MICROPAPER on the NGO stakeholder Group and the GFAR Process

I. Definitions, types, and roles of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)

A. Growth of NGOs

In the previous decades, there has been an upsurge of people grouping themselves to form organizations, associations, foundations and similar institutions to assist in delivering human services, promote grass-root economic development, prevent environmental degradation, protect civil rights and pursue other objectives which are traditionally addressed by governments.

The “phenomenon” of this increase in voluntary organizations are motivated (1) from "below" in the form of spontaneous grass-roots movements; (2) from the "outside" through the actions of various public and private institutions, and (3) from "above" in the form of governmental policies (Salamon, as cited by Maslyukivska, 1999).

Salamon (1994) argues that the most basic force in the creation of these voluntary organizations is that “ordinary people decide to take matters into their own hands and organize to improve their conditions or seek basic rights.”

Also, there have been a variety of outside pressures. For instance, in Latin America, the Catholic Church has played a significant role in helping the urban and rural poor. Various private voluntary organizations in the North have also contributed to this growth. In the 1960s and 1970s, many North American and European organizations have focused on "empowerment" from their traditional emphasis of fostering humanitarian relief.

In developing countries, such as in Asia, governments have started to facilitate the establishment of farmers’ cooperatives as a rural development strategy. Egyptian and Pakistani five-year plans have stressed the participation of nongovernmental organizations as a way to ensure popular participation in development.

One of the by-products of global economic slowdown and oil crisis in 1970s and the recession of the 1980s has been a new-found interest in "assisted self-reliance" or "participatory development" (Maslyukivska, 1999). This strategy stresses the need to engage the grassroots through a variety of nongovernmental organizations, which then started to serve as “interlocutors” between development aid institutions and the community.

Relatedly, the considerable global economic growth has contributed to creating a sizeable urban middle class in Latin America, Asia and Africa whose leadership was critical to the emergence of private nongovernmental organizations. Finally, and more recently, one important factor that has led to the upsurge of NGOs both in the North and in the South is the dramatic revolution in information and communication technology (ICT). ICT revolution has virtually made the world borderless. The widespread dissemination of the computer, fiber-optic cable, and the internet open even the world’s most remote areas to the expanded communication links required for mass organization and concerted actions.
B. NGO Definitions

Broadly, the term "nongovernment organization" is an association of people that (1) is independent of governmental, military or intergovernmental bodies; (2) is formally constituted as a charity or not-for-profit organisation; (3) provides services and/or mobilises public opinion on specific themes; and (4) has a mission to benefit a wider part of the community/society.¹

The meaning of the term “NGO” varies. In the United States, NGOs can be referred to as "private voluntary organizations" while many NGOs in Africa prefer to be called "voluntary development organizations."

However, this definition does not (seem to) include scientific or academic associations fora of scientists/academics. Neither it is clear as to whether it includes educational institutions like universities and colleges, of which many are involved in the cause-oriented activities. It appears, then, that such broad definition refers more to what an NGO is not.

It is difficult to give a precise definition for an NGO, especially if one elevates it to a polemical discussion. Suffice it to say, there have been many attempts to provide a definition acceptable to all. Various multi-lateral institutions like the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have their own definition of NGOs. Also, following the Rio Summit's definition of 'Major Groups', the definition of NGOs in three Rio Conventions² is kept very broad, and essentially covers any organization that subscribes to the conventions' objectives. These major groups include indigenous people; groups representing women, youth, workers, farmers; local governments, the scientific community, business and industry, grassroots and religious organizations, trade unions, businesses, and other NGOs (international, national and local). All three Conventions call for active partnerships with NGOs to further implementation of the articles of the convention.

In most cases, the following are the common elements found in the definition of an NGO³:

- A non-profit making, voluntary, service-oriented/development oriented organization, either for the benefit of members (a grassroots organization) or of other members of the population (an agency).
- An organization of private individuals who believe in certain basic social principles and who structure their activities to bring about development to communities that they are servicing.
- Social development organization assisting in empowerment of people.
- An organization or group of people working independent of any external control with specific objectives and aims to fulfil tasks that are oriented to bring about desirable change in a given community or area or situation.
- An organization not affiliated to political parties, generally engaged in working for aid, development and welfare of the community.

¹ A definition of an NGO as provided by Ann Waters-Bayer of the NGO Committee.
² Convention on Biodiversity, Convention on Climate Change and Convention to Combat Desertification
³ Cited from Maslyukivska, 1999.
• Organization committed to the root causes of the problems trying to better the quality of life especially for the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized in urban and rural areas.
• Organizations established by and for the community without or with little intervention from the government; they are not only a charity organization, but work on socio-economic-cultural activities.
• An organization that is flexible and democratic in its organization and attempts to serve the people without profit for itself.

C. Categories of NGOs

Broadly, NGOs can be categorized mainly as (1) operational and (2) advocacy\(^4\). This differentiation is important as regards to the kind of interaction one NGO has with another entity. For instance, an NGO may have policy dialogue type of cooperation with a multilateral institution but it has an operational type of cooperation with a number of “smaller” NGO it deals with in the field. This distinction is a reflection of the developmental roles that individual NGOs fulfils.

**Operational NGOs** can be regarded as those whose main area of action are geared towards the contribution or delivery of basic social welfare services (e.g., health, sanitation, emergency relief), and environmental protection and management. NGOs of this category has a range of programs, organizational structures, operational orientations, and areas of operation, both in terms of programs and geographical focus. They exist from local to international levels.

On the other hand, **advocacy NGOs**, are those whose main orientation is toward policy advocacy or actions that address specific concerns, points of view, or interests. In the development context, advocacy NGOs work to influence policies and practices of governments, development institutions, other actors in the development arena, and the public. This category of NGO usually are at national and international levels. While often working individually, advocacy NGOs increasingly are forming national and international alliances and networks that link groups with similar interests. They usually serve as “watchdogs” or as “voice” that they consider otherwise would not be heard in social, economic, and political processes.

Although they vary significantly on philosophy, purpose, expertise, program approach, and scope of activities, NGOs are generally development-oriented. This notwithstanding, it must be recognized that a single NGO has varying roles in the continuum of NGOs from the local level, to the national level, and to the regional and international levels. As such a single NGO can assume several roles and functions.

D. Levels of Operations

Finally, there is also a concern on the level of operations of the NGOs. For instance, among a category of NGOs, it is possible to distinguish between international-level NGOs (which are often headquartered in developed countries and has operations at various developing

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countries); regional-level and national-level NGOs, whose primary orientations and interests are toward issues and interests in the region or countries in which they are based; and local-level or community-based NGOs whose operations are localized in specific geographical areas. NGOs operating at the regional and international levels are those which usually have technical and organizational capacities, particularly in terms of networking. Likewise, there are those which are capable to serve as intermediaries between governments, development agencies, and other NGOs, channelling information, resources, and technical support. Still many other international and national NGOs are becoming conduits of donor support to smaller NGOs.

At every level, NGOs are linking with each other and collaborate as networks and consortia, sectorally and at the national and international levels, such as in the case of agricultural research for development (ARD) where NGOs have continued to advocate on the need for greater focus on farmer-led research and extension, sustainable farming systems, greater recognition of indigenous knowledge, and gender equity, among others.

II. NGOs and the international agricultural research for development (ARD)

The Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s has also stimulated the proliferation of non-government organizations (NGOs). Despite the technological merits of Green Revolution which resulted to increased productivity per unit area, there was a growing discontent about its allegedly social and environmental impacts. The application of biotechnology and genetic engineering in the 1980s and the persistent rural poverty are but among the issues that have led to a wider NGOs involvement in the agriculture sector.

Recognizing the potential impacts of scientific research on poverty and food security, civil society organizations (CSOs) have engaged themselves in a dialogue with the various actors in ARD. For the last two decades, CSOs have been the targets of many multilateral and bilateral organizations in development partnerships. At the same time, the academic and scientific community including the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) has opened its doors to other partners such as NGOs, the private sector, and farmers’ organizations either at the national, regional or international level.

For instance, the Lucerne Declaration5 in 1995, the CGIAR was encouraged to continue its efforts to develop a more open and participatory system. The NGO Committee (NGOC) was established as a system-level partnership committee to strengthen the CGIAR's dialogue with members of civil society and to complement existing efforts by CGIAR centres to establish, maintain, strengthen and expand working relationships with NGOs. It was given the mandate to provide perspectives and experiences of civil society on policies, priorities, strategies and methodologies relevant to the work of CGIAR Centre managers, scientists and Boards. Such perspectives should contribute to making the science promoted by the Centres relevant to the needs and circumstances of poor farmers in the developing world.

During a CGIAR meeting in late 1996, representatives from several research and development organisations from the North and South founded the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR). This was to bring together the key stakeholders in agricultural research for development (ARD): farmer organisations (FOs), national

5 Adopted at the CGIAR Ministerial-Level Meeting held at Lucerne, Switzerland, in February 1995.
agricultural research systems (NARS) in developing countries, national and international NGOs, advanced research institutes (ARIs) in industrialised countries, donors and the private sector.

The GFAR aims at building up a global system of agricultural research to reduce poverty, attain food security and promote sustainable management of natural resources. A major emphasis of GFAR is to strengthen the systems of agricultural research, going beyond the NARIs to integrate universities, NGOs, farmers and the private sector. It seeks to facilitate exchange of information and knowledge, foster partnerships among the stakeholders in ARD, strengthen the capacity of NARS to generate and disseminate technology to fit the users' needs, enable participation of all stakeholders in formulating a global framework for ARD, and increase awareness among policymakers of the need for long-term investment in agricultural research.

This has gained the interests of the NGOs. As such, many of them has engaged in various discourse and activities being facilitated by GFAR, particularly in areas concerning linking global issues with local realities, such as intellectual property rights, and access to information and genetic materials which are considered “are hot topics” to many development-oriented NGOs.

III. NGOs in the GFAR Process

The NGO stakeholders welcome GFAR as a platform for exchanging ideas and building collaboration between diverse actors in ARD. This provide an evidence of the willingness to change strategies and the desire to build partnerships with stakeholders in agricultural development. GFAR is viewed as a mechanism to discuss and find new ways of collaborating with stakeholders to create useful knowledge and to use it in addressing problems of poverty, food insecurity and degradation of natural resources.

GFAR also rely on various regional fora in mobilizing stakeholders to get involved in this partnership building by opening up to other stakeholders and to interact with other subregions and regions. To facilitate this building up process, in GFAR 2000 Conference, the NGO stakeholder group named contact persons in each of the major regions of the globe (except North America) who are responsible for keeping NGOs and FOs in their regions informed about GFAR opportunities and encouraging as many NGOs as possible to participate. All agreed that the first priority is to ensure involvement of NGOs and FOs in influencing research agendas and approaches at national level, and this is adequately emphasised in the GFAR Secretariat’s 2001-2003 work programme on strengthening national systems of ARD.

In the Dresden Declaration signed during the GFAR 2000 Conference held in May 2000 in Dresden, Germany, recognition was given to the crucial role played by farmers, especially

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6 e.g. APAARI (Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions) and CORAF/WECARD (West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development). Similar entities exist in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Western Asia and Northern Africa (WANA), in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and in Western Europe. Further fora are emerging in Central Asia and the Caucasus (CAC) and in North America. These fora already exist even prior to the launching of GFAR

7 Initial gaps in coverage and inadequate “representation” are inevitable in the early stages of setting up such a global dialogue. The “delegates” are thus tasked to spread information among their constituencies about the ARD fora and possibilities for partnerships. It is expected that in time, as awareness grows, the delegations should become more representative.
women, in agriculture and natural resource management (NRM). A commitment was expressed to work in partnership with farmers, building on their indigenous knowledge.  

Interestingly, there is a big NGO “buy-in” in the GFAR process that even prior to the GFAR 2000 Conference, the interaction between GFAR and NGO is gaining momentum. NGOs themselves have even organized activities before and during GFAR 2000.

1. Building a Global Vision in ARD

Building a Global Vision in ARD is GFAR’s first line of action. All stakeholders of ARD have been carrying out visioning and strategy-formulation exercises, with the objective of identifying the challenges and opportunities generated by the changing environment of agricultural research for development, and of defining their own Vision, Mission and Goals in terms of the contribution that each stakeholder can make to the overall objectives of poverty eradication, food security and sustainable development. In this activity, NGO involvement has been particularly substantial was in building a Global Vision on agricultural research.

A very important effort in defining the NGO strategy was carried out by the NGOs through the NGO Committee and the related processes of articulating an NGO constituency for ARD. A strategy document was produced which builds on and incorporates the work they have done throughout the last year. In this document, they present a "Pro-Poor, Agroecologically Based NRM Strategy". They have been actively involved in the Roundtable discussions that took place in GFAR 2000 where the Global Vision in ARD was adopted.

2. Promoting innovative research partnerships: NGOs in Natural Resources Management (NRM)

The second line of action is aimed at facilitating research partnerships among the stakeholders of ARD. New modes of research collaboration are emerging as part of the gradual shift in the organizational structure of science and of research towards more collaborative modalities. In the new context that is emerging at the beginning of the 21st century, the strategic importance of cooperation, of networking and of research partnerships is significantly increasing. GFAR was established precisely to facilitate and promote the emergence of these "new and innovative" research partnerships, which can play a key role in the process of building the emerging "Global Agricultural Research System in ARD".

GFAR is fostering global and regional research partnerships in the areas of commodity chains, natural resource management and agroecology (NRM/AE), genetic resources management and biotechnology, and policy management and institutions.

In these four themes, NGOs are taking the lead in NRM/AE. Several meetings and dialogues have taken place to discuss an inter-stakeholder global initiative. For instance, GFAR has co-organized with the NGOs workshops on Scaling Up. This initiative is aimed at promoting cases of scaling-up, with the objective of extrapolating to the wider rural population the

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8 This requires another form of communication with farmers than practiced by most researchers. If they are committed to this declaration, they must develop ways of better interacting with farmers, primarily through field-based FOs and NGOs (Waters-Bayer, 2001).
results, technologies and practices of successful research and development projects in NRM. A very intensive discussion is taking place in October 1999 on the requirements of scaling-up, and on the different strategies or approaches to do so. This was followed by another one held in April 2000 where specific cases where analyzed to better approximate how to plan for scaling up and how to implement and monitor impact of the scaling up process. A very rich documentation of these workshops has been published.

Various proposals for global research partnerships are also in the pipeline, most notable of which is PROLINNOVA, or Promotion of Local Innovation in ecological agriculture and natural resource management.

PROLINNOVA is an initiative seeks to strengthen research on promoting farmer innovation in agroecology and NRM through partnerships of farmers, NGOs and research organisations at various levels (from local to global, including national/regional). Its envisioned fields of activities include that of identification and supporting local innovations; strengthening, at the global level, processes and methods for agro-ecological research; training and information of researchers; and promotion of global research networks on AE/NRM based on local innovations. Discussions in implementing its first phase is underway.

Very recently, NGOs have been actively engaged in discussions at implementing Global Partnership Programmes (GPPs). GPPs are multi-stakeholder collaborative initiatives that emerge through a bottom-up approach. They are initiated around themes identified through a regional priority setting process where there is an added value to work in collaboration and where partners can gain from sharing experiences and research results. Financing GPPs is much more based on cost sharing (stakeholders “buying into” collaborative endeavors), and on the mobilization of other financial resources such as those related to the regional financial institutions and other non-conventional sources.

Likewise, the CGIAR which is one of the seven stakeholders of GFAR, of late, has initiated the launching of Challenge Programmes (CPs) as a means to strengthen its programmatic approach. Given the important role that CPs will play in the global agricultural research for development (ARD) community, all stakeholders have expressed their interest in participating actively in them. The GFAR Secretariat works closely with the CGIAR in facilitating the participation of stakeholders, particularly with regional foras, NGOs and farmers organizations, in this process.

In all these innovative means to establish research partnerships, the primary role of the GFAR is to facilitate the creation of fora involving multiple stakeholders at different levels, to facilitate the creation of effective local, subregional, regional and global partnerships. GFAR is therefore an added value “service” encouraging and testing innovative approaches, methodologies and spaces to build research partnerships.
IV. Closing

The recent external review of the GFAR up to and including the Dresden 2000 Conference meeting was quite favourable, largely because of its ability to broaden involvement of stakeholders beyond scientists and donors. However, it is also because of its open-access policy why GFAR is regarded with scepticism by some conventional scientists, who see that their influence on research content and methods is being reduced by this opening up to new partners (Waters-Bayer, 2000).

As far as GFAR is concerned, all stakeholders in ARD, should be able to identify research issues that will help address the development problematique. In this process, NGOs play a crucial role given their strong grassroots links; field-based development expertise; and ability to innovate and adapt.

In today’s globalized knowledge society, there is a recognition of the importance of supporting and facilitating networks and networking, and various forms of partnerships and collaborative arrangements. The Global Forum builds on this philosophy and on this approach, and NGOs are quick to recognize this. According to NGOs themselves, “we have made great efforts to prepare for GFAR 2000 and we are continuing with the process because we see it as a chance to increase our influence on research.”

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