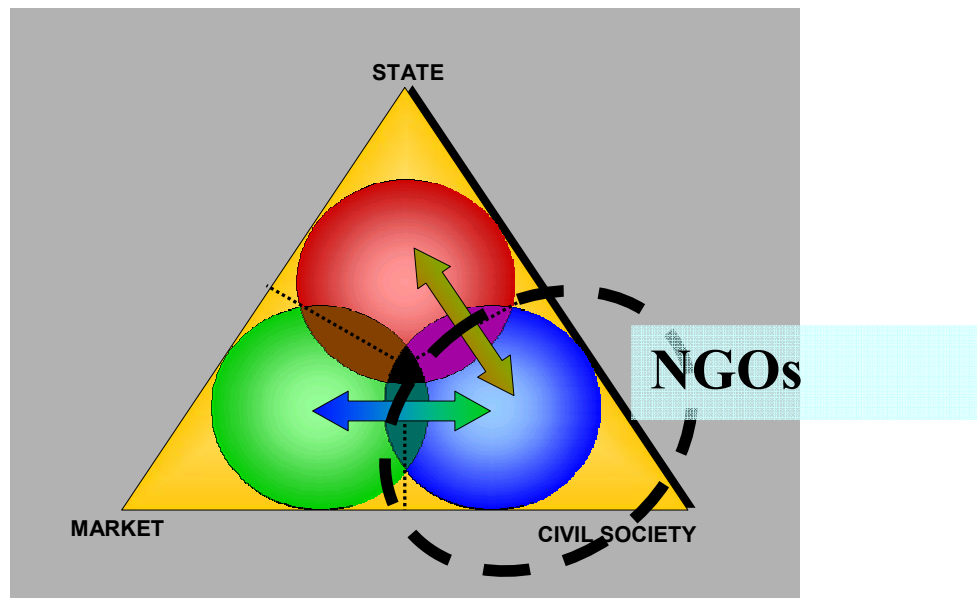


NGO STRATEGIES

1. Introduction: NGO strategies at the interface with public and profit¹



The function of Non-Governmental Organisations is first and foremost to organise society and to create ‘club goods’. Next to that, they operate at two interfaces: (a) between the state and civil society and (b) between the market and civil society. The first interface is the most traditional. Many NGOs appeal to government to obtain additional funding for projects they carry out on behalf of civil society. These are largely local projects for the benefit of the local population. As such, NGOs are taking over part of what is traditionally regarded as government responsibilities while still retaining part of their independence. Next to that, there are the so-called government NGOs. One of the reasons why receding central governments still succeed in obtaining the greatest part of the national income is that these funds are being redistributed to new semi-public

¹ This excerpt is a translation and reworking of a larger publication that can also be read and obtained (in Dutch) from this same website under the ‘stakeholder dialogue’ header. The original research on NGO strategies was conducted by Eveline van Mil.

supervisory bodies : (1) Gongos – Government Organised NGOs – are NGOs that have been founded by the government and which fulfil a supervisory function on behalf of government; (2) Gingos – Government Interested NGOs – carry out specific projects on behalf of government, such as promotion of exports or environmental decontamination. These NGOs are of great relevance to the functioning of companies and markets.

It is however especially the second interface – market versus civil society - that is undergoing change. Since the early nineties, with the advent of the bargaining society, NGOs have been calling companies to account for their social responsibilities in a variety of ways. Many NGOs believe that companies, more so than government, are/should be able to address certain issues. At this interface, a rich palette of new NGO strategies unfolds. Roles such as broker, mediator and/or supervisor are appearing which up until now, have hardly been discussed in academic literature. Moreover, it is often assumed that NGOs can fulfil only one role and/or that they migrate from one role to another. In practice, the situation seems much more nuanced. NGOs adopt different roles, both consecutively in a single process as well as simultaneously in different settings through which at one moment they seek to start a debate and the other they seek to start a dialogue.

The following ten NGO roles can be distinguished at the market-civil society interface (see chapter 7 in the book “international business-society management”):

1. **BONGOS** (Business Oriented NGOs).
2. **PONGOS** (Partnership Oriented NGOs)
3. **BINGOS** (Business Interested NGOs)
4. **SHANGOS** (Shareholding NGOs).
5. **STRONGOS** (Strategic Stakeholder Oriented NGOs).
6. **BRONGOS** (Broker Oriented NGOs).
7. **SUNGOS** (Supervisory NGOs).
8. **DONGOS** (Discussion and Dialogue Oriented NGOs).
9. **WONGOS** (Watchdog Oriented NGOs)
10. **DANGOS** (Direct Action oriented NGOs)

2. Roles and present dependencies

These ten NGO roles signify an increasing degree of NGO independence from companies. Table 1 maps this position. As NGOs operate more independently, their campaigns become less predictable for companies. Such campaigns are also almost always geared towards protest, debate and polarisation. In such campaigns, NGOs chiefly adopt a single-issue approach and focus almost exclusively on exposing the problems. If NGOs are more solution and product oriented, and seek to operate as company representative (Bongo) or endeavour to carry out a joint project with companies (Pongo), there is a great likelihood that they will focus on relatively simple (single) issues. Along with this, their dependence on and predictability for companies will also increase. It is only when NGOs seek a ‘mutually’ dependent relation with companies that it is possible to carry out a more multi-dimensional approach in practice, by means of which problems and solutions can be linked with each other.

Table 1. NGO Roles at the Interface with Business

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--|--|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| B O N G O | P O N G O | B I N G O | S H A N G O | S T R O N G O | B R O N G O | S U N G O | D O N G O | W O N G O | D A N G O |
| | | | | | | | | | |
| Dependent NGOs | | | Interdependent NGOs | | | | Independent NGOs | | |
| Product oriented; realisation; (ONGOs) | | | Process oriented; integration; Hybrid NGOs (HNGOs) | | | | Protest oriented; polarisation; Advocacy NGOs (ANGOs) | | |
| Single-issue approach; focus especially on (partial) solutions | | | Multi-dimensional approach; focus on problems and solutions | | | | Single-issue approach; focus on problems | | |
| Predictable | | | Interactive | | | | Unpredictable | | |
| Risks: complicity; excuse for finding more structural solutions; window dressing | | | Risks: weak compromises; co-optation; a too long-term vision; group thinking; lowest common denominator | | | | Risks: simplification/exaggeration of issue; 'iconification'; reactionary; shirking of responsibilities | | |






In 2004 we enquired 60 large internationally oriented NGOs after the role(s) they were occupying. The study distinguished six different types of NGOs/issues:

- (1) Nature, environment and animal rights (11 Large NGOs like WWF, FSC, Greenpeace)
- (2) Consumer interests (7 large Dutch oriented consumer organisations)
- (3) Humanitarian and civil rights (12 organisations ranging from Amnesty International, Unicef, Red Cross, Medicins sans Frontieres to Pax Christi)
- (4) Social-Economic and labour rights (6 ranging from trade unions to Fair Wear Foundation)
- (5) General Social-Economic (10, ranging from Fair Food, Fair Trade to Transparency International)
- (6) Development Cooperation (10: From Cordaid to Oxfam).

Figure 1 summarizes the roles these respondents identified themselves as their major roles.

Figure 1
Present NGO strategies: what prevails at the moment in the relationship with companies? (2004)

| Category | N | Dango | Wongo | Dongo | Sungo | Brongo | Strongo | Shango | Bingo | Pongo | Bongo |
|----------------------------------|----|-------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Nature | 11 | n.a. | 7 (63 %) | 10 (91 %) | 4 (36 %) | 0 ---- | 2 (18 %) | 1 (9 %) | 0 ---- | 3 (27 %) | 0 ---- |
| 2. Consumer interests | 7 | n.a. | 6 (86 %) | 6 (86 %) | 2 (29 %) | 1 (14 %) | 1 (14 %) | 2 (29 %) | 1 (14 %) | 1 (14 %) | 1 (14 %) |
| 3. Humanitarian and civil rights | 12 | n.a. | 3 (25 %) | 9 (75 %) | 1 (8 %) | 1 (8 %) | 1 (8 %) | 0 ---- | 1 (8 %) | 6 (50 %) | 0 ---- |
| 4. Social-economic: labor rights | 6 | n.a. | 4 (67 %) | 4 (67 %) | 3 (50 %) | 1 (17 %) | 2 (33 %) | 1 (17 %) | 1 (17 %) | 2 (33 %) | 0 ---- |
| 5. Social-economic general | 10 | n.a. | 5 (50 %) | 10 (100 %) | 2 (20 %) | 3 (30 %) | 1 (10 %) | 0 ---- | 1 (10 %) | 1 (10 %) | 0 ---- |
| 6. development cooperation | 10 | n.a. | 5 (50 %) | 10 (100 %) | 1 (10 %) | 1 (10 %) | 0 ---- | 1 (10 %) | 0 ---- | 8 (80 %) | 0 ---- |

100% - 80 % =  59 % - 30 % =  9 % - 1% = 
79 % - 60 % =  29 % - 10 % = 

One fifth of the NGOs assume just a single role. More than 40% assume more than two roles. In particular organisations with a large number of members and a long history – like trade unions and specific consumer organisations – show a propensity towards adopting more than four roles. This illustrates that these organisations have become increasingly more ‘service oriented’ towards their members (see chapter 4 on this development), which sometimes brings them directly in competition with market parties that operate on a for-profit basis.

Among the roles assumed, the centre of gravity clearly lies with the more protest oriented roles (Wongos and Dongos). The partnership NGO (Pongo), however, is on the rise. The relative importance of Dangos as non-governmental organisational form is more difficult to establish due to the illicit nature of these groups’ activities. These campaigns, however, have increased in significance – specifically in the form of terrorist attacks, but less so in the form of animal liberation actions.

The interviews show that NGOs adopt five generic strategies towards corporations:

1. A bargaining strategy (complementary strategy of action and conversation- 48%)
2. A dialectic ‘push-pull’ strategy (expressing criticism, while at the same time trying to put realistic alternatives into the market – 16%)
3. Direct cooperation with companies (bundling means, competencies, strengths and experience – 20%)
4. Bridging (brokering sometimes in combination with the supervisory role - 9%)
5. Diversification (adopting a large number of roles to be flexible and effective in dealing with very complex relations – 7 %)

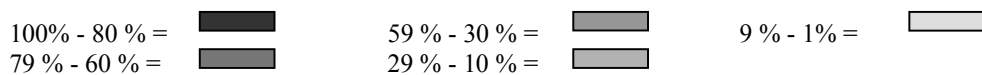
It is clear that an active bargaining strategy prevails. In particular Nature, consumer interest groups and labour rights groups have embraced this strategy. All these groups have extensive experience in these areas and often constitute part of the institutionalised bargaining setting in particular countries.

3. Future strategies

In the same research project we asked the respondents to reveal their future strategies vis-à-vis corporations. Figure 2 reveals the answers and specifies them for each of the six types of NGO distinguished above.

Figure 2 Anticipated NGO roles for 2009

| Category | N | Dango | Wongo | Dongo | Sungo | Brongo | Strongo | Shango | Bingo | Pingo | Bongo |
|----------------------------|----|-------|------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1. nature | 11 | n.a. | 6 (55%) | 9 (82%) | 3 (27%) | 1 (9%) | 3 (27%) | 1 (9%) | 0 --- | 6 (55%) | 0 --- |
| 2. consumer interests | 7 | n.a. | 6 (86%) | 6 (86%) | 2 (29%) | 1 (14%) | 1 (14%) | 3 (43%) | 1 (14%) | 1 (14%) | 1 (14%) |
| 3 Humanitary | 12 | n.a. | 4 (33%) | 9 (75%) | 1 (8%) | 1 (8%) | 2 (17%) | 0 --- | 1 (8%) | 8 (67%) | 0 --- |
| 4 Labour rights | 6 | n.a. | 4 (67%) | 4 (67%) | 3 (50%) | 1 (17%) | 2 (33%) | 1 (17%) | 1 (17%) | 2 (33%) | 0 --- |
| 5 Social-economic: general | 10 | n.a. | 5 (50%) | 8 (80%) | 3 (30%) | 3 (30%) | 1 (10%) | 0 --- | 1 (10%) | 2 (20%) | 0 --- |
| 6. development cooperation | 10 | n.a. | 5 (50%) | 10 (100%) | 1 (10%) | 2 (20%) | 1 (10%) | 1 (10%) | 0 --- | 8 (80%) | 0 --- |



By 2009, only marginal shifts in their chosen role vis-à-vis companies can be expected from NGOs. Almost half of all the NGOs anticipate that their role will not change at all, although they do anticipate that the intensity of their interaction with companies will increase. The importance of two roles is expected to increase slightly: partnerships (Pingos) and strategic stakeholder dialogues (Strongos). NGOs are particularly interested in operational partnerships with firms. This illustrates their increasingly pragmatic orientation. The number of NGOs that considers (strategic) stakeholder dialogue an important tool of future interaction with firms increases slightly from one in eight to one in six. Labour rights NGOs and environmental NGOs in particular are pursuing stakeholder dialogue. But the majority of NGOs do not yet want to focus on a dialogue that involves relative interdependency.