

# Forms of Social Organizations in the Third World: NGOs and POs

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## Introduction

The forms of social organization in the Third World would definitely vary in a particular stage of economic, political and social historical development of different countries. The nature of their existence in terms of direction and its activities are reflections of the particular epoch of their emergence.

Formally, in terms of its nature of not being part of government structures and its activities not meant for profit, the different forms of social organization have special role to play in the development of society. They can either help in the perpetuation of the existing dominant and oppressive system or they can, not only cause the weakening of the existing system, but can also help in the building of an alternative for the betterment of the majority of the people in a given society.

It is very important for the revolutionaries and social activists to see and understand the whole philosophy of the social organizations that we see today since their reasons for being are dictated by the ideological principles of their creators and supporters. And as we see since its beginning, the social organizations are created by the dominant system for the purpose that they will help in the mystification and justification of its existing governance.

But on the one hand, there are definitely forms of social organizations which can be vehicle for the expression of the people's issues and interests. There are organizations which reflect the day to day struggles of the poor and the oppressed towards the betterment of their lives. Their collective action in actual struggles towards achieving a common goal can be both liberating as well as transformative. But since there are vehicles of the dominated and exploited system, they are always

peripherized and neutralized but never stifled.

In this particular stage of neoliberal globalization, it will be a paramount importance for social activists and revolutionaries to understand the dynamics and complexities of the different forms of social organizations in order to know how the neoliberal policies are implemented in our local communities and day to day lives but how can we have programs not only to counter these anti people and anti development polices just to build an appropriate and viable one for the broadest section of the people.

It is in this context then that we will have exchange of ideas and profound discussion on the Forms of Social Organizations in the Third World in the 5<sup>th</sup> Asian Global Justice School (AGJS).

## **I. Definition of Terms and Brief History of Social Organizations in the 3<sup>rd</sup> World**

Nowadays, when one speaks of social organizations they always refer to the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and the Peoples Organizations (POs) and the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and social movements as well. In fact, they are interrelated and closely intertwined. One can always find NGOs and POs in any civil society organizations (CSOs) and social movements and vice versa. For our purpose we keep such understanding that way and we try to see them in their functions and activities in particular setting and period of time. The following definition can be of help:

**1. NGOs-** are legally constituted corporations created by natural or legal people that operate independently from any form of government. Its juridical identity states that they are non-stock as well as non-profit. That is the reason that they refer to as the “third way” because they are supposed to be in between authoritarian statism and savage market capitalism. But one can easily see the ironic nature of NGO , because they have to be registered and legitimized through the state and that for instance a progressive social movement would want to challenge. They have to be legalized by the entity (government/State) they wanted to challenge.

**2. Civil Society-** Any organization whether formal or informal that is not part of the apparatus of the government, that does not distribute profit to their directors or operators, that is self-governing and which participation is a matter of free choice. There is an emphasis on voluntarism.

**3. Social movements-** is an organized set of constituents pursuing a common political agenda of change through collective action. Social movements are always driven by shared vision and propelled through their collective actions. The movements we refer here are not one entity, but are made up of several forces, formal organizations, autonomous formations, intellectual spaces and thoughts as well as individuals. Here the movements are very important in a sense that they create the potential for sustained change not only institutionalizing reforms but consolidating transformation within the peoples and society.

### **Brief History of Social Organizations (NGOs and POs)**

The existence of NGOs dates back as early or before the writing of *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels. It was in 1839 when the term NGO first came up but it was in 1914 (before WWII) when there was identification of 1,083 NGOs which had already existed. During this period, the NGOs played important role in anti-slavery movements and movements for women suffrage. The popularity

of NGOs reached its peak in the Disarmament Conference after WWII. The word NGO was formalized by the establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 when provision in Article 71 of Chapter 10 of the UN Charter calls for consultative role for organizations which are neither government and member state.

The rapid development of the NGOs or non-government sector occurred in developing countries (South East Asia) and Latin America during the authoritarian regimes and dictatorships. Multilateral institutions had supported the existence of NGOs to fill in the gaps created by the absence of governments' basic services to help neutralize the boiling sentiments of the people.

Fast development of the non government sector happened in Western countries as a result of the processes of restructuring of the Welfare states. Further globalization of the process occurred after the fall of the Communist system and filling in the gaps of the governments or government in the making which have been part of the US or the Washington Consensus in ensuring that these countries would be the neoliberal circle.

The sudden rise of the NGOs and other forms of social organizations is part of neo-liberal paradigm rather than pure altruistic motivations of the neo-liberal development.

From its early beginning and rapid development, it is not surprising that the NGOs today have become powerful. They have influenced policies and directions of different governments, multilateral institutions and world's affairs. Their sheer number alone will really make any policy maker or government leaders listen to them.

Currently, there are more than 50,000 NGOs in the third world with estimated budget amounting to \$10 billion. The NGOs in the US are estimated to reach 1.5 million: in Russia 277,000 and in India there are 3.3 million NGOs in 2009 alone which means if we compare the number of NGOs to the number of the population of India, we have the ratio of one NGO for every 400 Indians. The funds which went to the support of NGOs are increasing every year. Like in the 1970- \$0.9 billion; 1980 at \$2 billion; 1993 at \$ 6 billion, etc. The involvement of NGOs to government machineries increased from 6% in late 1980 to 70% in 2006. This involvement range from different forms of Humanitarian assistance and development. They became part of delivery of goods and services to the poor countries, from the so-called rich countries.

There are five US-based mega NGOs which have overseas expenditures greater than \$500million in 2004. These are World Vision, Feed the Children, Food for the Poor, Catholic relief Services and CARE (USAID). They are all involved in Relief Development Program. Only one NGO which is based outside the United States which has almost the same budget, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Switzerland with \$600 million in the same year. The amount alone intended of these NGOs is much bigger than the annual budget of small and medium countries.

In such enormous amount of budget, the biggest single donor for it is from different national governments. In 2004 for instance, the total official aid for governments to the NGOs was \$87.7 billion worldwide and \$19.7 billion of such amount came from the US government. It is good to note also that private capitalists corporations like Mobil which get a profit of \$36 billion in 2005 and CITIGroup which got enormous profit donated only \$52 million and \$28 millions respectively to the NGOs. It is imperative then that these governments expect the NGOs to carry their foreign policies and interests and implement them from their level of operation that is from below.

The difficulty of maintaining an objective relationship between the NGOs and their donors is indeed a fact. While it states that NGOs are not part of government machineries but they are purposely given the budget to operate favorably within the dominant system.

On the other hand, the other social organizations and civil society organizations which have consistently identified themselves with social movements have received almost no support from the types of donors which we mentioned above. But they have survived because of their dynamic and organic link with concrete social movements of peoples and communities struggling collectively because of a common vision for change.

Currently, there is a general weakening of the Social Movements especially in the developing countries. There are several factors that can be the cause of the decline. One of them would be the general weakening of the revolutionary and progressive movements like in the case of the Philippines. The close identification of the social movements during the dictatorship period with the revolutionary organization and Parties and their common struggle to oust the dictatorship mutually help them to be stronger and more vibrant. However, after the dictatorship was ousted and replaced by the so-called new democratic government (Cory Aquino) there has been steady decline in the social movements. Democratic spaces have been created and popular democratic institutions have been build up to replace the old "political" movements driven social organizations. This had also been a remarkable decline of the growth of the revolutionary movements because the fascist regime which had been the concrete object/target of the struggle had been removed. The revolutionary Party and organizations have suffered difficulties in shifting political orientation which clearly manifested an error of understanding the sentiments of the people in the anti-dictatorship movements. Revolutionary Party such as the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its allied organizations had been pushing for a system change in the period when people could be only on the level of regime change - especially ousting and replacing the dictatorial regime of Marcos.

In such situation, different countries led by the United States of America (USA) have taken advantage to secure their interests in the country like the Philippines. They had put much funds through their own NGOs to support the building of popular democratic institutions and effect the alienation of the cause-oriented social movements. During this period, one can immediately observe that funding support has directed to projects rather than the movements.

This concrete situation has been happening in the Philippines but similar events can be observed in other developing and peripheral countries in the Southeast Asia and Latin America.

Worth mentioning here is the case of MST or Movement of the Landless Peasants in Brazil. Before the PT or Workers Party took over the government, the MST had been consistently and sustainably struggle to assert the interest of the landless peasants. The forms of struggle included among others, the direct occupation of agricultural lands by the peasant themselves. But when PT took power (which MST has been identified with) the movement aspect of the MST has occupied less attention and projects aspect became dominant. This change of concept and political orientation became institutionalized when an NGO was created to act as funding conduit of the PT government and MST in receiving financial support from the government.

## **II. The Marxist Concept of the Social Organizations and Movements vis-à-vis that of the Bourgeois Concept**

Basically the Marxist concept of social organization and movement is very well related to achieving concrete change of the status quo (bourgeois condition) to better condition for the working class and the toiling masses. Achieving change can only be realized if the working class and toiling masses work together (collectively) primarily and involve other sectors/class in struggling against the capitalist ruling system. It is in the process of the struggle against the dominant oppressive system that the workers and toiling masses became aware of their basic rights and become for themselves

when they directly participate in their emancipation. And such struggle contains the seeds of the future democratic collectivizing society.

On the other hand, the NGOs (bourgeois) claimed to be the “vanguard” of civil society and their aim is to create alternative development model to the existing bourgeois one. By talking about civil society, the NGOs obscure the profound class divisions, class exploitation and class struggle that polarizes the contemporary civil society.

It will be immediately noticed that NGOs emphasize projects rather than the movements but they often do this effectively through coopting the language of the left and hiring people and paying high salaries from the progressive and revolutionary organizations.

The NGO ideology depends heavily on the essentialist identity politics, engaging in a rather dishonest polemic with radical movement based on class analysis. They also start from false assumption that class analysis is reductionist overlooking the extensive debates and discussion within Marxist circle on issues of race, ethnicity and gender equality and avoiding the more serious criticism that identifies themselves which have clearly and profoundly divided by class elements. For this type of NGOs, class struggle is atavism.

One can clearly see the difference between the Marxist and bourgeois (NGO) with regards the concept of solidarity. The basic philosophy of NGO is to transform solidarity into collaboration and subordination to the macro economy of neo-liberalization by focusing the attention away from the resources of the wealthy class towards the deep exploitation of the poor.

The Marxist concept of solidarity in contrast emphasizes class solidarity within the class solidarity of the oppressed groups (women, minority nationals, etc) against their foreign and domestic exploiters.

The focus of the Marxist concept of solidarity is a common action of the same members of the class, sharing their common economic predicament and struggling for collective improvement. The main focus here is not on the donations (resources/money) that divide classes and pacify small groups for a limited period of time. For the NGO, the main object is getting the foreign funding for the project.

Solidarity among and between the working class and the toiling masses should be emphasized and strengthened by the progressive and revolutionary movements and organizations. Such task can be done among and between people to people, sectors, gender in all levels (national, regional and international). Collective struggle can only be done on concrete issues based on common experience and focusing on common enemy to achieve concrete gains and victories. The organic link of Agricultural industry for instance from the country of the main office of giant Agricultural Corporation and the host country of this agricultural products can be the weakest link of this globalized capitalist production. Hence, issues of inhuman working condition or raising of wages of the workers can be a concrete cause of Solidarity of the working people in the country where the main office of the product is located. A boycott of the product and fear of bad publicity image of the company in its home country can facilitate the granting of the demands of the agricultural workers in the plantation country. It is a concrete victory of the working class in both countries.

For Marxists, it is the process of political struggle and education in securing social transformation. The most important stress is on the movement whose objective is the raising of political consciousness for social change. It is in this stage where constructing or building political power to transform the general condition of the great majority of the people to their betterment concretely occur. On the other hand, for the NGO solidarity is driven away from the general object of liberation and it is a way of bringing people together only to attend training and deal with issues at hand.

The role of NGOs to micro project (micro-economy) is to neutralize political opposition at the bottom while neo-liberalism (macro economy) is promoted at the top. The ideologies of cooperations link the poor through the NGOs to neoliberal at the top.

Today, the NGOs have taken a central stage in the platform for change. The NGOization of the movements accompanied by the pre-requisite of "professionalization" of activism open to the middle classes with access to the formal education and able to operate in Western paradigm of advocacy has dominated the NGO world. Such reality has somehow numbed our imagination for transformation and dynamic visioning of a better future. Here, one can clearly see where activism is held hostage to the jobs.

Accountability will not be to the people, it will be to the donor. The powers of capital have paralyzed the NGOs and block them to go beyond donor driven paradigm.

And this is despite the strong belief of Marxist and progressives that funding sector is one sight for struggle by itself and that transformative progressive change will not be confined or restricted to logframe, results-based programming or project proposals.

The NGOs which we have been described above are those which serve as informal part of the neoliberal machinery. They exist and fueled purposely by donors (mainly government funds) to justify the existing dominant system and make some reforms to perpetuate its governance. Trends today are saying that many of them work to outsource government services. To do basic government obligations to the taxpaying people in terms of basic social services the NGOs get the job because the government paid them. People have to pay twice- to the government and to the NGOs. This is also filling the gaps in terms of the delivery of basic services. It is definitely taking away the basic duty of the government to the people , eg. basic health services, education, etc.

On the other hand, there are social organizations (NGOs/POs) which are grounded/rooted in the mass movement. And therefore they are serving as vehicle for the transformative process of the broadest sector of the population towards achieving the common good. Their close association with social movements has made them less favorite of the big funding donors. If ever they get funding it is from small funding donors only for specific action on issues at hand. This kind of organization relies on its own human resources and voluntarism. This identification or being rooted to the peoples struggle made them less institutionalized and therefore more organic dynamism to making their vision more realizable and doable.

This is the kind of social organization which progressives and revolutionaries shall help build and strengthen. The domineering influences of the neoliberal NGOs can oftentime neutralize the progressive and revolutionary NGOs but this is where the concrete battlefield is drawn. Critical Marxists and progressive intellectuals have their strength in the fact that this ideas resonate with the evolving social realities. The continuous polarization of classes and the violent confrontation are growing and intensifying as their theories would predict. It is from this perspective that the Marxists and progressives are seen as tactically weak but strategically strong vis-à-vis the bourgeois NGOs.

Besides, the role of the people in their numbers and their collective involvement in the social movement to achieve their common goal can be the unlimited source of energy and strength. Making the social movements and the social organizations sustained the dynamism of achieving positive change can be a big comparative and moral advantage from that of the bourgeois influenced NGOs.

### **III. The revolutionary Parties and the Social Organizations and Movements**

The struggle against the neoliberal globalization can be done in various means and forms depending on the socio-economic and political contexts of each country. In the South East Asian countries where capitalism developed unevenly and in some more backwardly, the forms and means of struggles will reflect such peculiarities. These can be expressed in armed form and underground organizations/parties because political realities would not allow them to be in other forms at the particular period (Philippines, Burma). But others have adopted the open and non armed form of struggles against oppressive dominant system of neoliberal. In both forms (open/ non armed and underground/armed) the roles of the social movements and organization also are differentiated. Definitely a proper combination of both forms with the social movements can achieve better results.

While generally speaking social movements include all organized set of constituents pursuing a common political agenda of change through collective action, organizations (open and aboveground) identified with revolutionary organizations and parties could be organically integral part of them.

The social organizations identified with revolutionary parties and organizations which will involve in the social movements should bear in mind that the social movements and other organizations including themselves have their own particular nature and dynamism and therefore factoring them in relation with the other participants in the common struggle will matter very much. No one, including the Party should impose its interests over the movement. Democratic debates should be encouraged in arriving at consensus. Social organization even if it is identified with a revolutionary party should struggle its ideas and decide on merits of the issues being debated at all times. The Stalinist practice of using the social organizations and movements as transmission belt of the Party should be avoided or never ever considered. The concept of transmission belt for the interest of one party or a group of people is anathema to any democratic principle. This is not only stifling a democratic process but worst is making the social organization and the movement numbed and act like political zombies.

The composition of the social organizations in the social movements vary not only in size and structure but also in its belief and ideology, it is always best if the principle of independence and initiative is practiced to encourage the continuous dynamism of all the political stakeholders and continue their struggle against the dominant system in a particular issue and in a given period. There can be disagreements among the constituents on certain issues but greater/stronger unity in other issues, and therefore principled unity should be stressed and less focus will be given to the differences which cannot be the major enough reason to affect the overall unity and struggle against the oppressive system and building the new and better alternative.

Revolutionary Parties and Organizations should continue to maintain and even develop a proper attitude within social movements and other organizations. The attitude of continuous education and learning should be practiced at all times. An attitude of "knowing all" and "have been there" should be strictly avoided. Each activity for genuine revolutionaries should be a new opportunity to learn and to share our knowledge with others.

The practice of transparency and accountability of all the stakeholders in the social movements often times will be very difficult for the social organizations identified with revolutionary parties and organizations to be transparent much more accountable for its actions. But this is not to say that is an impossible task because in doing so we are making a clear signal that we are not hiding anything and we can be responsible for our action and therefore from here we can build trust with each other. Engaging in collective struggle for achieving a common goal-trust is necessary- to achieve our objective.

The revolutionary parties and organizations and the social movements and the social organizations can have symbiotic relationship if one knows its interests and limitations while the revolutionary parties/organizations aim at achieving substantial and radical change in a neoliberal regime. They work out with social movements in weakening the dominant system and achieving meaningful reforms while building/constructing alternative for a better future. On the other hand, while social movement and organizations struggle for the tactical reforms and gain small victories for the broadest section of the people. It can ensure its strategic goal of total emancipation of the poor and the oppressed when it works together with those who struggle for substantial and radical change of the current dominant system.

Both can mutually help and strengthen each other is the sense that one possesses knowledge and skills that the other one does not have. The Social Movements and organizations can help progressive and revolutionaries in upscaling their skills and knowledge in working within and outside the bourgeois machineries and apparatus. The revolutionaries and progressives on the other hand can help the social organizations in giving stress in complementing the works of other networks rather than competing with them. Harnessing undivided political energy should be given paramount importance should that main blow of the dominant bourgeois machineries to divide the revolutionary and the social movements should be frustrated.

#### **IV. What more NEED to be DONE?**

With the decline of the socialist camp and its existing model discredited, the neoliberal offensives have seemingly been unopposed. This is notwithstanding the intensifying crises that capitalism in its present form has also been experiencing. The existence of the bourgeois NGOs in its sheer number has helped tremendously in maintaining and even strengthening the continuous existence of the dominant capitalist system in its present form. In fact, in many areas, these type of NGOs have successfully numbed the people's opposition to the neoliberal policies like in structural adjustment programs of their government. The use of left language, not politically risky job environment and with high compensation has continuously attracted cadres from revolutionary movements to work in their ranks.

On the other hand, we have NGOs/POs rooted on the social movement and whose strength emanate from the people who are gaining small victories and slowly building blocks for a better future. With less material compensation cadres working with these less funded NGOs have become creative and resourceful to energize their day to day struggles.

There is a need to give importance to the concept of the movement in order to maintain the element of dynamism and energy in achieving a common vision. Let us avoid institutionalizing the social movements so as not to stifle its inner strength and continue to propel the social movement into a high level of political dynamism and engagement. NGOizing a movement is practically killing it even if it will be in exchange of big amount for a project from the bourgeois funding donors.

There is a need to establish and strengthen solidarity among the poor and the oppressed. Their strength and energy come from being together and collectively pursuing their common interest in achieving a better future. They build solidarity and class bonding that make them sustain their struggle.

Solidarity with their oppressor, through whatever means and how much the amount they can get is like establishing relationships which the devil where there will be abundance of material resources that would last them for a day but starve them for the rest of their lives. The poor and the oppressed will always find themselves at the gates of hell because anytime such solidarity will break up to their

great disadvantage. The bourgeois NGOs will never work for the interest of the people they are exploiting at best they will work for the maintenance of the existing status quo.

The NGOs rooted in the social movements should always be conscious that their political mission is positively evolving to a higher level from achieving reforms and helping in creating situation for radical change in the dominant system. There is always a need to be conscious that in the process of achieving change there is a need to develop the foundation of the alternative of the system we want to change. And this is very important to the social movements because they can create the potential for sustainable change by not only institutionalizing reforms but in consolidation of the transformative process.

There is a need to strengthen the relationships of the revolutionary parties and organizations in the social organizations and movements to ensure the continuity and all sided development of the common goal they have collectively struggled. The dynamic relationship can also check reformist and over centralized tendencies of all stakeholders involve in the struggle for building a better future.

Building Solidarity from below should be a continuous task of both the revolutionary and social movements. This can be done in both domestic and international levels. Revolutionary Parties and organizations should be ideologically and politically strengthened specially in developing alternative development paradigm. The rapid changes brought about by the neoliberal system have caused big ideological and political gaps among and between revolutionaries of the current period. Feelings of demoralization and disorientation can be observed in both rank and file of the revolutionary movements which in turn has direct effect in the dynamism and general weakening of the social movements in many countries. The frustration of finding new answers to the fast unfolding new questions brought about by the bourgeois dominant system. There is still a problem for considerable number of revolutionaries and progressives to cling to old answers to the new questions.

But on the other hand, these ideological and political gaps can be appropriate opportunities for genuine revolutionaries to upload the weight on their shoulder of the old failed ideology and framework and develop a new one applying the Marxists' tool of analysis on the present context which can surely invigorate and give new energy to the current dynamism of the social movements. The new situation needs new energy of dynamism in our political struggles towards achieving new victories!

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