

Europe Looks at the Third World: The EEC-NGO Experience

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The protectionist policy of the European Economic Community (EEC) has created a negative image of this western regional economic grouping in the eyes of Third World countries. For the EEC (composed of the United Kingdom, France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Ireland, Greece, Spain, and Portugal), such a policy is needed to foster regional self-sufficiency and economic growth. Thus, there is a need to protect local markets of its member-states from the incursion of foreign products, including those from the Third World. The underdeveloped nations, on the other hand, point out the contradictions in such a policy. Not only did these European countries, several of which were their former colonial masters, transform their (Third World) economies into appendages of the international capitalist system, but foreign economic assistance to the Third World also perpetuate the dependence of their economies on the external market. How can one, therefore, expect these underdeveloped nations to economically progress when rich industrialized nations refuse to buy their products?

This position of EEC governments, how-

ever, is being challenged by a sector of their populace, European development aid non-governmental organizations (NGOs), who believe that the imposition of protectionist policies is detrimental to the European Economic Community. Such policies will ultimately backfire on the EEC member-states because they also limit the potential market for European products since developing states will not earn enough to buy First World commodities.

More importantly, unlike most of their governments, these NGOs believe that the goal of international economic assistance to underdeveloped states must be the establishment of self-reliant economies and not the production of commodities for the world market. Such an economic scheme, they perceive, would benefit both the First and Third Worlds.

Moreover, development NGOs also stress that a prerequisite to the economic advancement of underdeveloped regions is their political liberation, i.e., economic progress can only be possible under a democracy. The success of these NGOs in concretizing this conviction has led to the recognition of their importance by respective governments. One significant manifestation of this is the establishment of an EEC-NGO Liaison Committee to facilitate the distribution of the Community's international development aid to developing regions through non-governmental organizations. One of the primary goals of this Committee is to assist Third World countries in their struggle for economic as well as political liberation.

This article will therefore examine the degree to which the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee has been successful in its effort to link international economic assistance to Third World development and democratization. The first part will give a brief background on European non-governmental organizations in general and their specific objectives as well as their respective governments' perception of them. The second part will examine the effectiveness of these NGOs in meeting their objectives. The obstacles to the success of such an endeavor will also be discussed.

European NGOs' Raison d'Etre

European NGOs are basically concerned with alleviating the plight of the poor in underdeveloped regions by perpetuating a local and national environment that would enable them to partake of the benefits of development. Initially, this was perceived as an act of charity or altruism more than anything else. In Holland, for example, two forces which initially pushed for development aid projects to the Third World were the Church and youth organizations. These began in the early '60s and '70s when the Church, under the influence of the Vatican II Council and the World Council of Churches began to be more involved in secular matters. The Church preached that "to be a true Christian, one should assume responsibility beyond those of the family, the community, the town and the nation". Thus the themes of "international social justice" and "Option for the Poor" became rallying cries of NGOs for development assistance to the Third World.

For the youth sector, on the other hand, the urgency to save the peoples of the Third World was a vision they held onto, frustrated as they were with their own parents' primary concern for prosperity.[1]

Later on, the need to enhance economic assistance to the Third World acquired a new dimension when it became apparent that the future of Europe, more than any other industrialized region, was closely linked to the development of the Third World. Such an interdependence was concretized in several forms, among which were volume of trade, cooperative agreements, and the flow of people and capital.[2]

Consequently, the NGOs acquired a negative view of their governments' protectionist policies and the decrease of European aid to developing regions. They pointed out that by not helping the Third World countries to economically progress, their countries will be forced to bear the repercussions of such an inward-looking strategy. For example, two to three million jobs have already been lost in the OECD nations because of the reduced import capacity of underdeveloped states.[3] Thus, Third World impoverishment also leads to the threat of poverty in industrialized countries. Aside from severe economic consequences,

one grave political impact of an introspective European economic policy is the continuing conflict among countries due to underdevelopment and inequality. This could aggravate the already existing threat to world peace and security. [4] Reinforcing this argument is the view that North-South cooperation is one of the more important ways of lessening the tensions of superpower rivalry.[5]

European non-governmental organizations, therefore, do not view themselves as replacing governments and major Western lending institutions in solving international trade and financial imbalances, but rather as venues for denouncing policies which damage or hinder the development of Third World nations. Such is an urgent task for the political as well as economic survival of Europe.[6]

Despite these common goals, NGOs are of different ideological tendencies. One tendency is dominantly Catholic and is politically linked to the Christian Democratic parties in Europe. There are two other tendencies that are mainly Protestant and which generally have less clear political links. They are regarded, however, as having close relations with Liberal and Socialist parties.[7]

Aside from their differing ideological inclinations, European NGOs have also adopted various approaches in regard to development assistance to the Third World. One is the welfare approach which is chiefly concerned with delivering services to specific groups like child sponsorship and famine relief.[8] Another strategy of assistance is the development approach which aims to increase the productive capacities of local communities towards the goal of self-reliance. Thus, one would find socio-educational projects like community and health development and food care. NGOs also assist in providing institutional support for economic projects, e.g., providing access for landless farmers to get bank credit or government subsidies.[9]

The last approach which is closely linked with efforts for democratization is the empowerment approach which views poverty as a result of political constraints. This scheme includes assisting members of local communities to articulate their needs. The rationale for this is that "economic development is only possible when all sections of the populace are allowed to freely express themselves and exercise their individual creativity".[10] Thus, emphasis is placed on popular participation in the decision-making process as well as the recognition of the legitimacy of dissent.

Perceptions of European governments about development NGOs. The effectiveness of non-governmental organizations in Third World development aid projects increasingly brings them to the attention of their respective governments. European governments, which do not have the means to effectively reach the poor population of developing countries, turn more and more to NGOs for assistance in

disseminating development aid at the grassroots level. An oft-cited reason is that NGOs are people-oriented and thus are in close contact with the poor, the target population of governmental development projects. Facilitating the grassroots reach of European NGOs are their links with local NGOs in the underdeveloped countries. Thus, there is the strong perception that "whereas governments address themselves to the governments of the Third World, the NGOs speak directly to the people of the country".[11]

Another reason is the efficient bureaucracy of NGOs. Being relatively smaller than most official development aid agencies, NGOs are more labor-intensive and better supervised. Aside from these, they adapt more easily to changing circumstances and are also cheaper to maintain. Their staff also tend to be more dedicated.[12]

Governments also believe that NGOs are in the best position to ensure that aid to local communities are not consumed passively but that the local populace are encouraged to organize themselves effectively towards the achievement of self-sufficiency.[13]

European governments have also resorted to using NGOs for political purposes. This comes from the realization that capital transfers from governments do not lead to economic and social development. Political mechanisms need to be set up for development aid to reach the target grassroots sectors. Moreover, there is a growing skepticism about the role of governments both in Europe and underdeveloped countries to implement development aid projects.[14] Such a perception intensified with the rise of authoritarian regimes in the Third World that were guilty of using economic assistance for the benefit of the leadership, instead of disbursing it for the lower strata of society.

Another advantage of utilizing non-governmental organizations is that these can implement projects in Third World countries where donor governments cannot or do not wish to have relations with. For example, when a European country refuses to have diplomatic relations with a Third World nation due to the repressive policies of the latter's government, but at the same time wishes to help the people of that Third World nation, it courses its economic assistance through NGOs.

Sometimes, even with the presence of diplomatic relations, European governments that want to establish close political ties with the various political and social forces of society find it more convenient to do so through their own NGOs. Thus, it is not rare to find European parties using NGOs to forge close ties with Third World political parties, trade unions and even liberation movements.[15]

The importance of NGOs to European governments is also seen in the context of mobilizing their societies to implement development policies in the Third World. This

is especially true in West Germany where the need to assist NGOs is seen as a way of encouraging pluralism, making everyone contribute to this important endeavor.[16]

The increasing recognition given to NGOs by their governments, however, can only be attributed to the persistent efforts of NGOs themselves in pressuring their governments to adopt a more relevant and progressive view of development aid to the Third World.

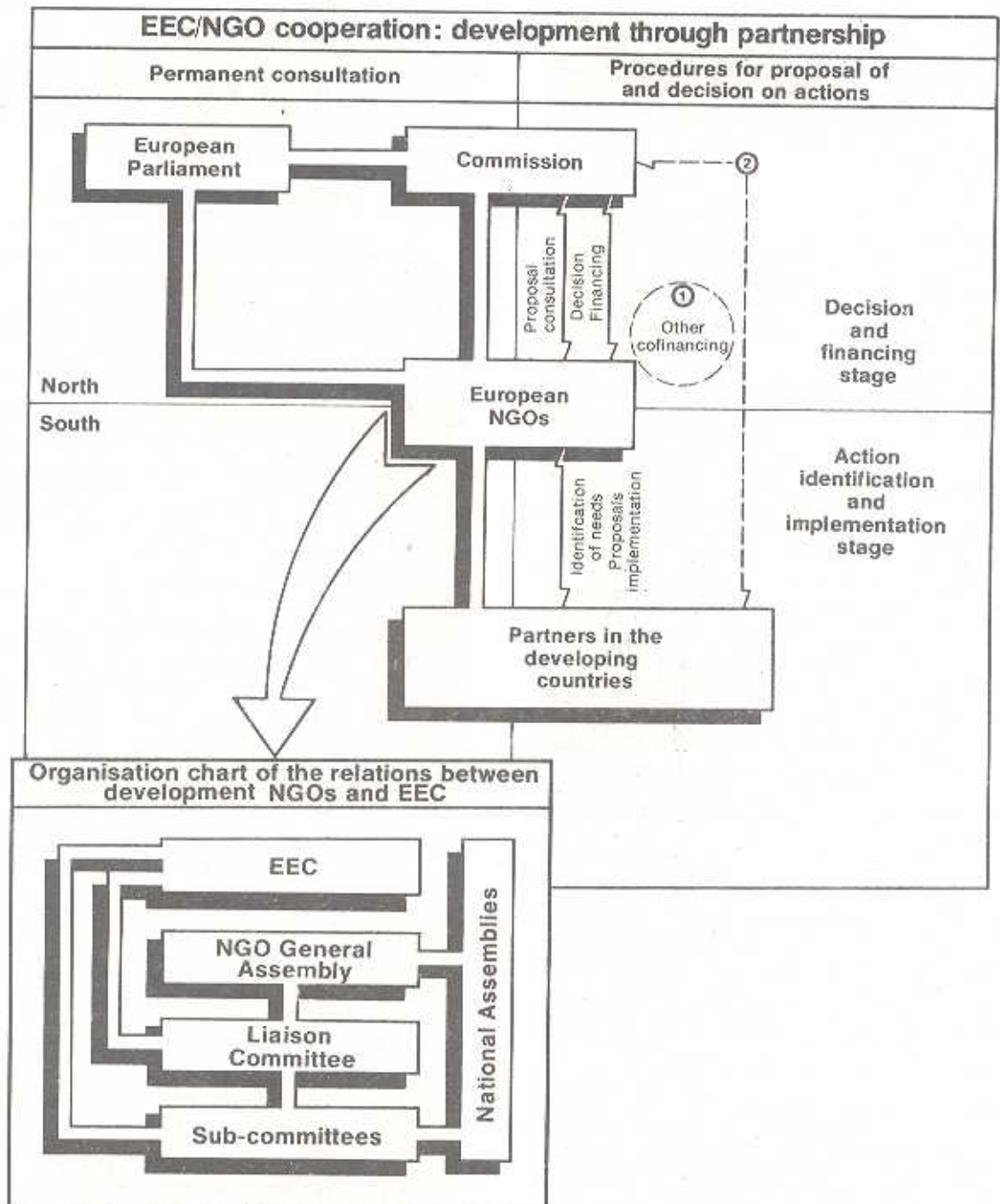
Mechanisms linking NGOs to their governments

Among the European NGOs, the German Stiftungen (Foundations), are the more highly politicized, i.e., German political parties generally have their own NGOs. For example, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung is linked with the Social Democratic Party of West Germany, while the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is associated with the country's Christian Democratic Union Party. The Stiftungen, in general, administer half of the German government's aid program which are all channeled through the NGOs. It is not rare to find the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation financing 100% of their NGO projects in the Third World.[17]

The relationship which the German NGOs have with their governments in regard to the financing of development aid projects is more the exception rather than the rule. The usual arrangement is co-financing, where the NGO and the government both contribute a certain percentage of the funding for the project. The Belgian and French governments, for example, provide financial support to their NGOs on a project basis. NGOs are also sometimes given tax exemptions as additional incentive by its home government. But what is important is the attempt to institutionalize NGO funding by governments. The Dutch Parliament, in 1967, for example, unanimously adopted a motion obliging the government to assist development NGOs in their activities. It was this legislation which gave rise to four important Dutch development aid organizations, namely, CEBEMO (Catholic), ICCO (Protestant), NOVIB (secular) and later HIVOS (Humanist).[18]

Apart from co-financing, many governments also contribute funds to NGO developmental/educational activities in the donor countries. NGOs are contracted by their governments to serve as an executing or implementing agency for certain official aid activities. There is an increasing trend in recent years to channel food and emergency aid through NGOs.

The closer relations between European governments and NGOs also witnessed the creation of other structures to facilitate smooth communication between the two parties. In Denmark, for example, development NGOs have easy access to civil servants and



Source: Partners for Development

decision-makers in central administration.[19] This only indicates the importance the Danish government gives to NGO activities in the Third World.

Development aid NGOs as Third World allies

The nature, goals, and objectives of European development aid NGOs thus make them natural allies of Third World countries that want to pursue a more people-oriented approach to economic progress. The emphasis on grassroots participation is compatible with the quest of peoples of underdeveloped regions to have a say in the economic projects which affect their lives. This sharply contrasts with the Third World experience of "development from above" advocated by major international creditors like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Such a development strategy emphasizes the role of the leadership and its technocrats to fashion out the economic programs of a country and to ensure its implementation without consultation from the people. Moreover, by stressing the need for political participation in development efforts, NGOs are able to lay down the foundation for democratic structures at even the lowest level of society. These structures provide the context in which economic self-sufficiency is attained, i.e., it does not perpetuate a parasitic relationship with foreign creditors. The effort is welcomed by the peoples of the Third World who, though needing the financial and technical support of these NGOs, want to retain their independence, particularly as initiators of development projects, and control of their human resources.

EEC-NGOs and an Alternative View of EEC Aid to the Third World

As stated earlier, the formation of the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee ten years ago epitomizes the recognition given by donor-governments to European NGOs in effectively implementing development projects in the Third World. This Committee, which is composed of around 500 organizations working in the fields of overseas projects, food and energy aid, and others, pursues the following objectives: 1) To strengthen the collaboration of non-governmental organizations with the European Community in all fields as well as safeguard the autonomy of these NGOs, i.e., preventing governments from using NGOs as "instruments" for the implementation of Community development policy; 2) to promote collaboration between NGOs at the national and European level; 3) to encourage the promotion of non-governmental organizations, communities, and local groups in Third World countries, particularly those which are most vulnerable to political or religious repression; and 4) to contribute to the education of

the European public on the causes and possible remedies of underdevelopment in the Third World. More importantly, the committee seeks to mobilize public opinion in Western Europe for concrete actions of solidarity with Third World peoples. Thus, development education in Europe is seen as complementary to development efforts in the South. Finally, the Committee promotes a development policy in Europe which takes into account the political aims of the NGOs, that of accelerating the political unification of the Community, which they believe, is important to the Third World.[20]

The efforts, therefore, of the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee complements worldwide endeavors to establish economic and political structures which help foster interdependence instead of dependence between the European and Third World nations. It tells the ordinary European, for example, that there is a need to extend aid to underdeveloped regions. Only with economic progress in the Third World will the market for European goods expand, and consequently, will jobs for the present 16 million unemployed in Europe be generated.[21] This initiative is part of a continuing North-South dialogue for world equality. One way by which all these are disseminated is through the publication and dissemination of information bulletins, e.g., the NGO-EC News as well as research work on this subject matter.[22]

Aside from the conscientization program, the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee also paved the way for the following: Firstly, it further strengthened the existing European NGO network. Secondly, it gave these NGOs a source of funding for its projects in the Third World,



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i.e., the EEC is now a co-financier.[23] Thirdly, the Liaison Committee also provided a venue for NGOs to dialogue with other EEC pressure groups working to lessen aid to Third World countries. For example, there have been constant dialogues between the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee and the COPA/COGECA, the European Community's influential pressure group of farmers, which is a strong advocate of protectionist policies.[24]

All these provide a venue for the European NGOs to intervene in shaping the nature of the EEC's foreign policy, particularly on economic issues such as international trade and debt. Regarding trade in particular, the question often raised is the need to take into account not only the short-term economic benefits of trade but also its long-term consequences. Trade should not perpetuate inequality and dependence.

The debt issue is another problem which greatly concerns the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee. A Conference on Debt was recently held in Lima, Peru, organized by Latin American NGOs in collaboration with the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee. Some 177 South NGOs and 66 North NGOs attended to discuss an action program on the debt crisis. The Conference called for action on three fronts: "1) the legal front which is concerned with the question of the legitimacy of the debt incurred by Third World countries; 2) the economic front which focuses on the campaign against the banks and multilateral institutions; and 3) the social front which emphasizes the need to coordinate activities with the trade unions, church and other people's organization with regard to the debt issue".[25]

Efforts of the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee also focus on "macro-policies", i.e., not only on economic but political issues as well. The NGOs have come out openly, for example, in support of liberation struggles against colonialism, the need to establish a New International Economic Order and the fight of the Third World peoples against repressive totalitarian regimes.[26] The Liaison Committee has also declared their fight against apartheid, e.g. the imposition of economic sanctions against South Africa and the need to assist the victims of racial discrimination, which not only refers to the black population of South Africa but also the ethnic minorities used as scapegoats for the Continent's current economic crisis.[27] Other socio-political issues of concern to the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee are that of women and environmental development as well as human rights. The Committee has also lambasted the superpower rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union which has adversely affected the economic progress of developing regions as seen in Central America and Southeast Asia.[28]

Through these efforts, the European Com-

munity has come to view the Committee as an added dimension to the Community's development policy enabling public funds to be used to express the solidarity of "unofficial" civilians in Europe with those in the Third World.[29] Community aid, for example, only represents about 40% of the total amount that the NGOs allocate to these projects. Thus, extra effort is made to strengthen the information drive on the need for the European people to assist the Third World nations.[30]

Because of the people-orientedness and efficiency of the NGOs, the European Community has also tapped them as a vehicle for the distribution of these funds to developing regions which are raised by their member-states, particularly in areas which are politically sensitive to foreign governments.[31] Thus, the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee is perceived to be a venue whereby the cooperation between the European Commission and the non-governmental organizations could provide a means of expressing European solidarity at a non-official level towards the poor sections of the population in the Third World.[32]

Structures for NGO Intervention in the European Community

The effectiveness of the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee depended to a great extent on the mechanisms created in order to allow it to actively intervene in shaping the European Community's policy towards the Third World. In terms of structure, the Liaison Committee is not integrated in the European Community. It



is more of an autonomous and independent body which is set up to work with the Community.[33] It is with the Committee whereby the European Community (EC) discusses the problems of development aid to the Third World.

The importance given to the the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee by the EC is based on the significance accorded by European NGOs in general. Such a relevance was given to the Committee when the process of representation in it was transformed such that NGOs were the ones who elected the members of the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee.[34] This was all part of the attempt of European NGOs, both at a national and international level, to unite and to consolidate the NGO network despite ideological differences at national and community levels.

This effort was seen among the French NGOs, for example, which took the initiative to form what is referred to as "Collectifs". These were groups of like-minded NGOs which moved on to form an "Intercollectif", which was in turn, composed of representatives coming from various "Collectifs" of different ideological persuasions. This was an attempt of the NGOs to get to know each other better and to embark on common activities which will not only firm up their solidarity with the Third World, but also enhance their effectiveness in creating awareness among Europeans regarding developing countries.[35] In 1983, this "Intercollectif" set up the Development Cooperative Commission, a bi-partisan structure which united French NGOs with around 14 French Ministries engaged in development projects. Such an arrangement provided a means for dialogue concerning official French aid programs to the Third World.[36] On an international level, the "Intercollectif" elect their own delegate to the Brussels European Community General Assembly and invite members of national NGOs to join their activities.[37]

Such an effort is duplicated in the other European Community member-states where hundreds of NGOs come together on a national level to meet and to discuss experiences in the Third World. They then elect delegates from their national associations to the European National Assembly of NGOs, which is the governing body of the association of NGOs working with the European Commission. The objectives of this Assembly are the following: "1) to enable the European Commission to report its activities to the NGOs; 2) to enable the participants to discuss these reports and future strategies and where necessary, to make decisions on questions relating to the different fields of development; 3) to elect and confirm the membership of the Liaison Committee; and 4) to enable the five work groups, i.e., the work groups on emergency aid, food matters, volunteers, developmental education and co-financing, to consult with members of the Association and to dis-

cuss the nature of their work since the previous Assembly".[38]

The working relationship of European NGOs and the European Community. The strengthening of the NGO network at the Community level through their National General Assembly is part of a continuing effort for effective NGO intervention in regard to the European Commission's development policy towards the Third World. NGO representatives elected by the General Assembly to the Liaison Committee are tasked with consulting with the European Commission (EC) about development aid.

Such a relationship, however, did not emerge immediately. It was part of a long process which started with NGO National Assemblies, then to the formation of a European General Assembly of NGOs and finally to the creation of a truly representative EEC-NGO Liaison Committee. The relationship of the Liaison Committee with the European Commission also developed gradually. It was only in 1983 that a permanent Secretariat in Brussels, the headquarters of the European Commission, was set-up.[39] This facilitated the continuous dialogue between the EEC bodies and the EEC-NGOs. It has had a great impact in that according to popular perception at the moment, the Liaison Committee is the only body which provides a permanent link between the "official" and "unofficial" European Commissions in matters of cooperation for development. Furthermore, the Liaison Committee is the agency responsible for initiating activities which aim to further integrate the peoples of Europe in community development policy.[40]

Presently, the EEC-NGO network covers about 500 organizations working on overseas projects, food aid, emergency aid, and sending volunteers overseas. What is interesting to note is that an increasing number of NGOs have also promoted development educational activities that have campaigned more on political issues instead of on development information generally given out by institutions and governments.[41] Initially, the Liaison Committee, particularly during its first seven years from 1976 - 1983, did not raise political issues because it was more concerned with establishing a good working relationship with the EEC by creating structures which would coordinate financing of projects.[42] But later on, the Liaison Committee found it very difficult to separate economic issues from political ones, particularly when political constraints in Third World countries prevented the realization of the Committee's economic objectives.

Among the structures which helped strengthen the effectiveness of the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee was the creation of sub-committees. The Sub-Committee on Euronaid, for example, which was set up in 1980 as an offshoot of a special food aid group established by European NGOs in 1975, was

established to facilitate NGO food aid program as well as act as a critical conscience of the European Community's aid policy.[43] The Sub-Committee on Volunteers of the NGO Liaison Committee, on the other hand, operates as a bridge between NGOs for Volunteers and the European Commission. It was set up in 1983 and it attempts to create opportunities for exchange of views, knowledge and experience acquired by the Commission and by NGO development workers who are (or have been) exposed to everyday realities in the Third World. Another of its more important goals is to search for popular ways of cooperation between the Commission and the NGOs in the field of personnel assistance to developing countries.[44]

Among the EEC's official bodies, it is the European Parliament which has been most supportive of the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee's economic activities. Last year, upon the initiative of the European Parliament, appropriations were added to Article 936, established since 1984, which sought to continue the Community's effort to assist refugees and displaced persons in Asia and Latin America in the period after the emergency relief stage.[45]

Members of the European Parliament, however, also realize the need to consider political realities in extending development aid to Third World countries. In 1987, the European Parliament called for aid to Chile to be given directly to the people through trustworthy NGOs. Such a call had to be made because the European Parliamentarians noted that aid transported through governmental agencies did not reach target sectors of the country. The MPs have also been very concerned with the trade and aid aspects of the EC which politically affect non-EC countries, particularly regarding the issue of development.[46]

But as a whole, the European Community, through the efforts of European NGOs, have increasingly recognized the importance of Third World development to economic and political interests of Europe. The European Commission was particularly active in preparing for and implementing the Council of Europe's North-South campaign. It sought the assistance of NGO Liaison Committee bodies in facilitating the participation of NGOs in awareness projects supporting the campaign.[47]

The co-financing of EEC-NGO development projects

Funding for NGO development projects in the Third World, in general, and awareness campaigns, in particular, has been officially supplied by the European Community since 1967. Article 941 of the EEC Charter "covers the co-financing with NGOs of development projects in developing countries and of operations to raise public awareness in Europe".[48]

The various projects co-financed, which numbered about 2,000 from 1976 to 1986, emphasized integrated rural development, health, education, and training. What was notable, though, in all these projects, was their humanitarian orientation and apparent disregard for political leanings of recipient governments.[49]

In terms of the amount of money involved, co-financed projects are usually small and manageable, i.e., the average EEC contribution is around 115.00 ECU (European Currency Unit) per project.[50] To get more funds, the NGOs tap other sources like contributions from member-states and the United Nations.

Generally, the NGOs find it difficult to raise funds from private and autonomous sources like individual donors. NGOs have complete accountability for all public funds entrusted to them through the EEC.[51]

The success of this co-financing endeavor is seen in the increase of net outflow of EEC-NGOs by 354% from 1976-1981.[52] Annual commitment of the EEC to co-finance projects as well as the rate of their utilization have also shown a positive growth as seen in Table I:[53]

Year	Annual Commitment (M ECU)	Utilization rate (%)
1976	2.5	100
1979	12.2	98
1982	26.9	95
1984	34.4	83
1985	42.4	99
1986	45.0	98
1987	62.8	99

Exchange rates of the ECU*

- 1 ECU equals:
- 44,01 Belgian francs
 - 7,94 Danish Kroner
 - 2,14 Deutsche Mark
 - 6,61 French Francs
 - 0,71 Irish Pounds
 - 1462,59 Italian Lira
 - 44,01 Luxembourg francs
 - 2,42 Dutch Guilders
 - 0,67 English Pounds Sterling
 - 133,59 Greek Drachmas
 - 135,70 Pesetas
 - 142,34 Escudos
- *rate for March 1986

In 1987, 432 development projects were co-financed and carried out in 96 developing countries. The geographical breakdown reveals that 43% of the total went to African countries south of the Sahara, 32% to Latin America, 18% to Asia, 5.5% to the Mediterranean area and 1.5% to the Pacific area.[54] These were projects that were not only concerned with development and raising public

awareness, but also included those that were related to food aid, emergency aid, food and agricultural problems, and South Africa's apartheid policy. Because requests for funding are consistently increasing, it is most likely that budget for such activities will also increase in the coming years.[55]

The EEC uses a set of criteria with regard in particular "to the nature of the applicant organization, its registered place of business and the center of its operations within the European Community" when deciding which groups should get funding. The applicant is required to be autonomous and non-profit making and to have effective support from the population wherever the NGO is based in Europe. Furthermore, the applicant is required to demonstrate personal commitment and experience and to have a proven track record in the developing country of interest.[56]

Another issue to be considered is the nature of the project, whether it is able to encourage and generate participation by the recipient in all stages of the project, starting with its conceptualization. Another basic requirement for co-financing is that the recipient should be among the least favored groups of the population in the developing country of concern.[57]



The emphasis given by EEC-NGO projects on participation of NGOs from developing nations has created a need to enforce a strong working relationship between NGOs of the North, or the developed nations, and those of the South, or the underdeveloped countries. As a result, consultations, seminars, and workshops were held in developing countries to allow for NGO North-South exchanges of

experience and information.[58] Sometimes, particularly in relation to emergency aid, there is direct collaboration between NGOs in the South and the European Commission through an EEC delegation. The ideal situation, thus, for European NGOs is not only to have permanent contact with its European institutions, i.e., the Parliament and the Commission, but also with their partners in the South.[59]

The success of the EEC-NGO Liaison Committee can be seen in the heightened awareness by the European public of issues affecting the Third World, such as self-development, environmental preservation, role of women in agricultural production, and appropriate technology. Proof of this can be seen in increased voluntary contributions of individuals to NGOs. It is popularly believed that, in general, non-governmental development activities are better known to the public than aid extended by governments or inter-governmental organizations.[60]

Because of all these, European non-governmental organizations are perceived to have indeed played an important role in transforming the European Community's foreign policy into one of solidarity towards the peoples of the Third World.

Obstacles to Overcome

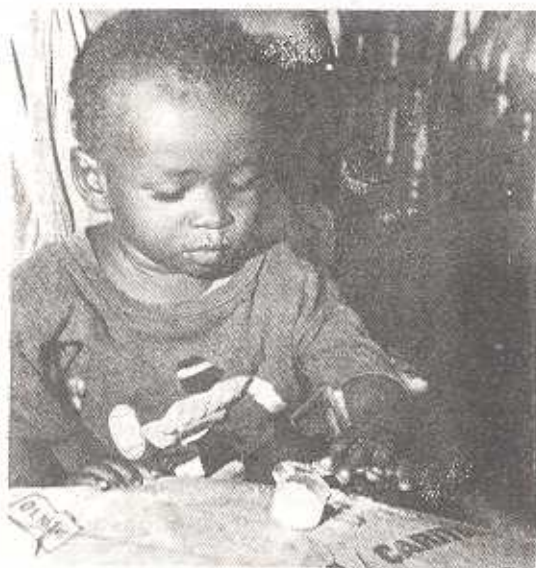
Despite the positive impact of EEC-NGOs in terms of increased development aid to the Third World, there is still much left to be desired in how NGOs relate with one another, their own governments, other European institutions, and their NGO partners in the South.

NGOs are of different ideological persuasions which still sometimes prevent the achievement of consensus on critical issues such as debt, arms sales, and the establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO). Some would argue, however, that this situation could be improved if NGOs attempted to communicate more with one another and to share with each other information about their own programs, grassroots experience, policies of their respective national governments, as well as expertise and training. Thus, a more "multilateral" approach to development at the European and international levels is required.[61]

In addition, an NGO network which will give NGOs a means of communicating with governments and the public, provide a means of gathering information on NGO activities and create a venue for members to discuss shared problems.[62]

These are some ways through which European NGOs may enhance overall efficiency, thereby making it easier for them to achieve common goals. Moreover, a united NGO network which is engaged in solid research and training activities will enable it to be in a better bargaining position vis-a-vis donor agencies and governments.[63]

Meanwhile, NGOs encounter several dif-



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difficulties in their relationships with funding agencies. Firstly, although the European Parliament has been willing to support budget proposals for NGO activities, the more powerful Council of Ministers of the EEC have, on the other hand, been generally reluctant to do so.[64] Secondly, with respect to co-financing, governments usually provide NGOs with specifications about projects they are willing to fund, and NGOs sometimes have no choice but to accept these even though these may not coincide with their priorities. Thirdly, when NGOs accept substantial government funding for their projects, their activities may substantially increase, leading them to expand organizationally, but governments are not always prepared to give extra funding for increased overhead costs.[65] Fourthly, NGOs are sometimes reluctant to accept governmental food aid programs because of differences in goals pursued. For example, quite a number of governments throw excess food away despite starvation in the Third World. Fifthly, some NGOs still feel that to have projects co-financed by the EEC could also mean losing their autonomy.

The European Community and funding agencies, on the other hand, have criticized NGOs as sometimes acting more like pressure groups, i.e., they question operational procedures of the European Commission without really knowing or understanding these; and as sometimes wanting to do everything themselves even when it would be better to farm out work and funds to more appropriate channels like governments of recipient countries and international agencies like the UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees).[66] Critics have also pointed out that NGOs sometimes accomplish projects in isolation from their host governments and therefore hardly influence national policy.[67]

Problems have also been identified with respect to relationships between North and South NGOs. Firstly, it was noted that there is a need to link NGOs' experiences with local grassroot groups and specific projects, on one hand, and public policies which affect the development process, on the other. For example, in many countries, the benefits of projects or programs at the micro-level, i.e., the community level, are negated by the impact of such macro-level policies like restrictive trade barriers or government austerity measures.[68]

Secondly, there is still no NGO approach to development which would require a close collaboration of NGO partners in the South. There is a need to integrate NGOs into the development process, a task that requires long-term funding because the goal of working towards people-based development needs building self-sustaining institutions.

Thirdly, when grassroots groups linked to foreign NGOs lose their autonomy, local leaders sometimes give more attention to sources of foreign capital rather than towards their own communities. (# 12a) Moreover, because these NGOs are Western-oriented, there is sometimes the fear that NGOs of the South may lose their indigenous culture. Closely associated with this is the possible negative impact of a practice of funding agencies to give support only to those NGOs which are in ideological agreement with them. For example, church NGOs prefer to support their own specific religious streams in countries where they form small minorities. As a consequence, local groups linked with ideologically dominant NGOs in the North may be subjected to the latter's rigidity and inflexibility.[69]

Fourthly, NGOs in the South have also expressed the need for closer contacts with European NGOs in order to inform each other about their respective activities, political constraints they may face, and other issues which affect the implementation of development projects. They also want to expand their social bases in the North and gain wider support [70] by establishing new mechanisms for dialogue between NGOs and potential funders. A critical analysis of North-South links, e.g., the impact of the international debt crisis, is also required. This will serve as the foundation on which the two groups of NGOs can join forces to influence the public, governments and international agencies, especially in pushing for progressive solutions to Third World development problems. Such a partnership might also serve to counteract the mendicant image European mass media paint of Third World nations.

Lastly, NGOs in the South also see the need to join forces with NGOs in the North in forging alliances with broader social movements, e.g., women, trade unions, and environmentalists, nationally and internationally, in order to ensure their own legitimacy and to

effectively persuade governments to embrace an alternative development strategy.[71]

All these issues will have to be urgently addressed because otherwise, the work of NGOs with regard to development aid will remain a subordinate element in the relationship of the EEC and the Third World. For the moment, there are still very powerful private sector groups in the Community which continue to influence trade policy and which create a far greater overall impact on Third World countries than development NGOs.[72]

Laying Down the Foundations of a Third World Approach to Development Aid

Despite all these hindrances to the success of the EEC-NGOs, it cannot be denied that they have definitely laid down the foundation of an alternative development approach to the Third World. Unlike the more established international lending agencies like the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), EEC-NGOs have looked upon economic assistance to the Third World as a means of achieving self-sufficiency and self-reliance and not one that will perpetuate the latter's dependency on creditor nations or institutions. They argue that only in such a context can meaningful interdependence exist. An underdeveloped Third World only brings about a worldwide political crisis of inequality.

Furthermore, NGO development aid goes beyond economic concerns, i.e., it also aims to facilitate the democratization process in developing regions by emphasizing people's participation in projects. Thus, economic assistance is oriented towards the grassroots level, in contrast to loans from the IMF/WB which are administered on the government level.

Although mechanisms for the realization of EEC-NGO goals have also been criticized, it is notable that they have provided an important starting point for consolidating NGO efforts at

both national and international spheres. The setting-up of a European NGO network at the Community level has facilitated activities which have conscientized not only governments about the Third World, but also European peoples. The EEC-NGO Liaison Committee has also provided an official structure for NGO intervention in the European Community's development projects in underdeveloped regions. More importantly, the creation of the Committee has also formalized the recognition which European governments have accorded NGOs, and their distinctive approach to aid for development. This is important particularly to NGOs working in countries under authoritarian regimes. Because they advocate popular empowerment as essential to achieving economic progress, they are often accused of perpetuating "subversion".

The EEC-NGO network also provides a model to be emulated by their counterparts in the South. Only when there is unity can there be strength, especially in bargaining for more influence in decision-making in government. Thus, the emphasis on continuing dialogue and exchange of information on research, training, and other activities, is part of an arduous process to form a united front among NGOs who share common objectives, but may be of different ideological persuasions.

The EEC-NGO Liaison Committee of the European Community has indeed become a vital venue for undertaking meaningful NGO work. At this point, one can only be optimistic and believe that political will and determination will help overcome the obstacles mentioned. Such optimism stems from the fact that only a little over a decade ago, it was quite unthinkable that the European Community would even bother tapping non-governmental organizations to implement EEC development aid projects. All these would have not been possible without the accomplishments of and pressure from the European NGOs themselves.

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