

EVOLVING CONTEXT FOR NGOS IN LATIN AMERICA

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The very big picture

- Over 500,000 NGOs in Latin America and the Caribbean
- \$\$ to NGOs as service providers has grown, but direct funding for existing programs and capacity building remains limited.
- Economy had “exceptional performance” in 2004 according to IDB President, with 5.5% growth
- Yet over 15% of the region living in absolute poverty. Higher in certain countries/sectors
- Inequality among the highest in the world

Overarching Context

1. Shift to Democratic Regimes
2. Globalization of Policy Arena
3. Weaknesses in Governance Structures
4. Violence and Criminality

Democratization

- NGO movement in LAC has strong roots in political opposition to authoritarian regimes.
- As regimes shifted, NGOs had to redefine themselves in new political landscape.
- NGOs provided a vehicle for representation of marginalized groups in political process.
- Not as easy to define “enemy” in democracy, especially when NGOs invited to sit at the table.
- Challenge of maintaining critical voice while also participating within the system.

Global Policy Arena

- Can't work on local development without being affected by global policy.
- International Trade Regimes; Regional Free Trade Agreements.
- Global debates on Health and Education policies.
- Funding for local communities affected by global events and policies.

Global Policy Arena (cont)

- Rise of “Transnational Advocacy Networks”
- Links to global advocacy efforts enhance impact at local level.
- In LAC, indigenous movement gained ground by working with transnational allies.
- Globally, impact of debt relief campaign, for eg.
- Socially excluded groups such as Afro-Hispanics have not yet achieved global movement

Problems of Governance

- Corruption

- With democratization came a public process for denouncing corrupt politicians
- NGO role from election monitoring shifts to monitoring use of funds
- NGO role in bringing pressure important, but problem remains entrenched, real justice elusive

- Inequality

- Persistent inequality in the region heightens political and social instability
- Continued dominance of class elites
- Now governments swinging “left” seeking more just form of economic development and distribution

Governance (cont)

- Decentralization

- Decentralization has opened door for NGO role of mobilizing and facilitating local community voice
- Tradition of authoritarianism and culture of passivity remain obstacles
- Ability of NGOs to affect change depends on level of authority and resources of local governments and responsiveness of local authorities to participation

Culture of violence, Criminality

- Drug and other illicit trade perpetuate violence and lawlessness in many parts of the region
- Inequalities and poverty continue to foster civil unrest in some areas; fight for scarce resources in remote areas
- Entrenched war economy in Colombia
- NGOs work in this environment, work for peace, work for economic and social justice within this context
- Complex issues of identity for NGOs especially when caught between conflicting

Now, what does this mean for you?

- This has been a very quick review of a few overarching elements of the contexts in which NGOs are working in LAC today
- In the Q&A session - and throughout the conference - I look forward to hearing how these issues are really playing out for your organizations.