the project, it is the borrowing government and not the Bank that owns and manages the project and maintains working relations with NGOs, in itself largely precludes the possibility of establishing genuine 'partnership'

between the World Bank and an NGO. It is not impossible that the Bank could enter into a lasting relationship with an NGO where mutual goals are discussed and agreed, decision-making powers are shared and accountability is a two-way process. But, at least at the present time, this scenario is far from typical of NGO involvement in Bank projects.

## **5 Conclusions and Recommendations**

The system of classification proposed here shows that Bank-NGO operational collaboration can take on very different forms and serve diverse purposes. Available evidence suggests that reactive/submissive forms of involvement (NGOs as 'beneficiaries' and 'mercenaries') are much more common than proactive/critical forms ('missionaries' or 'revolutionaries'). Transfer of funds (from the Bank to CBOs/NGOs) lies at the heart of the former, while in the latter NGOs are more likely to contribute their own resources towards achieving development goals. While the latter hold greater potential to bring significant benefits, they are also most likely to be of a critical/conflictual nature. This article also concludes that it is probably inaccurate, at the present time, to refer to any of the four identified forms of interaction as 'authentic partnerships'.

This article has found that weaknesses on the part of both NGOs and the Bank continue to limit the potential benefits of collaboration. The following are recommendations for both the Bank and NGOs aimed at promoting more significant and productive collaboration in future.

### **5.1 Recommendations for MDBs**

*Be explicit in planning NGO involvement.* During project preparation stages, Bank staff in collaboration with NGOs should define *why* NGO involvement in the project is sought, identify the specific goals and expectations of their involvement, clearly define the specific tasks and responsibilities of participating NGOs and outline the specific measures and procedures that will be put in place to facilitate productive collaboration. This information should be included systematically in the appraisal reports of projects involving NGOs.

*Better assessment of NGOs.* A common error on the part of Bank staff is to over-estimate NGO capacity – defining NGO roles on the basis of wishful thinking rather than a realistic assessment of existing capacity. NGO involvement in Bank projects is also frequently planned without a proper understanding of the history and nature of the NGO/CBO community, the environment in which they work and the nature of their relations with government. The Bank needs to devote more time and energy to understanding NGOs and their relations with government at the country level. It should also be more rigorous in assessing the credibility and capacity of NGOs with whom it seeks to work and, where appropriate, devote more attention and resources to NGO capacity-building activities.

*More rigour and precision in monitoring NGO involvement.* In the early days of Bank–NGO collaboration, it made strategic sense for the Bank’s NGO Unit to emphasise the growing importance of the phenomenon and to err on the side of over- rather than under-estimation on the basis of available information. At the current time, however, the Bank’s system of monitoring collaboration with NGOs is inadequate and potentially even counterproductive. By exaggerating the true extent of NGO involvement in Bank projects, it runs the risks of creating unrealistic and unattainable expectations. The Bank should shift its emphasis towards monitoring the *quality* of NGO involvement, with a focus on the purpose and results of that involvement. Enhancing the quality of information contained in project appraisal reports (as suggested above) is one important step in this direction. Including an evaluation of NGO activities in project supervision and completion reports would also facilitate more meaningful monitoring. Finally, the Bank might consider inviting members of the NGO Working Group on the Bank and/or its growing network of country-level NGO specialists to contribute to its yearly monitoring exercise – by providing more detailed and qualitative information on a sample of identified projects with NGO involvement.

*Improved use of participatory methods.* Until the Bank is able to translate its participation rhetoric into practice, the scope for meaningful NGO involvement in Bank projects and the ability of NGOs to deliver hoped-for benefits, remains limited. NGOs and CBOs can potentially play an important role in

assisting the Bank to enhance primary stakeholder participation – but only if Bank staff understand and are open to participatory approaches and are willing and able to make appropriate provision for their use. The Bank still faces many challenges (at the attitudinal, policy and procedural levels) in this regard.

## 5.2 Recommendations for NGOs

*Know what you want and what you can offer.* As has been discussed, a common error on the part of NGOs is to enter into working relations with the Bank without clearly thinking through the purpose of the collaboration, what they expect to achieve and what they can offer. In order to collaborate effectively, NGOs must first establish their own goals and priorities and assess the benefits and risks of the proposed collaboration. It is also in NGOs’ interests to be honest about their own operational capacities and to resist the temptation to over-commit or over-stretch their limits. NGOs should be wary of taking on tasks outside of their defined mandate or area of expertise and also be cautious about excessive scaling-up (for example, accepting to work with 100 villages when currently working with only 10).

*Negotiate.* Once NGOs have established their own expectations, goals and capacities, they must learn to negotiate acceptable working arrangements and procedures. Productive working relationships do not just happen; they are the result of a process of communication and negotiation. NGOs should not underestimate their bargaining power. Although they may feel small and powerless *vis-à-vis* the Bank, the reality may often be that the Bank ‘needs’ NGOs more than the other way around. All parties have an interest in agreeing to terms and conditions that will allow NGOs to function effectively and achieve (mutually agreed) operational goals. An important aspect of effective negotiation is a willingness to say no. When goals are not compatible, when conditions are unworkable or an organisation’s credibility or constituency links are placed in jeopardy, NGOs must be prepared to decline involvement in a Bank project. Even if Bank overtures may be tempting from a resource mobilisation point of view, there is no long-term gain for NGOs in committing to a working arrangement that is doomed to fail.

*Know the Bank.* Another element of successful negotiation is being well-informed. NGOs can only negotiate effectively with the Bank if they understand the basic functioning of the institution, are informed of current and upcoming projects (in their particular country or sector of interest) and have a working knowledge of its operational rules and procedures. Fortunately, over the past decade, the Bank has significantly enhanced its information disclosure policy and practices. A large range of information (regarding the Bank's mandate and institutional structure, operational policies and procedures, portfolio of current and upcoming projects as well as information, guidelines and lessons learned on Bank-NGO cooperation) are available from the Bank's website, NGO Unit, various Public Information Centres and Resident Missions. Groups outside the Bank such as the NGO Working Group on the Bank and the Bank Information Centre are also valuable sources of information and advice. Given the central role of government counterparts in most Bank-related activities, it is also desirable for NGOs to establish independent contacts with and develop a good understanding of relevant line ministries.

*Network.* A final recommendation for NGOs seeking eract with the Bank is to make linkages and join forces with other NGOs in the same country or sector. NGOs who have never worked with the Bank

have a particular interest in learning from the experience of others that have. Where lobbying or protest is involved, evidence clearly shows that networking between NGOs at the local, national and international levels is much more likely to bring results than any of the groups intervening on their own. Where a number of operational NGOs are involved in the same project, the chances of successfully negotiating flexibility in project design and appropriately adapted procedures are greater if NGOs can establish operating principles among themselves and negotiate collectively with the Bank. NGOs' record of successful networking and inter-organisational collaboration is not particularly encouraging. Edwards and Hulme (1996:6), for example, find that examples of alliances of NGOs at different levels are rare and point out that direct funding from official donors can serve to erode collaborative relations between NGOs by placing them in open competition with one another for scarce resources. In this regard, however, the large scale of World Bank operations could represent a potential advantage. Gibbs *et al.* (1998:x) report that 'the demand for partnerships with NGOs/CBOs exceeds the supply of willing and able partners'. In the context of any given project/programme, there is likely to be ample opportunity and resources for *all* NGOs with requisite skills to participate, thus lessening the tensions related to competition for scarce resources.

## Notes

- 1 The New Policy Agenda, as described for example by Moore (1993) and Robinson (1993), derives from a combination of neo-liberal economics and liberal democratic theory.
- 2 While this article focuses on the World Bank, the issues discussed may be relevant to NGO relations with multilateral development banks more generally – in particular the African and Asian Development Banks that have adopted NGO-related policies and guidelines similar to those of the World Bank.
- 3 For example, the programmes of international NGOs are estimated to have doubled in real size between 1975 and 1985, by 1993 representing 14 per cent of all development assistance or US\$8.5 billion per annum. In many developing countries, numbers of officially registered NGOs grew exponentially in the same period. For example, there are currently an estimated 18,000 registered NGOs in the Philippines, 5,000 in Tunisia and 3,000 in Brazil.
- 4 See, for example, Edwards and Hulme (1992).
- 5 Nelson defines as a 'major role', when NGOs contribute to project design, receive direct funding or enter into conflict with the Bank.
- 6 It should be noted that findings of both Nelson and Gibbs *et al.* are based largely on projects approved in the 1980s. Gibbs *et al.* find encouraging evidence that more recent projects tend to have more significant and successful NGO involvement.
- 7 It is not indicated what type of 'expertise' is sought.
- 8 See, for example, Bhatnagar (1991), Hino (1996), Malena (1997), Voorhies (1993) and World Vision (1996).
- 9 Three factors are identified as essential in determining successful outcomes: a supportive environment for NGO/CBO activities, effective working relationships

- and adequate and balanced capacities of all partners (NGOs, government and Bank).
- 10 Nelson (1995) found that projects with 'major' NGO involvement tended to involve joint participation by a variety of different (grassroots, national and international level) NGOs.
  - 11 In the case of institutional development or capacity-building activities, the beneficiary could also be a non-membership, 'intermediary' NGO.
  - 12 And, it must be said, not necessarily an effective way of targeting the *poorest* members of society who are often excluded from or marginalised within such groups.
  - 13 Progress reports indicate an increasing tendency on the part of the Bank to work directly with CBOs. While this focus on grassroots organisations is welcome, it should not be at the exclusion of intermediary NGOs that have a key role to play in facilitating effective participation.
  - 14 Hulme and Edwards (1997:277) report that 'Large numbers of new organisations are being formed on the back of readily available donor funds, with weak social roots and no independent supporter base'.
  - 15 This information is based on a survey of project managers of 194 projects.
  - 16 Examples include Bank-supported micro-credit schemes in Bangladesh based on the experiences of the Grameen Bank and BRAC, and water and sanitation activities in Nepal based on NGO models of participatory village-level planning. (John Clark, personal communication)
  - 17 See, for example, Voorhies (1993), Malena (1995), World Vision (1996).
  - 18 See Fox (1996) for a discussion of independent NGO monitoring and evaluation of MDB activities.
  - 19 The creation of the Bank's Independent Inspection Panel in 1993 has served to facilitate such efforts.
  - 20 Covey acknowledges the link between NGOs' advocacy and operational roles and uses the term 'critical cooperation' to refer to NGO involvement that seeks to influence Bank decisions and actions (in Fox and Brown 1998).

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