NGOS' IMPACT AND SPHERE OF INFLUENCE ON DIFFERENT GOVERNMENTS' POLICYMAKING AROUND THE WORLD. THE CASE OF ASHOKA: INNOVATORS FOR THE PUBLIC

ADAM JAGIELLO-RUSILOWSKI, PHD
University of Gdansk, PL

ABSTRACT

The article offers the most relevant literature review and the case study of the NGOs which are led by a global network of Ashoka fellows. The author uses the theory of change and presents evidence on how social innovators build and run NGOs to maximize their social impact, scaling their change- making models to the level of governmental policymaking or even beyond. The role of Ashoka as a global non-governmental organization itself is analyzed in terms of identifying, supporting and rooting the social entrepreneurs with their NGOs within the empowering networks. The methodology uses triangulation of data from Ashoka Social Impact Report 2018 and Ashoka Fellows narrative interviews. The results show the scale and strength of NGOs' impact in multiple spheres both directly on polices of national governments and indirectly on international policymaking through exerting market-related pressure for embracing social change. The conclusions focus on theoverarching principles and ethical fiber of Ashoka fellows as leaders of their NGOs.

NGOS AND THEIR ROLE IN GLOBAL CHANGES

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have become very influential actors in both domestic and international policymaking since the last turn of the centuries . According to The Global Journal there are over 10 million of them worldwide and it is estimated that nearly 1,5 billion people have donated money towards its mission at least once. In some developed countries almost 25% of citizens have either volunteered or worked full-time for a non- governmental organization. Over 80%of people globally believe that NGOs allow civil society to engage in social change[1].

NGOs have played an increasing role in operating and interacting with local governments representing civil society to promote change in domestic policies. International NGOs and their networks are able to make the largest impact due to their size and international image and connections. Domestically, a government can capitalize on the activities and resources of associations, foundations etc. but sometimes political bodies in power may work to obscure or hinder the ability of domestic NGOs to act. International NGOs, however, have more autonomy in their actions and ability to push for change. I argue that the stronger the international NGO-government relation becomes, the more trust a government has in an NGO, and the larger the impact they are able to make. Additionally, the more active a civil society in a particular country is, the faster international NGOs will be made aware of the issue, and the stronger support base NGOswill have to pressure the government to adapt new policies. Furthermore, the research shows that the more accountable international NGOs are, the more trust both governments and local civil society will have in international NGOs in their capacity for changemaking

---

[1] https://www.standardizations.org/bulletin/?p=841

20

(Tortajada, 2016).

Non-governmental organizations are groups of individuals or communities voluntarily emerging and forming from dynamic initiatives that act on a non-for-profit basis (Charnovitz, 2007) . NGOs are organized under national law, and act independently of respective governments. The scope of NGO activities may be local, national, or international. NGOs formulate their mission statements in response to societal needs. They choose to focus on and self-organize around specific issues, such as education, human rights, environmental protection, or around a broad set of social challenges. NGOsmay act as direct providers of goods and services or/and advocate before governments for the interests of citizens who may feel excluded from some basic social benefits or any form of participation in governance. Associations, foundations, unions, etc. additionally play a large role in providing independent information to civil society. They collect and disseminate information that thepublic can trust, especially in places where it may not be available, manipulated or openly blocked bya government. Furthermore, they play a fundamental role in creating awareness, educating people, and directing citizens through channels for support (Fogarty, 2011).

While NGOs do not enjoy formal decision making rights, they exercise substantial influence over outcomes through their activities, expertise and policy proposals. They aim to influence governments and shape their decisions which concern the underserved groups of civil society. Over the last decades NGOs have advanced from traditional philanthropic institutions helping the disadvantaged, preserving natural or cultural heritage etc. to self-organizing networks of system changemakers. Theytransformed from direct and specific service providers to major players with the updated knowledge,funds and potential to influence policy and state or even international institutions. NGOs prepare studies for wide dissemination, engage the media to shape public opinion, and contribute expertise to governmental delegations[2]. NGOs can adapt quickly and respond to changing needs faster than government organizations. The four most important functions of NGOs are (Dunoff, 2015):

- their ability to set agendas,

- negotiate outcomes,

- confer legitimacy,

- implement solutions which address citizens' needs.

Non-governmental organizations help to set agendas in the most dynamic way by notifying the publicand governments of emerging issues. They problematize critically newly occurred situations both on a local and global scale e.g. migration, pandemic, digital exclusion, addiction, family violence, massivebankruptcy of SMEs etc., they identify new policy areas, facilitate the debate on the consequences of old and new policies, identify aspects that require review or refinement . This provides NGOs with ample opportunities to participate in decision making as representatives of civil society. NGOs negotiate outcomes by ideating and presenting knowledge-based alternative strategies for policy outcomes and engage in extensive networking. Non-governmental bodies are able to confer legitimacy as their judgments can be decisive in gaining or withholding the public's political support. Furthermore, NGOs make solutions work as they are able to do what the governments cannot or will not do. They are further able to influence domestic policy both directly and indirectly. Directly, NGOs provide information for governments and lobby governmental officials on their policy options.
Indirectly, NGOs increase the public awareness of issues through the free press. (Simons, 1998)

DIVERSITY OF NGOS AND SPHERES OF THEIR INFLUENCE

The World Bank defines two categories of NGOs: operational and advocacy. Operational NGOs focus on the design and implementation of development-related products. Operational NGOs can further be broken down into three main groups: community based organizations, national organizations, andinternational organizations. Community based organizations (CBOs) serve a specific population in a defined area. National organizations

---

[2] Global Policy Forum. "Global Policy Forum." NGOs and the United Nations, June 1999, www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/176/31440.html. Accessed on 10.07.2021

operate in individual countries and international organizations are headquartered in developed countries and carry out operations in developing countries . CBOs are different from national and international organizations as they are membership organizations that join together to further their own interests. They can be especially effective in the domestic arena when NGOs are trying to garner more support and participation from citizens. Advocacy NGOs primarily work to defend or promote a specific cause. These NGOs work to raise awareness and knowledge through various activities such as lobbying and activist events. Many NGOs engage in both operational and advocacy purposes (Malena, 1995).

Wielka Orkiestra Swiatecznej Pomocy (Holiday Aid Band Foundation) is an emblematic NGO in Poland which raises funds for improvement of health care system in Poland. In its operational capacity it provides Polish hospitals with modern equipment worth millions of Euro which neither local or even national government would not have been able to buy from health insurance schemes. This foundation has the trust of 56% of Poles[3] while only 5% can trust the national health system making Poland the worst country in EU according to the patient satisfaction study.[4] The foundation has a unique model of operating with a strong network of local engagement committees both across the whole country but also abroad. Over one million volunteers have raised over one billion 300 million PLN in spectacular ways during the dedicated rock concerts, auctions, sports and entertainment events. In its advocacy capacity the NGO organizes massive events to celebrate the civic engagement,especially of Polish youth, promoting democracy and transparency in governance as well as pressing for systemic changes in health policy. The foundation has an immense impact on Polish government but the quality of partnership depends, unfortunately, on the ideology the current government subscribes to. Paradoxically, the less support the government officially declares and the more criticism from the public TV the NGO receives the more civil society all over the world is ready to donate.[5]

International Sustainable Education Foundation[6] is based in the Hague (Netherlands) but it operates on 4 continents. Its focus is on achieving systemic change in educational policies to eradicate povertyand human trafficking so the sphere of its influence ranges from instructional delivery in schools, through engagement of youth at risk in community centers to solar energy and internet installations. ISEF partners with EU governments and agencies to provide training to both underserved groups in Europe and potential migrants or even refugees in their native countries to avoid the migration traumas. The youth at risk are offered training in IT, internships and finally paid work with stakeholders from It sector who make it possible that instead of migration the talent can re-distribute their earning amongst their families, saving both mobility drama and higher cost of living in the West/cities. As part of Ashoka support network ISEF is an umbrella organization for smaller NGOsrunning education and development projects in distant locations. In this way it coordinates its impacton governmental policies on education, migration and prevention of brain drain both in Europe and developing countries (e.g. Nigeria or Nicaragua).

ACCOUNTABILITY OF NGOS AND GOVERNMENTS

Under democratic systems, it is common to observe NGOs functioning as information providers, lobby groups, agenda setters, and norm generators (Prekash & Gugerty, 2010) . Not only do NGOs collect, disseminate and analyze critically the information that they access, but they also spread it amongst the civil society at large. The increasing role of the internet makes the sharing of information more instant and less burdening if a given NGO can mobilize its supporters on the social media. Additionally, through the use of the traditional but independent media NGOs are able to disclose their information to the less privileged public. NGOs can lobby to influence votes on specific legislation or direction of policy. NGOs attempt to gain governments' recognition and promote the issues that are important to the community they represent and that they have identified the need for social change. They are most effective at lobbying when they combine their efforts with other NGOs or civil

---

[3] https://fakty.ngo.pl/raporty/zaufanie-i-wizerunek-ngo-2020 - accessed on 14.07.2021

[4] https://www.pap.pl/centrum-prasowe/709706%2Cpolska-w-ostatniej-trojce-europy-pod-wzgledem-oceny- systemu-opieki – accessed on 17.07.2021

[5] https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/wyniki-wielkiej-orkiestry-swiatecznej-pomocy-orkiestra-w-sumie-zebrala- ponad-miliard-zlotych-i-idzie-po-kolejny-rekord-6603441813367328a.html - accessed on 17.07.2021

[6] https://is-ef.org/

society in general who may be mobilized for a specific cause . Since lobbying focuses on influence and persuasion to gain support for their policies, joining together with civil society creates a larger base for a transformation and makes it harder for governments to ignore.

NGOs tend to have stronger impact on agenda-setting at the grassroot level as they can disseminate their ideas and engage the public in demonstration activities to raise the profile of the issues at stake. They enjoy more opportunities to engage also on a national level as they are able to merge their goals with particular state interests represented by a current government to affect domestic negotiations. The most important role that NGOs play at the national level, however, is setting norms(Macarchuk, 2018). NGOs are able to influence policy and persuade governments or/and parliamentary majority to create or amend legislation to effectuate the policy change that the NGO issponsoring (Anderson, 2009) . Furthermore, NGOs in their home countries play a critical role in enforcing and promoting compliance with international legal norms. They frequently investigate and publicize governments' violations of international law in order to shame the current political leaders or state "apparatchiks" as well as build domestic constituencies for the compliance.

NGOs have proven their effectiveness in holding institutions and governments accountable to the public and exposing them to public scrutiny when they fail to do so. However, at times NGOs may also complicate or disrupt the law making process, and some States believe that NGOs take an inappropriate activist tone and do not focus enough on the relevant issues . Subsequently, issues have arisen over agenda setting. According to an independent review commissioned by UNAIDS[7], some NGOs have played a more active role in shaping rather than responding to societal needs, theiractual awareness and the consistent agenda of meetings. They tried to push their agenda separatelyfrom that of civil society and a respective government. While the intentions of the NGOs may be good, it is important that NGOs bridge their causes with that of the state representatives to ensure that the parliament or/and government will follow through with the policy changes.

Klub Gaja is another Polish NGO with 25 years of record of fighting for animal rights and preserving nature. They became known as activists chaining themselves to trees when Polish authorities gave permissions to cut them down or freeing carps sold live in shops before Christmas. They questionedany policies accepting cruelty to animals, contamination of waters or mindless destruction of ecosystems. While their good intentions were clearly communicated in progressive mass media Gaja's coverage and popularity especially amongst the youth did not translate to policy changes. TheNGO's leader, Ashoka Fellow - Jacek Bozek started wide partnerships with diverse stakeholders, including local and national governments to challenge the mindsets, design educational programs and engage civil society to plant new trees as part of "tree holyday", organize swimming competitions in Vistula - the main Polish river and promote creative ways of compensating for carbon footprint by consumers. The NGO's programs continued to be well covered by the media but also approved and funded by the largest governmental agencies and public education system. Klub Gaja directly contributed to changing environmental and animal rights policies e.g. ban on cutting big trees or selling live fish in plastic bags[8]. More importantly, perhaps, this NGO has impacted the entireculture and raised a new generation of environmental friendly citizens who are ready to self-organizeto fight for the wellbeing of animals, cleanness of air, water and the beauty of landscape.

The impact of NGOs is strictly linked to the transparency of their funding sources. NGOs are funded by donors, governments, multilateral agencies, private foundations, or charitable individuals (Townsend, 2004) . NGOs are held accountable by these donors; at the same time, however, NGOs do not always provide full transparency over their funding sources. Under such circumstances governments may make claims that they do not know who is providing NGOs with their funding and have doubts to what extend the interests of the civil society in a particular country are represented. Governments may question trust even the best intentions of the NGO and their donor, which can create tension between a state, its institutions and the NGO. International NGOs obtain funds from various sources, but some donors do not require that activities undertaken by the international NGOs be approved by the communities they work in (Szporluk, 2009). A government may, therefore,be more suspicious of NGOs which are highly dependent on donors whose motivation is not disclosed. The destructive outcome may be the confusion it creates for the civil society and its exposure to manipulation from multiple actors.

---

[7] https://www.unaids.org/en/aboutunaids/unaidsprogrammecoordinatingboard/ngocivilsocietyparticipationinpcb - accessed on 17.07.2021

[8] https://www.tuwroclaw.com/kalendarz,trzy-wystawy-klubu-gaja,cal4-12146.html accessed on 17.07.2021

TRANSPARENCY OF NGOS AND QUALITY OF THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENTS

Transparency in this context means a committed, coordinated action toward a plan intended to achieve specific goals set out publicly by NGOs . Full disclosure from NGOs about their activities enhances public trust. Greater transparency ensures to the State and community that NGOs are working for the citizens and not for their own power, or that of their donors. A step towards greater transparency was made by some NGOs, as in 2006, the International Non-Governmental Organizations Accountability Charter was established[9]. To build a relationship and achieve a greater impact on new policies, international NGOs should disclose their motives so that they can work with the state instead of confronting it. International NGO accountability to civil society is also a key component to ensuring NGO success. When NGOs willingly disclose their mission to civil society they establish trust and communicate their commitment to be held responsible to follow through on theiractivities and resulting policy changes (Kaldor, 2003) . Enhanced transparency also helps NGOs build up public trust, support, and capacity through increased exchanges (Macarchuk, 2018) . Positive perceptions of NGOs are found when the citizens believe that an NGO is working to represent their needs, aspirations, identities etc.. On the other hand, negative perceptions of NGOs are tied to issuesof funding, which may cause society to doubt the intentions of the allegedly independent organizations . When international NGOs gain the trust of civil society they can work together to impact change, and domestic NGOs can continue the work of international NGOs. This ensures that international NGOs will be held to commit to their objectives.

NGO Advisor is an independent media company based in Geneva[10] in order to showcase the best practices and newest ideas , highlighting the strongest innovation, impact and governance in the nonprofit sector. Ashoka: Innovators for the Public was ranked number 6 moving up from last year's position at 19. Ashoka is the world's largest collection of social entrepreneurs working in 84 countriesaround the world. According to NGO Advisor, in the last ten years, NGOs have moved further and further from their origins as charity businesses and expanded into an increasingly diverse range of activities. Nonprofits are investing in social enterprise, cultivating academic expertise, and finding strategic ways to address urgent development crises around the world. The fourth edition highlights the evolving values of the sector as a whole, as nonprofits shift away from older strategies of playing to investors and instead focus on producing tangible results.

According to the NGO Advisor website the NGOs in 2019's ranking became more influential, more powerful, and more innovative than ever before. With 89 new entrants to the list, and thus 89 NGOsleaving the list, it reflects the broader evolution of the nonprofit sector as well as the issues faced byglobal civil society from the local level to the transnational level. The company, currently chaired by Jean-Christophe Nothias, works with a team of researchers who evaluate leading organizations with a goal of serving as a lens to bring the transformations of the NGO sector into focus and to magnify the evolving range of nonprofit values. Ashoka as an umbrella international NGO coordinating nearly3 500 smaller non-for-profits led by its fellows in over 90 countries ranked second in the NGO Advisor, it was also ranked second most innovative and impactful NGO serving social innovation by Forbes in 2019.[11]

IMPACT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ASHOKA'S SOCIAL CHANGE THEORY

---

[9] https://accountablenow.org/aboutaccountable-now/ Values and Policies | Accountable Now accessed on: 10.07.2021

[10] NGO Advisor is a Geneva-based independent media organization that produces the Top 500 NGOs, a series of reviews of the best non-profit organizations from around the world.. They combine sound journalism with comprehensive research to highlight innovation, impact, and governance in the nonprofit sector. www.ngoadvisor.net.

[11] 2019's Top 5 Most Innovative And Impactful Social Enterprises (forbes.com), https://www.forbes.com/sites/lilachbullock/2019/03/05/2019s-top-5-most-innovative-and-impactful-social-enterprises/?sh=36d3b449774a

Ashoka's theory of social change is based on two concepts: "everyone's a changemaker" and "teamof teams" orientation. Change-maker is a person who is sensitive to human/environmental needs critical of any form of injustice and responds to uncertainties by creative action. Change-making likecreativity can be learnt. Model social entrepreneurs (e.g. Ashoka Fellows) who engage others into development of their novel solution serve at the same time as tutors of disruptive approaches to systemic change, applied creativity, entrepreneurial resourcefulness, impact analyses, courage and ethical fiber/integrity. To become a change-maker one must experience freedom and intrinsic motivation to create value, be supported with basic resources, wise feedback and achieve a level ofresilience allowing to face adversity or failure on the way to a successful improvement of life. The most complex challenges (like climate or education itself) must be handled through collective change-making by "team of teams" approach in which every stake holder with a collaborative mindset is a potential expert but needs to find the right community to put her/his resources to the best effect on systems and framework changes.

Ashoka's definition of impact implies all the general social transformations provoked by its beneficiaries rather than only the part of the outcomes that can be attributed to the organization'sactivities. This is a relatively important difference because all of the expected outcomes might not come from Ashoka's activities and existence as even the best non-for-profit organization (Leviner, Crutchfield, Wells, 2006). From the perspective of all the definitions of social impact listed by Maas (2014), Ashoka's conception of impact best fits Kaplan's definition (2001): "by social impact we meanthe consequences to human populations of any public or private actions that alter the ways in which people live, work, play, relate to one another, organize to meet their needs and generally act as a member of society"

Ashoka's search and selection process for social entrepreneurs with NGOs is very different from a pitch to a jury, but rather a collaborative conversation of ideas. The main goal is to test how candidates solve problems and think about change, not just what the potential of their organizations is. Ashoka's 3,600 social entrepreneurs have been selected after considering hundreds of thousands and screening tens of thousands in 92 countries. Ashoka elects fellows at an inflection point, only when there is consensus among all those involved at all stages of selection. Those changemakers thatseem to possess new system changing ideas, an entrepreneurial track record, creative problem solving, the potential for significant impact, and unquestionable ethical fiber are approached. There is significant face-to-face, in-depth interviews and site visits by Ashoka's national teams. The next stage includes an Ashoka board appointed interviewer from another continent, who can evaluate thesystem change potential beyond national context. Then a panel of peers who know what it takes to create big change also interview and assess candidates against the same criteria The final stage is a
review by Ashoka's global board.

In selection of fellows (social innovators) for support and networking the following questions and criteria have been tested as good practice by Ashoka:

1. The novelty of ideas for dealing with a social problem and arising uncertainties:

    -   Does the change-maker/graduate of changemakers' campus offer new proposition for life improvement to the society departing from the established approaches

    -   Do educational programs offer learning opportunities and feedback structures and validation(grading) for generating disruptive innovations

    -   Is the proposition original to change-maker's (students) life experiences. Has it emerged from unique personal or collective insights as part of character development? Does it go beyond just professional qualifications or activism emerging from specific strategy to deal with the uncertainty or imbalance in the immediate environment?

2. System/frame improvement

    -   Does the changemaker demonstrate an intention to go beyond serving direct beneficiariesand disrupt the entire system to ensure sustainability of his/her proposition

    -   Is she/he aware of how to change mindsets, inform and engage the key stakeholders of the systemic improvement

- Can the changemaker mobilize diverse resources to help the community transform to an upgraded reality

3. Creativity of changemakers

    - Is the changemaker playful, has a sense of humor, interested in asking divergent questionsand engage in "flow" experiences, fuzzy, not clearly defined tasks, willing to deal with the limited resources and uncertainty to achieve success

    - Has the changemaker demonstrated ability to invent original products or ways of solving problems, designing new models, prototypes, services etc.

    - Does the changemaker use diverse roles and strategies for generating and implementing new solutions

    - Can she/he play a leadership role in setting goals for her/his teams aspiring to the improvedversion of life

4. Entrepreneurial quality of character

    - Does the changemaker go beyond activism aligning the diverse interests (including financial goals) to the chosen mission

    - Has the changemaker demonstrated a capacity to marshal all the available resources to onegoal, taking risks and using uncertainty and niches in market to gain competitive advantage over similar proposals

5. Social impact

    - Has the changemakers got a clear vision of what and who is changed once her/his actionsreach a tipping point

    - Is she/he able to use transparent indicators of impact to capture the change that has beenachieved

    - Is the changemaker able to build coalitions, networks, influence policies for a stronger impact

6. Ethical fiber/integrity

    - Has the changemaker demonstrated critical thinking and courage to make independent decisions and actions, showing civil or cultural disobedience to continue change-making.

    - Is she/he transparent and consistent in describing shared values, principles and actual past actions, partnerships, dependencies etc.

    - Does the changemakers identify multiple resources (e.g. support networks, awareness ofwell-being) for staying resilient in face of adversity and uncertainty

Ashoka helps the elected fellows and their organizations to be present across three levels of impact:Firstly, by directly impacting the organisations in the ecosystem Ashoka fellows work with, from participants in their projects to partners, mentors and key stakeholders. Their goal is to support the ecosystem at large, have access to resources, contacts and know-how.

Secondly, to scale Ashoka's impact and support outside of changemakers' communities and local/issue networks. The fellows strive to find allies across all regions of their respective countiresand activists or entrepreneurs they already know and collaborate with.

Finally, Ashoka's most important objective is to be a key actor in accelerating the environment and infrastructure for social entrepreneurship to grow, for social entrepreneurs to become more visible and to have

access to tools and resources for them to succeed. Systems change is well embedded inthe fellows' work within their NGOs . They want to empower civil society to embrace the mentality that everyone can be a changemaker.

NGOS' IMPACT MEASUREMENT - THE CASE STUDY OF ASHOKA

In the 2018 survey[12] independent group of researchers asked Ashoka Fellows "What percentage of your organization's revenue comes from selling products/services?" This question was intended to bea proxy for the type of organization Fellows run -- whether for-profit, nonprofit, or hybrid. Overall, just under one-third of Fellows responded "0 percent" to this question, indicating that they are non- profits. 12 percent of Fellows reported that 100 percent of their revenue comes from selling products/services, indicating that they are either for-profits or have a hybrid model. On every systems change question in the study, the results showed that non-profit organizations of Ashoka Fellows reported much higher rates of change. For example, 32 percent of nonprofit Fellows had achieved change in legislation or public policy compared with just 12 percent of for-profit Fellows.
The comparison between these two groups on independent replication was even starker.

While Ashoka has tracked Fellows' ability to influence systems change for more than 20 years (both in terms of changes in policy and laws as well as changes in market dynamics), in 2018 Ashoka collected data to investigate whether and how it has had a role in accelerating the impact of its Fellows' ideas. Therefore in the Global Fellows Survey questions were added to measure the impactthat Fellows attribute to Ashoka, in addition to 43 qualitative interviews. Ashoka's selection process,was often cited by Fellows as a key learning experience where they were able to think differently about systems change and have the opportunity to interact with many partners and Fellows in the Ashoka network. Two-thirds of respondents (66 percent) fully agreed with the statement that the selection process helped them turn their NGOs into system change agents, with more than a quarter(27 percent) agreeing to some extent. The number of those fully agreeing goes up to three-quarters for Africa (75 percent) and MENA (74 percent).

The social entrepreneurs who become Ashoka Fellows are leaders who recognize the need to give up control over their idea to see it spread beyond their NGO. They are resilient and adaptive to change; the majority of Fellows practice a type of leadership that is transitional and non-hierarchical. In the interviews, Fellows confirmed that they lead by giving up power rather than consolidating it. Many Fellows voiced the opinion that their mission was to spread their idea so effectively that they themselves would no longer be necessary to solving the problem.

To understand whether Ashoka had any influence on Fellows' leadership or thinking on systems change, in the survey Fellows were asked whether as a result of Ashoka they had changed how theythink about systems change or how they practice leadership in their NGOs and its network. When asked whether Ashoka has helped them see their work at a system change level, 86 percent responded positively. Those who saw their work differently were asked whether their strategy had changed as a consequence of this new perspective: 92 percent confirmed they had indeed fully or partly changed their strategy.
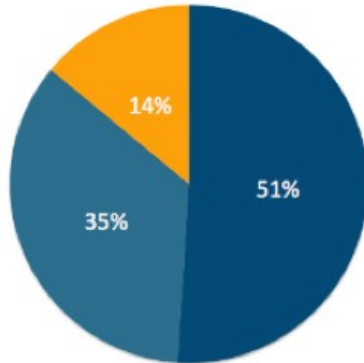
---

[12] https://ashoka-cee.org/austria/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/01/ashoka_-_2018_fellows_impact_report-1.pdf

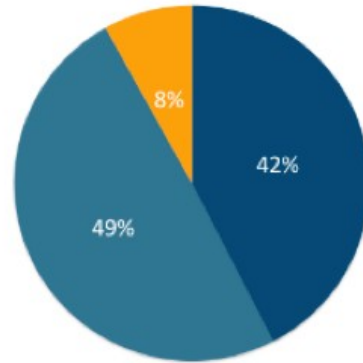## Has Ashoka helped you see your work at a systems-change level?

■ Yes (51%) ■ To some extent (35%) ■ No (14%)

14%

35%

51%

N = 818

As a result, have you made changes to your strategy?

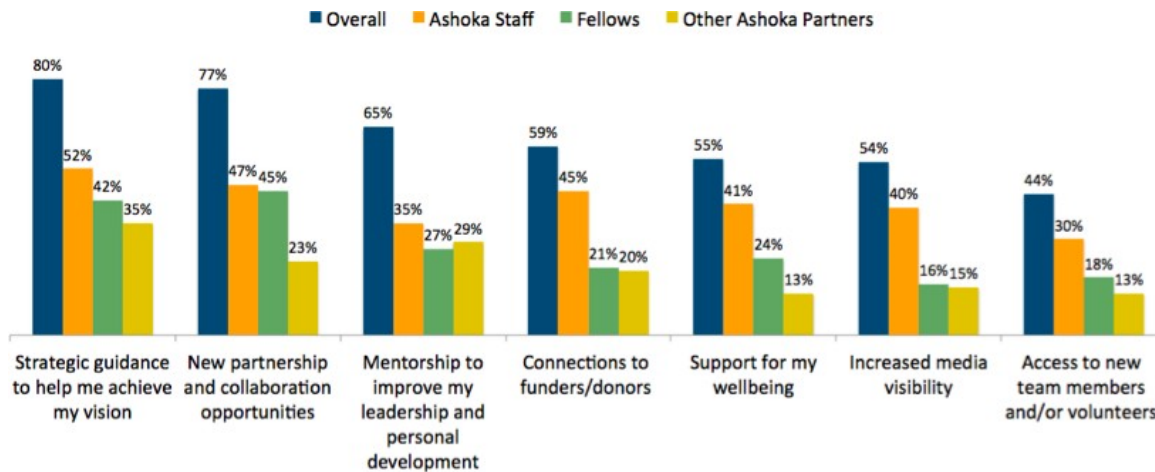■ Yes (42%) ■ To some extent (49%) ■ No (8%)

8%

42%

49%

N = 695

86% report that Ashoka helped them see their work at a systems-change level, and of those Fellows, 92% made changes to their strategy as a result

Fellows were also asked directly whether Ashoka has helped them increase their impact. 84 percent confirmed that Ashoka helped them increase their impact. Based on the Global Fellows Study results[13], there is a strong evidence that Ashoka's selection process strengthens the ideas of its fellows, but that the Ashoka Fellowship contributes significantly to systemic thinking and leadership qualities of its Fellows, with the consequences that many of them change their strategies within theirNGOs accordingly. A majority of Fellows confirm that this helped them increase the impact of their work and non-for-profits they lead.

While the search and selection process of new Ashoka Fellows is standardized across the globe, thesubsequent support from the umbrella NGO to the network varies greatly depending on the local context of each country, the presence and size of Ashoka staff, as well as the maturity of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem. For this reason, the social entrepreneurs vary as to what kind of help their NGOs have received from Ashoka and by which members of this global network.

---

[13]　https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/story/2018-global-study-finds-ashoka-fellows-change-policy-market-dynamics-and-how-people-think

As visualized in the chart above, the most common type of support is strategic guidance (80 percent)as well as the creation of new partnerships (77 percent). Two-thirds of Fellows mentioned mentorship to improve their leadership within their NGOs and beyond (65 percent). More than half claim that Ashoka has created new funding opportunities (59 percent), helped them to focus on theirwellbeing (55 percent), or increased their media visibility (54 percent). Fellows report a structured collaboration or partnership with an average of 4.1 other fellows, with seven percent of them collaborating with 10 or more Fellows. Mentorship and strategic guidance are often delivered by external partners engaged by Ashoka with the clear goal to increase the impact on both local and global policies.

All Fellows in the global network receive mentorship, strategic guidance, connection to funders and media as well as support to their wellbeing. This helps most of them to see the critical social or environmental problem they are trying to tackle in systems change terms and many of them change their strategy accordingly. The guidance received by Ashoka staff, by other Fellows and external alliesalso contributes to how Fellows perceive themselves as leaders capable of influencing legislation anddecision makers. As a global NGO Ashoka has a valuable role in accelerating Fellows' social impact that positively improves policy and market dynamics. Their respective NGOs supported by Ashoka's global resources bring to the surface ideas that often have no chance for development or remain confined locally. Fellows also report that Ashoka plays a role in validating their ideas and the organizations' programs and work by confirming that they are on the right track. This often works asa self-fulfilling prophecy and further increases the chances of Ashoka network NGOs reaching the level of policy transformation and systemic impact.

Former Ashoka employees (Waitzer & Roshan, 2011) studied the inherent contradictions and challenges in social impact-oriented organizations adopting business scaling strategies. They argue that systems-changing social entrepreneurs "let loose a well-defined idea to create a movement or mission-aligned ecosystem, rather than only growing the organization behind it."[4] Fellows see "scale"in terms of how deeply an idea spreads rather than as an increase in employees or direct beneficiaries of their NGOs, they often pursue distinct systems strategies. Achieving "scale" from Ashoka Fellows' perspective means changing market systems by shifting societal narratives and howpeople think, rather than just how they behave as consumers, voters, learners, professionals etc.. It means challenging existing power structures to make space for everyone to be an active participant in social change. Whether Fellows' ideas spread through open-sourcing, social franchising, licensing, training other NGOs or public institutions to copy their model, or strategic partnerships with government, the end result is the same. In sharp contrast to most for-profit entrepreneurs, systems- changing social entrepreneurs are willing to relinquish control and ownership of their idea in order tosee it spread as far as possible.

Ashoka Fellows know that in order to spread their idea quickly and turn it into the society's *new policy-based practice,* they must employ innovative strategies to get their idea into the hands of as many people as possible, preferably engaging governmental decision-makers. Independent replication is one indicator Ashoka has consistently used to measure its Fellows' "idea spread." The independent replication is understood in Ashoka's theory of change as a partnership with another organization or institution that takes on a Fellows' idea

and brings it to even larger scale and indirect impact. Independent replication can happen through strategic partnerships, licensing, or open- sourcing, among other strategies. (Waitzer & Roshan, 2011) With the advent of new technologies and digital tools, it is becoming easier for social entrepreneurs to make their idea accessible and easily replicable.

Since becoming an Ashoka Fellow, has your idea been replicated by independent groups or institutions?

(n=843)
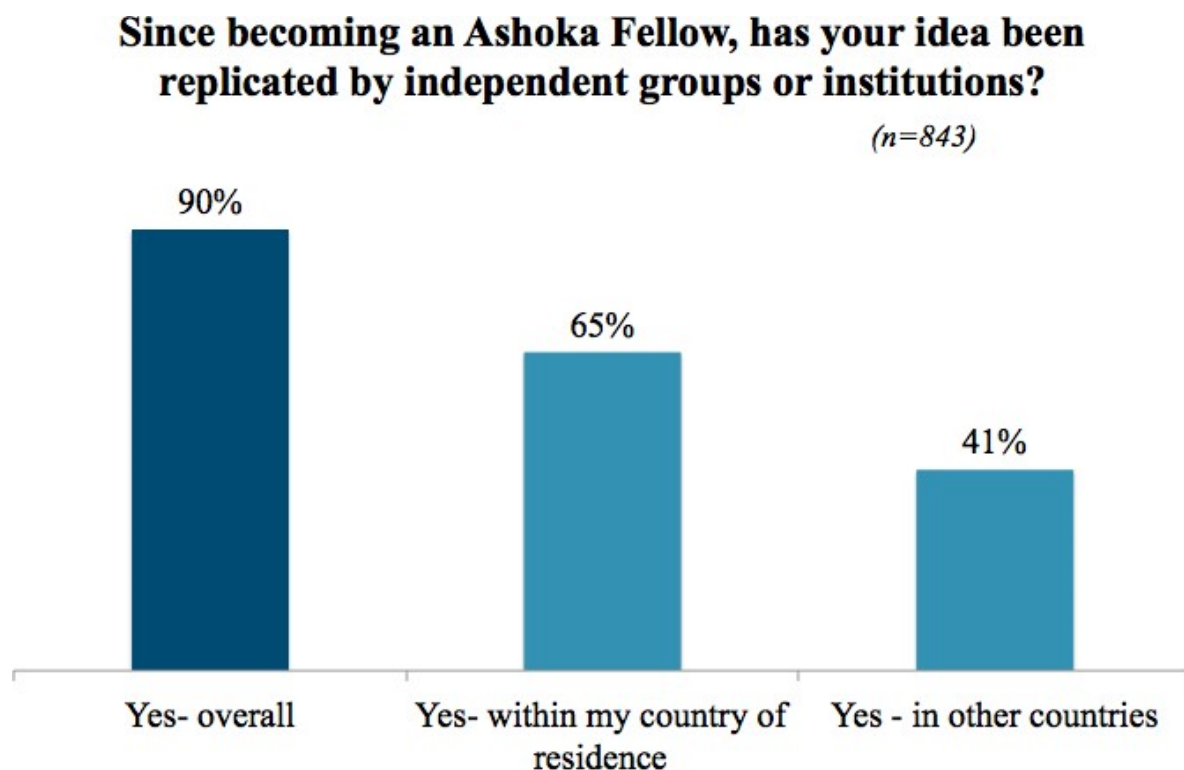
90 percent of Ashoka Fellows have seen their idea replicated by an independent group, mostly another NGO or an issue based networked community, whether at an international or national level. During interviews carried out as part of Ashoka's Global Impact Study[14], Fellows clearly indicated that they viewed independent replication as the key to their strategy for social change, although it often took them several years of trying and failing on their own before they realized they needed to give up "control" over their idea to other NGOs or even governments in order to scale it.

The term "policy change" in Ashoka's theory of change is understood as the most desired by changemakers and their NGOs end result legislation. Indeed, new or modified legislation can have widespread and long-term social impact -- for instance, due to Fellow Akkai Padmashali's tireless advocacy for transgender rights, Karnataka state in India has passed the first civil rights bill for transgender individuals that will impact an estimated 400,000 people in the state with legal protections from discrimination[15].

Overall, 93% of Fellows have achieved changes in public policy like representing marginalized groups in court, or advising policymakers as an expert. 74% of Fellows have created change in public policy or legislation. For example, Indian Fellow Sailakshmi Balijepalli[16] involved stakeholders such as local governments, educational institutions, and private providers to address the gaps in public healthcare with a particular focus on neonatal and maternal health. By convincing the government to take up her idea, the Indian Fellow scaled her community-based healthcare model across the country without increasing the NGOs staff, operating budget, or number of direct beneficiaries. Through collaborating with the government of Tamil Nadu and operationalizing 73 Neonatal Intensive Care units across the State to bring down Infant Mortality Rates, that model was replicated in other

[14] https://issuu.com/ashokachangemakers/docs/ashoka_-_2018_fellows_impact_report
[15] https://www.ashoka.org/pl/fellow/akkai-padmashali
[16] https://www.ashoka.org/en-us/fellow/balijepalli-sailakshmi

statesof India. And apart from this, global chapters were set up where members had the opportunity to learn the model hands on and manage it through local chapter implementation.[17]

Cántaro Azul is another Ashoka's emblematic example of influencing local and national government in the field of water and sanitation. He argued that access to potable water at a low cost is not enough to eradicate the severe gastrointestinal diseases that greatly impact rural communities in Mexico and beyond. His NGO took a multipronged approach to optimize the benefit provided by water purification units. Even one contaminated water source in a community significantly reduces the impact of installing water purification sources because it only takes one sip of contaminated water to make a person sick. The organization therefore partners with local institutions to facilitate awidespread, community understanding of the importance of potable water from an ecological and health perspective. These partnerships couple the technicalities of the potable water initiative with community-wide hygiene education and environmental awareness efforts. Cántaro Azul's hygiene education courses in local schools promote hand washing and other important habits that enhance the benefits of drinking safe water, thus arming community members with information that will incentivize upkeep of the newly installed water purification systems. The organization's environmental awareness initiatives make sure that the community, especially the youth, develops an understanding of water ecology and its importance in a world with limited and diminishing resources. Cántaro Azul's collaboration with public policy actors is key to the organization's future plans.[18] Even the public water networks are contaminated in Mexico, making access to clean water 24 hours a day extremely expensive. Cántaro Azul extended the innovative services to communities with access to public water networks as well. This involved a sistemic partnership with local governments in order to equip the organization's water purification technologies with alarms that would alert users as to whether or not the filtration device was working. The alarm has become anextra check so that no community member would ingest contaminated water.

With the novel approach, Cántaro Azul seeks to transform the current water treatment paradigm from one with a heavy emphasis on products to one with a service oriented strategy. Instead of asking households to contribute with a one-time disbursement or limited series of microfinance payments, households are asked to pay a small monthly bill. Other related solutions (such as sanitation facilities and hygiene products) have been adopted into the service model in other Latin America countries, showing how NGOs may influence governmental policies in this sphere.

Ashoka fellow Sakena Yacoobi, who was awarded the title of "Brave thinker 2010"[19] by The Antlantic Magazine, impacted the position of women through her NGO -The Afghan Institute of Learning (AIL) This foundation, under the umbrella of Ashoka, builds education and health systems in Afghanistan using a holistic approach that develops capacity and empower people. With 26,000 students educated already AIL continues to provide education at its Learning Centers in academic subjects and income generating skills. AIL is helping to revive traditional Afghan arts and culture through classes and conferences. AIL spreads the educational empowerment through teacher training and offers instructional support in subjects such as: human rights, leadership, peace and democracy. Health education and health care is given at AIL clinics, mobile outreach units and Community Health Workers Posts. The NGOs impact on the national education is spectacular not just through the annualscale: 48 Learning Centers, 231,000 health patients in 6 clinics or mobile units , 172,000 health education interventions. Sakena Yacoobi's NGO combines innovative education, quality health care with health education and training programs, as well as providing emergency aid and free legal aid. The Fellow empowers women and girls so they can earn independent income and maintain a sustainable life. No government would dare to ignore this kind of impact, unless it openly adheres to ideologies reducing women to half-humans in order to keep the power.

In addition to new legislation, Ashoka measured several other "targeted systems change" strategies for policy change and influence over the governmental decisions in the 2018 Global Fellows Study. Especially for
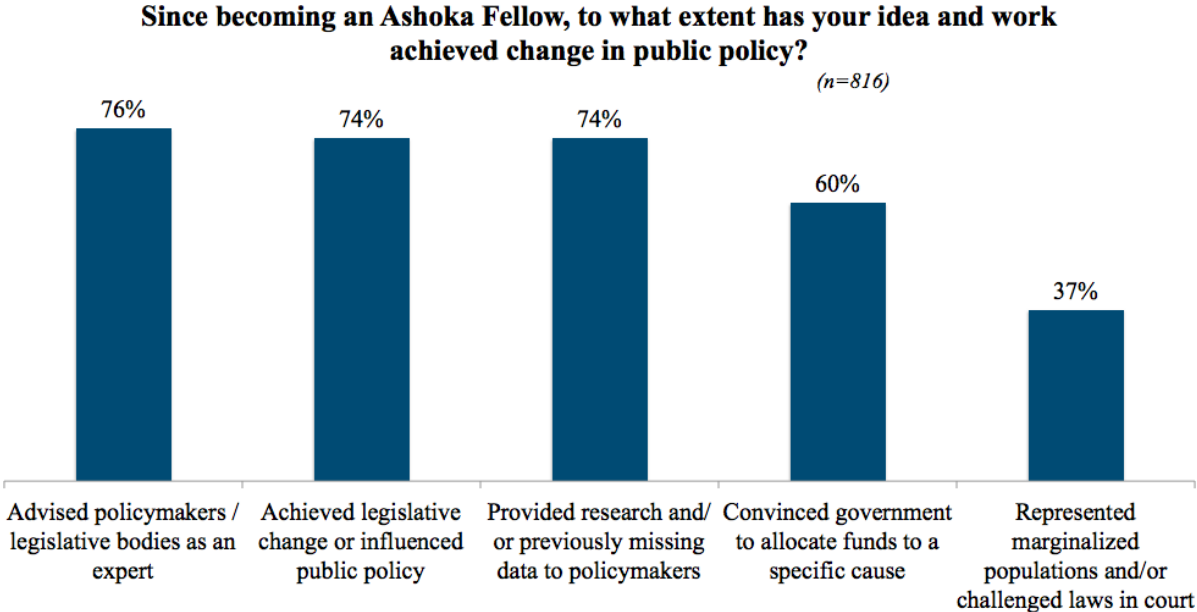
---

[17] https://socialinnovationsjournal.org/editions/issue-52/75-disruptive-innovations/2905-how-ashoka-fellows- create-systems-change-new-learnings-and-insights-from-the-2018-global-fellows-study
[18] http://en.cantaroazul.org/

[19] https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/11/brave-thinkers-2010/308283/ -accessed on 14.07.2021

Fellows living in countries prone to political corruption and high attrition rates of government officials, legislative change may not be the most feasible or sustainable solution. Other strategies that Fellows employ to change public policy include representing marginalized populationsor challenging laws in court, convincing governments to allocate funding to a specific cause, advising policymakers as an expert, or providing research/previously missing data to policymakers. All of these strategies can be thought of as subsets of the overall category of "policy change."

Since becoming an Ashoka Fellow, to what extent has your idea and work achieved change in public policy?

(n=816)

Advised policymakers / legislative bodies as an expert	Achieved legislative change or influenced public policy	Provided research and/ or previously missing data to policymakers	Convinced government to allocate funds to a specific cause	Represented marginalized populations and/or challenged laws in court
76%	74%	74%	60%	37%

When analyzing the data by the fellows' election period, a new trend emerges: rates of international-level systems change have been increasing over time for policy change, markets change, and replication. This increase is particularly pronounced because Fellows elected more recently, by definition, have had less time than their peers to create systems change. The shorter timespan makes this finding even more spectacular: Fellows elected between 2014-18 are already
reporting the same levels of international-level systems change as Fellows elected in the 1980s and1990s. For most measures of social impact one would expect that Fellows elected more recently would have lower rates of systems change, simply because it takes time to build their NGOs' capacity, build the network, learn etc.to start succeeding.

International-Level Policy Change Response by Period of Election to Ashoka Fellowship

(n=816)

13% → 24% → 32% → 33% → 31%

| 1980-89 | 1990-99 | 2000-07 | 2008-13 | 2014-18 |
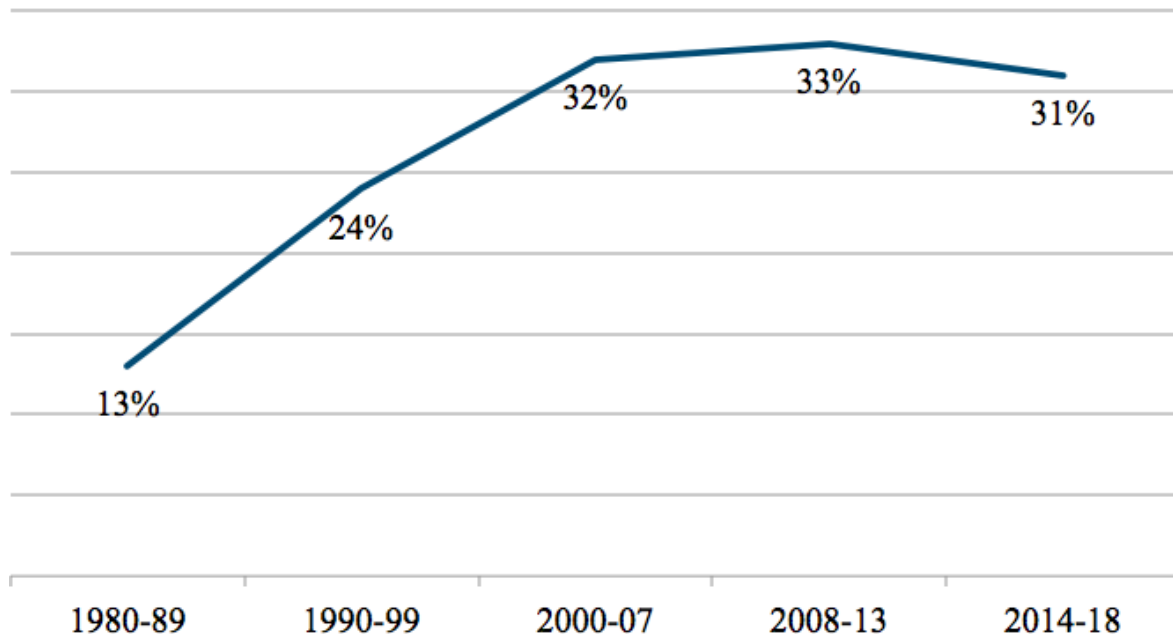
More research is needed to understand this phenomenon, but one hypothesis is that globalizationand new digital tools like Facebook and Skype may be assisting Fellows in increasing their rate of international change. Other hypotheses include network effects from other Fellows and from the social entrepreneurship sector more broadly as it has continued to evolve from the 1980s.

CONCLUSIONS

Out of 10 million NGOs in the world only some reach the policy changing level and their work is of interest to governments. Tackling the most complex and deep-rooted challenges, creating sustainable social change both at a local and global scale may seem a herculean task that only those NGOs which are led in an innovative, accountable and financially transparent way are able to perform. While all the NGOs face the dilemma whether to target policymakers with a solution from the very beginning of their activities or to change how key stakeholders think about a social issue first, whether it is better to start local and build a model that works or to target key influencers within international bodies who can affect widespread change Ashoka fellows and their organizations was presented in the article as the highly impactful network. In Ashoka's 2018 Global Fellows Study, the findings show that most Ashoka Fellows' response to these questions is simply "Yes." Changing policies and mindsets often go hand-in-hand. And in order to scale a solution, Fellows usually first need to demonstrate their innovation works. For the majority of Fellows systems change is not one monolithic strategy for addressing societal challenges; rather, like chess players, Fellows are employing different, multi-step strategies and engaging every piece on the board to win the game of reaching a tipping point in social impact.

Regardless of sphere of influence in order to impact a state or intergovernmental policy level an NGOmust embrace a mindset by being clear about the systems the civil society wants to change. This desired transformation must be incorporated into the NGO's DNA, and become the guiding principle in looking for funding opportunities and partneships, including the governmental support. International or umbrella NGOs must support evolving paths to systems change by supporting leaders (e.g. social innovators) with transformative visions of improved systems rather than projects,investing in learning and capability building and encouraging collaboration among diverse NGOs sharing the big vision for change. Impactful NGOs work in true partnership by acknowledging complexity

and working against power dynamics[20], providing support that fits civil society needs, andbeing mindful of their limited resources. These NGOs are ready for long-term engagement by being realistic about the time it takes to achieve systems change, acknowledging that the path of the initiatives will change along the way and encouraging realistic ambitions. Finally the NGOs with policy-changing ambitions must collaborate with other stakeholders by aligning with diverse funders or decision-makers building networks, and giving up the leading role to innovators.

LITERATURE

Anderson, K. "What NGO Accountability Means - and Does Not Mean." Review of NGO Accountability: Politics, Principles & Innovations, edited by Lisa Jordan and Peter van Tuijl. AmericanJournal of International Law 10, no. 1: 170-78, 2009

Charnovitz, S. "Accountability of Non-governmental Organizations in Global Governance," NGO Accountability: Politics, Principles and Innovations, London: Earthscan, 21-42, 2007

Dunoff, J., et al. International Law, Norms, Actors, Process: a Problem-Oriented Approach. WoltersKluwer, 2015.

Fogarty, E. A. Nothing succeeds like access? NGO strategies towards multilateral institutions. Journalof Civil Society, 7 (2), 207–227, 2011

Kaldor, M. "Civil Society and Accountability." Journal of Human Development, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 5– 27,2003.

Kaplan, R., Strategic performance measurement and management in nonprofit organizations.Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 11(3), p.353-370, 2001

Leviner, N. Crutchfield, L., Wells, D. "Understanding the impact of social entrepreneurs: Ashoka'sanswer to the challenge of measuring effectiveness." Research on Social Entrepreneurship and Contributing to an Emerging Field (2006): 89-103.

Malena, C. Working with NGOs : a practical guide to operational collaboration between the WorldBank and nongovernmental organizations. Washington, DC: World Bank, 1995

Macarchuk, A., The Effect of International NGOs on Influencing Domestic Policy and Law CMC Scholarship Claremont, 2018

Maas, K., Corporate Social Performance: From Output Measurement to Impact Measurement.Rotterdam: Haveka, 2009

Prakash, A., Gugerty. M., Advocacy Organizations and Collective Action. Cambridge University Press,2010.

Simmons, PJ. "Learning to Live with NGOs." Foreign Policy, no. 112, 1998.

Szporluk, M. "A Framework for Understanding Accountability of International NGOs and Global Good Governance." Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies, vol. 16, no. 1, p. 339-361. 2009.

Tortajada, C. Nongovernmental Organizations and Influence on Global Public Policy. Asia & thePacific Policy Studies, 3: 266–274, 2016

Townsend, J.G. & A.R. Townsend. Accountability, motivation and practice: NGOs North and South,Social & Cultural Geography, 5:2, 271-284, 2004

Waitzer J., Roshan P., "Scaling Social Impact: When Everybody Contributes, Everybody Wins," Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization, MIT Press, vol. 6(2), pages 143-155, April. 2011

---

[20] https://www.mckinsey.de/publikationen/embracing-complexity