

SECTION 2: RATINGS – GENERAL

DEFINITIONS

The NGO Sustainability Index uses a seven-point scale, to facilitate comparisons to the Freedom House indices, with 7 indicating a low or poor level of development and 1 indicating a very advanced NGO sector. The following section elaborates on the characteristics of each level of development:

1. NGO sector's sustainability enhanced significantly by practices/policies in this area. While the needed reforms may not be complete, the local NGO community recognizes which reforms or developments are still needed, and has a plan and the ability to pursue them itself.
2. NGO sector's sustainability enhanced by practices/policies in this area. Local NGO community demonstrates a commitment to pursuing reforms and developing its professionalism in this area.
3. NGO sector's sustainability somewhat enhanced by practices/policies in this area or commitment to developing the aspect in question is significant.
4. NGO sector's sustainability minimally affected by practices/policies in this area. Progress may be hampered by a stagnant economy, a passive government, a disinterested media, or a community of good-willed but inexperienced activists.
5. NGO sector's sustainability somewhat impeded by practices/policies in this area. Progress may be hampered by a contracting economy, authoritarian leader and centralized government, controlled or reactionary media, or a low level of capacity, will or interest on the part of the NGO community.
6. NGO sector's sustainability impeded by practices/policies in this area. A hostile environment and low capacity and public support prevents the growth of the NGO sector.
7. NGO sector's sustainability significantly impeded by practices/policies in this area, generally as a result of an authoritarian government that aggressively opposes the development of independent NGOs.

SECTION 3: RATINGS – A CLOSER LOOK

The following sections go into greater depth about the characteristics in each of the seven dimensions of the sector's development. These characteristics and stages are drawn from empirical observations of the sector's development in the region, rather than a causal theory of development. Given the decentralized nature of NGO sectors, many contradictory developments may be taking place simultaneously. Therefore we do not attempt to break out the characteristics of the seven dimensions into seven distinct steps of development. Instead, these characteristics are clustered into three basic stages: Consolidation, Mid-Transition and Early Transition. The Consolidation stage, the highest level of sustainability and development, corresponds to a score between 1 and 3 points; the Mid-Transition stage corresponds to a score between 3 and 5 points; and the lowest level of development, the Early Transition stage, corresponds to a score of 5 to 7 points on the scale.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

Consolidation (1-3): The legislative and regulatory framework makes special provisions for the needs of NGOs or gives not-for-profit organizations special advantages such as: significant tax deductions for business or individual contributions, significant tax exemptions for NGOs, open competition among NGOs to provide government-funded services, etc. Legal reform efforts at this point are primarily a local NGO advocacy effort to reform or fine tune taxation laws, procurement processes, etc. Local and comparative expertise on the NGO legal framework exists, and legal services and materials are available.

Mid-Transition (3-5): NGOs have little trouble registering and do not suffer from state harassment. They are permitted to engage in a broad range of activities, although taxation provisions, procurement procedures, etc. may inhibit NGO operations and development. Programs seek to reform or clarify existing NGO legislation, to allow NGOs to engage in revenue raising and commercial activities, to allow national or local governments to privatize the provision of selected government services, to address basic tax and fiscal issues for NGOs, etc. The local NGO community understands the need to coalesce and advocate for legal reforms benefiting the NGO sector as a whole. A core of local lawyers begins to specialize in NGO law by providing legal services to local NGOs, advising the NGO community on needed legal reforms, crafting draft legislation, etc.

Early Transition (5-7): The legal environment severely restricts the ability of NGOs to register and/or operate, either through the absence of legal provisions, the confusing or restrictive nature of legal provisions (and/or their implementation), or government hostility towards and harassment of NGOs.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Consolidation (1-3): Several transparently governed and capably managed NGOs exist across a variety of sectors. A majority of organizations have clearly defined mission statements, and many NGOs utilize strategic planning techniques. Boards of directors exist, and there is a clear distinction between the responsibilities of board members and staff. NGOs have permanent well-trained staff, and volunteers are widely utilized. Most NGOs have relatively modern equipment that allows them to do their work efficiently. Leading NGOs have successfully developed strong local constituencies.

Mid-Transition (3-5): Individual NGOs demonstrate enhanced capacity to govern themselves and organize their work. Some individual NGOs maintain full-time staff members and boast an orderly division of labor between board members and staff. NGOs have access to basic office equipment, including computers and fax machines. While these efforts may not have reached fruition yet, leading NGOs understand the need and are making an effort to develop local constituencies.

Early Transition (5-7): NGOs are essentially “one-man shows,” completely dependent upon the personality of one or two major figures. They often split apart due to personality clashes. NGOs lack a clearly defined sense of mission. At this stage, NGOs reflect little or no understanding of strategic planning or program formulation. Organizations rarely have a board of directors, by-laws, staff, or more than a handful of active members. NGOs have no understanding of the value or need of developing local constituencies for their work.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY

Consolidation (1-3): A critical mass of NGOs have sound financial management systems in place, including independent audits and the publication of annual reports with financial statements, to win potential donors’ confidence. NGOs raise a significant percentage of their funding from local sources, including government, corporate and individual philanthropy, and earned income. Most NGOs have multiple sources of funding, which allow them to remain viable in the short-term. A growing economy makes growth in domestic giving possible.

Mid-Transition (3-5): NGOs pioneer different approaches to financial independence and viability. While still largely dependent on foreign donors, individual NGOs experiment with raising revenues through providing services, winning contracts and grants from municipalities and ministries to provide services, or attempting to attract dues-paying members or domestic donors. However, a depressed local economy may hamper efforts to raise funds from local sources. Training programs address financial management issues and NGOs begin to understand the importance of transparency and accountability from a fundraising perspective, although they may be unable to fully implement transparency measures.

Early Transition (5-7): New NGOs survive from grant to grant and/or depend financially on one foreign sponsor. While many NGOs are created in the hopes of receiving funding, most are largely inactive after attempts to win foreign donor funding fail. Local sources of funding are virtually non-existent, in part due to a depressed local economy. NGOs have no financial management systems and do not understand the need for financial transparency or accountability.

ADVOCACY

Consolidation (1-3): The NGO sector demonstrates the ability and capacity to respond to changing needs, issues and interests of the community and country. As NGOs secure their institutional and political base, they begin to 1) form coalitions to pursue issues of common interest, including NGO legislation; 2) monitor and lobby political parties; and, 3) monitor and lobby legislatures and executive bodies. NGOs demonstrate the ability to mobilize citizens and other organizations to respond to changing needs, issues, and interests. NGOs at this stage of development will review their strategies, and possess an ability to adapt and respond to challenges by sector. A prime motivator for cooperation is self-interest: NGOs may form alliances around shared issues confronting them as nonprofit, non-governmental organizations.

Mid-Transition (3-5): Narrowly defined advocacy organizations emerge and become politically active in response to specific issues. Organizations at the Mid-Transition level of development may often present their concerns to inappropriate levels of government (local instead of national and vice versa). Weakness of the legislative branch might be revealed or incorrectly assumed, as activists choose to meet with executive branch officials instead (“where the power truly lies”). Beginnings of alternative policy analysis are found at universities and think tanks. Information sharing and networking within the NGO sector to inform and advocate its needs within the government begins to develop.

Early Transition (5-7): Broad umbrella movements, composed of activists concerned with a variety of sectors, and united in their opposition to the old regime fall apart or disappear. Some countries at this stage have not even experienced any initial burst of activism. Economic concerns become predominant

for most citizens. There may be an increase in passivity, cynicism, or fear within the general public. NGO activists are afraid to engage in dialogue with the government, feel inadequate to offer their views and/or do not believe the government will listen to their recommendations. NGOs do not understand the role that they can play in “public policy” or do not understand the concept of “public policy.”

SERVICE PROVISION

Consolidation (1-3): Many NGOs provide a wide range of goods and services, which reflect community and/or local donor priorities. Many NGOs deliver products beyond basic social services in such sectors as economic development, environmental protection or democratic governance. NGOs in several sectors have developed a sufficiently strong knowledge of the market demand for their services, the ability of government to contract for the delivery of such services or other sources of funding including private donations, grants and fees, where allowed by law. A number of NGOs find it possible to cross-subsidize those goods and services for which full cost recovery is not viable with income earned from more lucrative goods and services, or with funds raised from other sources. Government bodies, primarily at the local level, recognize the abilities of NGOs and provide grants or contracts to enable them to provide various services.

Mid-Transition (3-5): The contribution of NGOs to covering the gap in social services is recognized by government, although this is only rarely accompanied by funding in the form of grants or contracts. NGOs recognize the need to charge fees for services and other products – such as publications and workshops – but even where legally allowed, such fees seldom cover their costs. While NGO-provided goods and services respond to community needs, needs are generally identified by foreign donors, or by NGOs in an unsystematic manner. The constituency for NGO expertise, reports and documents begins to expand beyond their own members and the poor to include other NGOs, academia, churches, and government.

Early Transition (5-7): A limited number of NGOs are capable of providing basic social services – such as health, education, relief, or housing – although at a low level of sophistication. Those that do provide such services receive few if any government subsidies or contracts. NGOs that produce publications, technical services or research do so only for their own members or donors. There are rarely attempts to charge fees for goods and services.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Consolidation (1-3): NGO Intermediary Support Organizations (ISOs) and/or NGO resource centers are active in all areas of the country and provide advanced training, informational services, legal support and advice, and philanthropic development activities. Efforts are underway to establish and endow community foundations, indigenous grantmaking institutions, and/or organizations to coordinate local fundraising. A professional cadre of local experts, consultants and trainers in nonprofit management exists. NGOs recognize the value of training, although the lack of financial resources may remain a constraint to accessing locally provided training. Topics of available training cover: legal and tax issues for NGOs, accounting and bookkeeping, communication skills, volunteer management, media and public relations skills, sponsorship and fundraising. NGOs work together and share information through networks and coalitions. NGOs are beginning to develop inter-sectoral partnerships with business, government, and the media to achieve common objectives.

Mid-Transition (3-5): ISOs and resource centers are active in major population centers, and provide services such as distributing grants, publishing newsletters, maintaining a membership database, running a library of NGO literature, and providing basic training and consulting services. Other umbrella organizations and networks are beginning to be formed to facilitate networking and coordinate activities of groups of NGOs. Local trainers have the capacity to provide basic organizational training. Donors’ fora

are formed to coordinate the financial support of international donors, and to develop local corporate philanthropic activities. The value of inter-sectoral partnerships has not yet been realized.

Early Transition (5-7): There are few, if any, active ISOs or resource centers, networks and umbrella organizations. Those that do operate work primarily in the capital city and provide limited services such as access to computer equipment, faxes, email and meeting space. Local training and NGO development capacity is extremely limited and undeveloped. Primarily programs of international donors provide training and technical assistance. There is no coordinated effort to develop philanthropic traditions, improve fundraising or establish community foundations. NGO efforts to work together are limited by a perception of competition for foreign donor support and mistrust of other organizations.

PUBLIC IMAGE

Consolidation (1-3): This stage is characterized by growing public knowledge of and trust in NGOs, and increased rates of volunteerism. NGOs coalesce to mount campaigns to increase public trust. Widespread examples of good working relationships between NGOs and national and local governments exist, and can result in public-private initiatives or NGO advisory committees for city councils and ministries. Media covers the work of NGOs, and NGOs approach media and public relations in a professional manner. Increased accountability, transparency, and self-regulation exist within the NGO sector, including existence of a generally accepted code of ethics or a code of conduct.

Mid-Transition (3-5): The media does not tend to cover NGOs because it considers them weak and ineffective, or irrelevant. Individual NGOs realize the need to educate the public, to become more transparent, and to seek out opportunities for media coverage, but do not have the skills to do so. As a result, the general population has little understanding of the role of NGOs in society. Individual local governments demonstrate strong working relationships with their local NGOs, as evidenced by their participation in advisory committees, consultations, public-private initiatives, and the funding of an occasional grant, but this is not yet widespread.

Early Transition (5-7): The general public and/or government are uninformed or suspicious of NGOs as institutions. Most of the population does not understand the concept of “non-governmental” or “nonprofit”, including government officials, business leaders and journalists. Media coverage may be hostile, due to suspicion of a free but uninformed media, or due to the hostility of an authoritarian government-controlled media. Charges of treason may be issued against NGOs. Due to a hostile atmosphere caused by an authoritarian government, if individuals or businesses donate to NGOs at all, they do so anonymously.