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Feb 15 Reaction Paper

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Restructuring World Politics: The Limits and Asymmetries of Soft Power – Kathryn Sikkink

This article suggests that although transnational movements and NGOs contribute to international deliberation, they have yet to resolve several internal issues of democratic representation and accountability. Specific examples include less than democratic organizational decision making structures, the dilemma of accountability to a range of influential constituencies, and the difficult balance of relationships with governments and donors. Further, the author notes that within NGOs, “many citizens and issues are not represented and representation goes disproportionately to those with organization and resources” (311). To maintain legitimacy, Sikkink notes that NGOs rely substantially on moral authority, which they attempt to enforce by exercising transparency, reliability, etc.

The Earthscan Reader on NGO Management – Michael Edwards and David Hulme

This article expresses many concerns related to the insufficient monitoring of and “multiple accountabilities” faced by NGOs. For example, while increasing government funding to NGOs may help NGOs to promote their national policy agendas, at the same time this relationship may jeopardize the independence that enables NGOs to serve as a check on government. In my experience with an international NGO, this has not really been a concern. Strong relationships with national government institutions are a key way to create in-country legitimacy, particularly for international NGOs, which in turn have expansive international networks to prevent the emergence of an unreasonable bias towards any one national government. The article also raises concerns about undue influence regarding donor relationships. Another worry is that NGOs appear to be shifting more towards service delivery and away from institutional development (perhaps to create more concrete products for donors), which threatens long term sustainability of project efforts if NGOs withdraw. The article also addresses performance measurement and suggests that much needs to be done to improve evaluation of NGO work.

Defending Accountability in NGOs – Paul Wapner

This takes as a starting point the argument that states have a high degree of accountability because they report to their constituents, while NGOs seemingly do not report to anyone, or to only a small subset of the population. The article argues that NGOs are accountable, just in different ways, and that in fact many states are not necessarily accountable to their citizens (noting that only around 60% of world’s governments are democratic). NGOs are accountable to their members, who can withdraw support at any time; their donors; their boards of directors; their civil society partners; and to some degree to states. The article emphasizes the importance of a good reputation to NGO success and sustainability. This issue ties in with the branding issue we discussed last week. Image and marketing play a huge role in NGO sustainability, and are taken very seriously. In WWF, for example, I was once reprimanded for using a logo with the wrong font (the WWF logo is periodically updated and the font is slightly changed). NGOs do not take for granted the market value of their brand recognition.

By What Authority? The Legitimacy and Accountability of NGOs – Hugo Slim

This article discusses the movement towards performance accountability in NGOs, and the importance of monitoring impact and outcomes as opposed to only financial expenditures. It also notes important issues of legitimacy such as representation and voice (speaking with as opposed to speaking for), legal

mandate, being able to show evidence of good performance, and transparency. One detail that was unclear to me was in the 'Methods of Accountability' section when the stakeholder analysis discussion referenced a need to consider "a much broader range of people (living and not yet born)". I can't get my mind around the point here – why would an organization be accountable, or consider in a stakeholder analysis, the unborn?