

Transnational NGO Initiative

Annual report, 2014-15

The Transnational NGO Initiative

Transnational non-governmental organizations (TNGOs) profoundly shape global affairs. The TNGO Initiative advances the understanding of these actors through research, education, and practitioner engagement. It focuses foremost on the governance, leadership and effectiveness of transnational NGOs. The program grew out of National Science Foundation Grant No. SES-0527679 (Transnational NGOs as Agents of Change: Toward Understanding Their Governance, Leadership, and Effectiveness), an interview study of 152 US-based TNGO leaders conducted between 2005 and 2008.

The research component of the TNGO Initiative focuses on governance, leadership and effectiveness challenges of transnationally operating NGOs. Other research areas include the role of rights-based approaches in development, the role of non-state actors in global health and the emergence of digital NGO platforms as a competitor to as well as collaborator with 'brick and mortar' NGOs.. The practitioner engagement component encompasses the Moynihan Fellowship program and the Syracuse based Transnational NGO Leadership Institute as well as customized senior leadership development programs for specific NGOs. It also includes extensive work with big TNGOs to document, learn from and review the leadership and management of their organizational change processes. Our educational efforts include a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Civil Society Organizations, hosting the TNGO (Graduate) Student Group, as well as Public Administration 'capstone' projects with TNGOs, and related student research practicum opportunities.

Activities, 2014-2015

The activities of the TNGO Initiative are organized along the three main areas, research, education, and practitioner engagement. Since September 2014, we have focused our research on digital NGO platforms: their Theories of Change, strategies and tactics, organizational models and leadership styles and how these compare and contrast with those of 'brick and mortar' NGOs.

Research.

The TNGO Initiative has produced significant research output in well-respected journals, maintains a regular presence at major academic and practitioner conferences, and has initiated new research efforts on virtual NGO platforms as well as leadership training.

Updated publications and conference presentations

Refereed journal articles and book chapters

- *Persistent Power of Human Rights. From Commitment to Compliance*, edited by Thomas Risse, Stephen Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013.

Reports and short pieces

- Bruno-van Vijfeijken, Tosca, Steve Lux and Shreeya Neupane. 2015. External Review: Amnesty International Global Transition Programme.

Selected conference presentations

2014 Association for Research on Non-profit Organizations and Voluntary Associations (ARNOVA), Hartford, 'Leading and Managing Organizational Change in big NGOs' (Tosca Bruno-van Vijfeijken)

2015 International Studies Association (ISA), Toronto, 'Rights-Based Approaches to Development: Implications for Public Administration?', (George E. Mitchell/Hans Peter Schmitz)

New Research and fundraising efforts

In 2013, the TNGO Initiative won a Faculty Challenge grant from the Moynihan Institute to undertake a small, exploratory study on the strategies, tactics, organizational attributes and leadership of digitally enabled NGOs. This study examines digital, internet-based organizing platforms and organizations such as Change.org, Avaaz, ONE, Ushahidi, Kiva, Watsi and others. Questions include: How do virtual platforms compare and contrast with traditional, 'brick and mortar' NGOs? Do they provide lessons for these traditional NGOs? How should collaboration between these two types of civil society organizations be undertaken?

As part of this research, the TNGO Initiative organized an event titled "Breaking Digital" on April 2, 2015. During the event, NGO leaders across the spectrum as well as academics were

presented with a real world scenario and were asked to compare their Theories of Change, goals, strategies and tactics, organizational as well as leadership characteristics in an exciting debate. The debate led to a lively discussion on the comparative advantages, strength and weaknesses of various forms of civil society across the spectrum, where they collaborate and, to some extent, where they compete. The debate and the way in which our networks of contacts with relevant leaders and scholars was expanded have informed our next steps in this research, which will lead to an interview study with leaders in 2015-16.

We continue working on our applied research project on the 'next and best leadership development practices' in the TNGO sector in collaboration with the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). This research attempts to investigate what major TNGOs have found to be the most promising leadership development practices and what can they learn from each other in that regard. To this date we have interviewed approx. twenty senior management and human resources leaders from eight organizations including ActionAid International, Amnesty International, World Vision, Medicine Sans Frontiers, Oxfam International, and Plan International among others.

Education.

The TNGO Initiative provided a broad array of courses and other learning opportunities to students at the Maxwell School and Syracuse University.

Graduate level. Tosca Bruno-van Vijfeijken taught a graduate course titled *Global Governance and Civil Society* in the fall semester 2014. The TNGO team administered the *Certificate of Advanced Study on Civil Society Organizations* which draws 8-10 students annually.

Tosca acted as faculty advisor for Public Administration workshops (in collaboration with *World Vision International* and *Amazon Conservation Association* as NGO clients). She also regularly offered internship and career advice to students interested in the TNGO sector.

In addition, we hosted high-profile speakers throughout 2014-15, including:

- Professor Dave Karpf, George Washington University
- Janet Lord, Director, International Programs, Burton Blatt Institute on Disability Policy, Law and Rights, Syracuse University
- Sophie Delaunay, Executive Director, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) U.S.A (March 2015)

In addition, we hosted two Moynihan TNGO Fellows for a period of two weeks -- *Richard Marshall, Senior Director for People and Culture, World Vision International* and *Josephine Oguta, Regional Governance Advisor for East and West Africa*, also at *World Vision* (February 2015). Seven graduate students had the opportunity to complete research for these visiting Fellows on the shifting characteristics of top leaders that NGO recruiters should keep in mind,

as well as on the profile of the future board chair, respectively. The Fellows also offered several talks to faculty and students focused on CEO derailment factors as well board governance. Upon his return to World Vision, Marshall also wrote a short reflection piece on the five key characteristics essential to CEOs of the future.

We also continue to expand our series of brief conversational web interviews with visiting scholars and practitioners to educate students and faculty about issues in the world of civil society research and practice. This has proven to be a useful teaching tool for many Maxwell courses. The interview series can be found at:

http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/moynihan/tngo/interview_series/Interview_Series/

Practitioner engagement.

The TNGO Leadership Institute represents the flagship of our practitioner engagement efforts. This has spun off an interest among some major TNGOs to have us design and offer in-house, customized senior leadership development programs in their organizations. In March 2015, we offered, for the first time, a customized leadership development training program to senior leaders from Population Council. We also offered for the second time a senior leadership development program with ActionAid International, Amnesty, and Greenpeace

The TNGO Initiative was also involved in efforts to capture learning about organizational change among larger development and humanitarian organizations. Steve Lux, Director of Maxwell's Executive Education Program and Shreeya Neupane, Program Associate at Executive Education Program and the TNGO Initiative and Tosca conducted an external review of Amnesty International's Global Transition Programme. The resulting external review, which accompanied Amnesty's internal mid-term assessment, included specific feedback on the current change management and leadership process and how lessons learned might be adopted moving forward. We also continued our collaboration with CARE International to document their ongoing change process.

We continue to facilitate an informal learning group among TNGO change leaders and change managers.

The TNGO Leadership Institute

In 2011, the TNGO Initiative launched a major new annual leadership preparation program for practitioners. It is targeted at second tier NGO staff members who wish to prepare for top leadership positions. This one-week executive leadership program is designed to respond to a need for greater attention to leadership transition and succession issues in the international nonprofit sector. Our regular interactions with practitioners have shown that leaders working at the second tier are much less networked than top leaders; they are rarely considered for top positions, and are not well prepared to take the 'leadership leap' to the top level. The Institute addressed this gap under the guidance of a Steering Group of top NGO leaders. Participation of

NGO practitioners from low-income nations is regularly facilitated by a number of scholarships offered by foundations.

During the 2014-2015 academic year, we did not host a Syracuse based Leadership Institute program, due to the fact that we had to host a big event in Washington DC under the digital NGO research during the same period. Our next Institute will be June 2016.

External funding for the Leadership Institute

The TNGO Leadership Institute was awarded a West Family Foundation grant for 2013-2016. This grant is covering core development and administration costs and allow us to invest in new programming.

INGO Learning Group on Organizational Change

The TNGO Initiative continues to co-facilitate an informal INGO Learning Group on Organizational Change among seven to ten major organizations. During the past year, we co-facilitated several teleconferences on specific dimensions of leading change. The aim is to document the learning in formats useful to practitioners as well as scholars. Additional information can be found here:

http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/moynihan/tngo/INGO_Learning_Group_on_Organizational_Change/

Plans for 2015-16

- *Research*: Professor Hans Peter Schmitz, who had been the Co-Director for Research of the Transnational NGO Initiative since 20015, moved to the University of San Diego in Dec 2015 to start a new appointment. We are deeply grateful for all his contributions to the TNGO Initiative over all these years. Happily, Hans Peter has agreed to continue on with the TNGO Initiative as Senior Moynihan Research Fellow in a part-time capacity, and he continues to head our research on Digital NGO platforms.
- We also continue to write a book on TNGOs that focuses on future challenges facing the TNGO sector. The book will be based on three main sources: the NSF funded interview study (1), additional in-depth interviews with TNGO thought leaders on future challenges (2), and a Bridgespan Group/InterAction survey on CEO perspectives on changes in the funding and operational landscapes for US TNGOs (3). The tentative title is 'Are transnational NGOs still relevant? Leadership perspectives in a global context.' The book will be co-written by George E. Mitchell, Assistant Professor at City College, City University of New York (CUNY), Tosca Bruno-van Vijfeijken, and Hans Peter Schmitz.
- *Practitioner engagement*: Hosting of the TNGO Leadership Institute, June 2016; Design for delivery of a pilot Leadership Institute on Digitally Enabled Activism; Delivery of several customized Senior Leadership Development Programs for ActionAid/Greenpeace/Amnesty/Oxfam and for Population Council.

Thank you

We thank the team members of the TNGO Initiative for their contributions in 2014-15: Carlo Abuyuan, Catherine Gerard, Peg Hermann, Steve Lux, Edward Joseph Lynch, Olga Boichak, Jake Herrle, Jaclyn Dorothy Petruzzelli, Erika Kisseih, Joseph Michael Dedmon and Shreeya Neupane. We thank the Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs for its financial support and its staff for their administrative support throughout the year.

September, 2015
Tosca Bruno-van Vijfeijken