

## DEVELOPMENT DIPLOMACY BY NON-STATE ACTORS: AN EMERGING FORM OF MULTISTAKEHOLDER DIPLOMACY

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### *Abstract*

*Conventional definitions of diplomacy previously reserved for state actors increasingly apply to non-state actors such as non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations, and international organisations. Development policy and intervention in the form of development aid has been reserved in the past to interactions between state actors such donor countries (developed countries) and beneficiary countries (developing or transition countries). While non-governmental organisations have always been active in the field of development aid as providers of services, they have not openly become political actors in the development policy field until recently. The purpose of this article is to define the new term “development diplomacy” and to show how this broadening of mandate affects the policy dialogue and policy negotiations in international development.*

Non-state actors such as national or international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are adding their voices to international development policy debates by organising, campaigning and lobbying across national boundaries in order to have a greater influence on international development policy making. This trend has gained major momentum, evidenced by the active involvement of NGOs in international co-operation for development, by vocal criticism of unfettered capitalism, by conflicts with multinational companies in regard to the exploitation of natural resources, and by confrontations with national governments on various socio-economic development policy issues.

Faced with growing economic and political interdependencies of markets and states, governments have to cope with the increasingly complex post-modern environment, including the activities of NGOs. Governments need to find effective ways to interact with non-state “adversaries” such as NGO pressure groups. These competent and well-networked groups monitor and evaluate the performances of governments and multinational companies and demand greater accountability and transparency of their actions. NGOs and

other civil society groups have learned to galvanise public opinion to forward successfully their own agendas and effectively to demand greater social and international solidarity.

A well-documented example of successful NGO influence on development policy was Eurodad's advocacy in favour of debt relief of poor and least developed countries. Prior to the campaigns by Eurodad, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, faced with the staggering indebtedness of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries, thought that limited debt relief would make the debt of these countries "sustainable" and allow them "to grow out of" their debt through economic growth. In contrast, however, Eurodad emphasised that partial debt relief could not manage the excessive debt of these countries, and that they required more substantial debt forgiveness to fight poverty (Bökkering and Van Hees, 1998). The persistent and well co-ordinated influence of Eurodad led international financial institutions to adopt a poverty alleviation based debt policy. The use of such tactics as monitoring of policies of international financial institutions, sharing relevant information with other NGOs, co-ordinating public pressures and promoting alternative policy frameworks, negotiating text revisions with representatives of the financial institutions and national governments constitute an excellent example of development diplomacy. The purpose of this article is to show how this broadening of mandate affects policy dialogue and policy negotiations in international development, and to define the new term "development diplomacy."

### **Defining Development Diplomacy by Non-State Actors**

Development diplomacy has traditionally been a policy domain of state actors, such as Ministries of Foreign Affairs or Economic Affairs. Recently, however, non-state actors have begun to insert themselves into the development policy field previously kept closely in the hands of nation states and such intergovernmental development organisations as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme. The active insertion of non-state actors into the international arena of development policy debate necessitates an enlargement of the notion of diplomacy and a clarification of what comprises development diplomacy. To achieve such a redefinition, it is helpful to reflect on developments in the theory and practice of diplomacy as they have evolved over the last thirty years.

*Growing participation of transnational NGOs in international affairs.* NGOs represent diverse groups, including national civil society organisations and transnational NGOs. The latter often operate at national, regional, and transnational levels focusing on economic, social, and political issues. Together, these NGOs actively promote public awareness on issues ranging from environmental protection or degradation and animal rights to observation and investigation of possible human rights violations by global companies or foreign states.

Concerned with the negative impact of development on the environment and on disadvantaged groups, NGOs challenge states on economic and business issues by means of civil protests, campaigns, and negative ranking lists. For instance, Transparency International publishes research findings on corruption in the form of a Corruption Index to exert pressure on governments that misappropriate public funds and demand bribery from citizens and companies. Thus, NGOs stifle the ability of traditional sovereign actors to operate without impediment, be this at a state-to-state level or within the sphere of multinational standard-setting organisations.

NGOs are also able to exert pressures on transnational enterprises at home and in foreign markets alike. Through campaigning and boycotts, for example, INFACT has exposed life-threatening abuses by transnational companies and organised grassroots campaigns to hold corporations accountable to consumers and society at large. From Nestlé's infant formula marketing of the 1970s and 1980s to today's boycott of Kraft Foods – owned by tobacco giant Philip Morris – INFACT has successfully won concrete changes in corporate policy and practice (Multinational Monitor, 2001).

Internationally, NGOs are also leaving their footprints. The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), an international treaty negotiated by World Health Organisation member states, is a successful example of change. A grassroots movement through supraterritorial alliance, the Network for Accountability of the Tobacco Transnationals, challenged the governments and international organisation into action. FCTC concluded the fourth round of negotiations in March 2002. The treaty will greatly limit business options for the tobacco industry and for transnational companies such as Philip Morris.

The Internet has changed greatly the power relationship between state actors, transnational enterprises, and transnationally active NGOs. A search of the World Wide Web for "stakeholder" related websites revealed more than 24,000 sites on *Google* alone. The Internet has become one of the most power-

ful and affordable tools for making strategic alliance amongst transnational NGOs and voluntary groups around the world. Instant connectivity creates virtual communities that evolve around common concerns and reaches beyond borders and resource limitations. They can exert pressures on governments and on global companies, demanding more information and more transparent government policies and business practices. At the same time, they use information technology to exert influence deeply into governments and global companies.

Significantly, NGO communities are putting forward alternative development models, thereby directly challenging dominant policy formulae such as the so-called Washington Consensus (Saner, 2000b). Internet based virtual communities allow NGOs to pool resources and information on things happening on the ground. Making use of their information gathering capacity and sophisticated policy analysis capability, transnational NGOs are increasingly active in the international policy arena; they demand the rights of supraterritorial representation – thereby challenging the abilities of Ministries of Foreign Affairs to co-ordinate national economic policy at international fora.

*Insertion of NGOs into national and international development aid policy-making processes.* NGOs of a large number of donor countries have succeeded in influencing the national policy-making processes that determine the framework within which development aid is spent. In addition, internationally active NGOs like Eurodad have established their own policy-making think tanks, which they use sometimes in direct confrontation with prevailing opinions of donor countries or with prevailing policies at the development organisation.

National and international NGOs have keenly used the apparent proliferation of development diplomacy activities by other ministries in efforts to play one ministry against another. They also have used their often excellent information technology resources to keep track of a government's inconsistencies in policy implementation and discrepancies in regard to development aid and funds earmarked for specific aid programmes. Having identified inconsistencies with concrete data backing the claim, local NGOs can then more easily assert influence on their respective governments to redress some of their findings.

*Contrasting “development diplomacy by non-state actors” with traditional concepts of diplomacy.* As diplomacy evolved, so did its definition and the professional identity of diplomats. Recorded history of diplomacy begins in ancient Greece and important contributions to diplomatic methods were

made during the period of the Italian city-state, in France before and after the French Revolution, and in England starting with industrialisation and the expansion of its empire (Saner, 2000a). Systematic contributions originated in the USA, especially after World War II, with the start of large-scale social science research aiming at analysing and understanding the behaviour of international negotiators.

Many historians have equated the period of modern diplomacy with the era following the Westphalian peace negotiations (Meerts, 2004). The term “Westphalian System” describes the post-1648 system of international relations composed of secular, sovereign, independent, and equal states, in which stability is preserved by a balance of power, diplomacy, and international law (Berridge and James, 2001). As recent history teaches us, however, conflicts might again arise that involve non-state actors. Many conflicts since the 2001 attack on the World Trade towers in New York involve a state (USA) and its allies (mostly OECD countries) facing a non-state actor (Al-Qaeda) working world-wide through various networks and alliances. Thus, the Eurocentric character of the Westphalian system might not fit the reality of the current, globalised play of diplomacy. As well, in addition to national states, many sub-national actors (e.g., regions like the Länder of Germany), supranational actors (e.g., the European Union, the North American Free Trade Association), and non-state actors (e.g., NGOs and enterprises) partake in the shaping of international relations.

Bátora (2005), describes the influence of the European Union on the institution of diplomacy and the changes in diplomacy consequent on the interaction between the supranational institution of diplomacy and the current, global institution of diplomacy. He anticipates four possible scenarios within which diplomacy might evolve in the near future: isomorphism, fragmentation, metamorphosis, and breakdown. For example, Bátora suggests that fragmentation would

involve development of a different standard of diplomatic appropriateness in various states or various grouping of states, for example, a multitude of logics of appropriateness. Some states would, for instance, consider it appropriate to sign treaties with NGOs or give private enterprise a seat in the United Nations. (p. 51)

In a similar vein, in reviewing the evolution of diplomatic practice, Wiseman (1999) adds to the traditional diplomatic methods of bilateralism and multilateralism a third concept, that of “polylateralism,” which he defines as

the conduct of relations between official entities (such as a state, several states acting together, or a state-based international organisation) and at least one unofficial, non-state entity in which there is a reasonable expectation of systematic relationships, involving some form of reporting, communication, negotiation, and representation, but not involving mutual recognition as sovereign, equivalent entities. (1999, p. 11)

Wiseman's concept of polyilateralism captures the broadening of interfaces between Ministries of Foreign Affairs and their respective state and non-state counterparts. In light of this proliferation of actors involved in international relations and diplomatic activities, Melissen (1999) offers a succinct definition of contemporary foreign policy and diplomacy by stating that diplomacy "is defined as the mechanism of representation, communication and negotiation through which states and other international actors conduct their business" (pp. 16-17).

Melissen and Wiseman's definitions of diplomacy capture the post-modern nature of diplomacy, characterised by the simultaneous participation of multiple state and non-state actors. Applying Melissen's enlarged definition of diplomacy to development diplomacy by non-state actors, the following definition seems most succinct:

"Development diplomacy by non-state actors" attempts to influence development policy-making at national, regional, and intergovernmental levels by organisations mandated to make these institutions' development policies conform to their own developmental agenda.

### **Diplomatic Functions and Roles of Non-State Actors: The Example of NGOs**

Developmentally oriented NGOs focus on economic and social policy, international economic development, and global business practice. NGOs are also active in many other areas. A distinction needs to be made here between NGOs acting within national boundaries and those operating on an international level through their own foreign outlets, as well as through

alliances with like-minded transnational NGOs. We may define *national development NGOs*:

National development oriented NGOs represent civil society aims active in the development and aid sphere, and consist of various constituencies ranging from academically oriented groups to self-help groups focused on providing support to developing and transition countries.

The number of national development oriented NGOs is growing despite a shortage of funding (in comparison to funds available in the 1960s and 1970s). The growth occurs since development NGOs can more easily reach the public at large through competent use of information technology and public relations campaigns. However, a larger political space available to NGOs has also facilitated their growth. This enlargement of political space both at the national and international level has been triggered by the fall of the Berlin Wall and a subsequent political liberalisation in many parts of the world.

Transnational development NGOs are able to organise advocacy events and lobbying activities at cross-border levels. We may define them as follows:

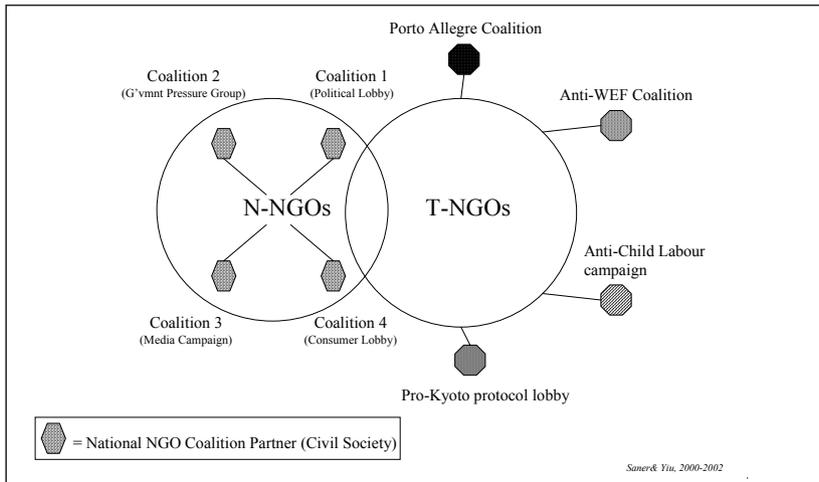
Transnational Development oriented NGOs propose their own policy solutions in international arenas, working, for instance, during the multilateral negotiations on the Kyoto Protocol agreement, in the debt rescheduling of least developed countries at the International Monetary Fund, or within the negotiation of a multilateral convention on foreign investment at OECD.

They are also involved in implementing technical co-operation projects in developing and transition economies, thereby complementing, at times even replacing, national governments. They also offer current research in areas crucial for international co-operation and crisis management.

In contrast to national NGOs, transnational NGOs actively seek ways to influence the agenda at international governance bodies by putting forward their policy recommendations and by lobbying in the corridors of power. The dialogue between major transnational NGOs and the World Bank during recent annual conferences of the Bank is an outstanding example. Due to their domain of expertise, these non-state actors have taken the lead in many international fora and narrowed the range of operational freedom of

traditional diplomats. However, full participation at international conferences from planning to conclusion stages entails considerable financial resources and the development and cultivation of substantial networks. For these reasons, most of the internationally active NGOs are based in the developed countries (Sadoun, 2005).

As depicted in *Figure 1* below, national development oriented NGOs might focus on creating coalitions at the national level to lobby for development causes or to protect consumers from harmful food products (e.g., genetically modified food products). They may also organise media campaigns exposing business practices of local companies in countries that violate basic labour conventions.



*Figure 1:* Territorial Spaces for the Advocacy of the National NGO Diplomat and Transnational NGO Diplomat (Saner and Yiu, 2003)

Transnational development oriented NGOs organise alliances at the international level to create counterweights to such institutions as the World Economic Forum and its perceived pro-business policies; they may castigate multinational companies in various of their foreign subsidiaries causing environmental pollution illegal in their country of registered domicile.

To give an example of the complexities of post-modern diplomacy and the growing importance of NGOs, Finn (2000) cites a statement attributed to US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott:

In Bosnia, nine agencies and departments of the US government are cooperating with more than a dozen other governments, seven international organizations and thirteen major NGOs . . . to implement the Dayton Accords. (pp. 144-145)

From the perspective of actual participation in world affairs, it appears necessary that different actors in the enlarged sphere of post-modern diplomacy acquire additional competencies (domain expertise) to engage constructively in international economic policy dialogue. Conversely, it should also become increasingly possible for Ministries of Foreign Affairs and state diplomats to learn to adapt their traditional roles and functions. Diplomats must evolve from inward looking, exclusive, and secretive actors to more reachable, outgoing, and inclusive diplomats constantly in search for possible inclusion of other actors, whether state (other ministries) or non-state (such as business diplomats and transnational NGO diplomats) (Saner et al., 2002; Saner and Yiu, 2003).

### **Role Requirements of Non-State Actor Development Diplomats**

Regardless of affiliation to different ideological orientations and causes, the primary task of non-state actor development diplomats (NSA-DDs) is to safeguard the interests of their constituencies and to influence the outcomes of transactions between themselves and other parties. Transnational NGOs need to safeguard the economic and social interests of their respective interest groups, as well as those of civil society as a whole, and to uphold established international human rights and environmental standards. To succeed with their advocacy goals and objectives, NSA-DDs need to prevent confrontations, but not to shy away from using appropriate advocacy influencing schemes, as long as the latter do not lead to protracted conflicts.

In safeguarding the development interests of their respective constituencies, NSA-DDs fulfil a set of basic objectives and tasks. These common objectives and tasks are:

- To influence political, economic, and social policies to create the right conditions for development in developing countries, taking into account the needs and aspirations of other stakeholders in the developing countries;

- To work with rule-making international bodies whose decisions affect international development and development regulations;
- To limit conflicts with foreign governments, other NGOs, and various economic actors, thereby aiming to minimise political and economic risks;
- To use multiple international fora and media channels to safeguard the image, mission, and reputation of their development NGO (“reputation capital”);
- To create social capital through dialogue with all stakeholders who might be impacted by the process of socio-economic development (Dasgupta and Serageldin, 2000);
- To sustain credibility and legitimacy of their representative bodies in the eyes of the public and their own communities;
- To know how to draw a line between advocacy and development diplomacy, whereby advocacy might be part of the repertoire of tactics but should not become the main strategy;
- To learn to work with many constituencies (Hocking, 2005), to create coalitions of interests and convenience, to know how to negotiate at bilateral, plurilateral, multilateral, and multi-institutional levels.

## Conclusions

Traditionally, diplomacy has been the prerogative of ambassadors and envoys representing Ministries of Foreign Affairs and central government offices, with mandates confined to the affairs of the state. Today, management of international development co-operation no longer confines itself to the state, but extends to NGOs and civil society organisations. Protagonists of these new interest groups are often professionals with impressive academic backgrounds and equally impressive project experience, sometimes outperforming their state actor counterparts.

From this perspective, it appears necessary for NGO actors involved in the enlarged sphere of development diplomacy to acquire the competencies that will enable them to engage constructively in policy dialogue with state actors. Conversely, Ministries of Foreign Affairs and state diplomats should adapt their traditional roles and functions from inward looking, exclusive, and secretive activity into a more reachable, outgoing, and inclusive diplomacy.

New times call for modification of traditional roles and responsibilities. Ministries of Foreign Affairs are no longer sole guardians of diplomacy; instead, they must share diplomatic space with other ministries and engage constructively with non-state actors. Through dialogue, proactive consultation, and future oriented co-operation, they must ensure legitimacy of policy decisions and security of policy implementation.

In the final analysis, sustainable development in the global context demands equitable representation of multiple stakeholders and the recognition that relationships among these stakeholders are intricate and web-like, unrestricted by political or geographical boundaries. “Diplomatic” skills are now and will be employed by all to promote individual views and profiles. We need to see today’s diplomacy in its full complexity.

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