

# Transnational NGO Initiative

## Annual Report, 2015-16

### I. 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 NGO 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 student-focused talks by visiting NGO scholars as well as practitioners, as well as Public Administration 'capstone' projects with TNGOs, and related student research practicum opportunities. The Initiative enjoys the support of several student volunteers each year, who contribute significantly to its overall outcomes.

### II. Activities, 2015-2016

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 digital NGO platforms as well as leadership training.

### **Publications and conference presentations**<sup>1</sup>

#### *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, 203-21.

#### *Reports and short pieces*

Gneiting, Uwe and Hans Peter Schmitz. 2016. "Comparing Global Alcohol and Tobacco Control Efforts: Network Formation and Evolution in International Health Governance." *Health Policy and Planning* 31 (supplement 1), i98-i109.

Levine, Carlisle J., Bruno-van Vijfeijken, Tosca and Jayawickrama, Sherine. 2016. "Measuring International NGO Agency-Level Results." *InterAction*. (pp 1-48)

Levine, Carlisle J., Bruno-van Vijfeijken, Tosca and Jayawickrama, Sherine. 2016. "So, What Does It All Add Up To? Measuring International NGO Results At The Agency Level"

Schmitz, Hans Peter and George E. Mitchell. 2016. "The Other Side of the Coin: NGOs, Rights-Based Approaches, and Public Administration." *Public Administration Review*. 76(2), 252-262. DOI: 10.1111/puar.12479.

Mitchell, George E. 2015. "The Attributes of Effective NGOs and the Leadership Values Associated with a Reputation for Organizational Effectiveness." *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*. 26(1), 39-57. DOI: 10.1002/nml.21143.

Mitchell, George E., Rosemary O'Leary, and Catherine Gerard. 2015. "Collaboration and Performance: Perspectives from Public Managers and NGO Leaders." *Public Performance and Management Review*. 38(4), 684-716. DOI: 10.1080/15309576.2015.1031015.

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<sup>1</sup> This list includes publications by Hans Peter Schmitz, Moynihan Senior Research Fellow and former co-Director of the TNGO Initiative (currently at the University of San Diego) and George Mitchell, Research Fellow and former Research Assistant of the TNGO Initiative, currently Assistant Professor at City College, City University of New York

### *Selected conference presentations*

American Evaluation Association – Assessing Organizational Change in INGOs, Tosca Bruno-van Vijfeijken, Oct 2015

Association for Research on Nonprofits and Voluntary Action – Transnational NGO panel, Tosca Bruno-van Vijfeijken, Nov 2015

2016 InterAction Forum - [So, What Does It All Add Up To? Measuring International NGO Results At The Agency Level](#), Tosca Bruno-van Vijfeijken, April 2016

### *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 digital 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? And do digital strategies affect the depth and breadth of citizen engagement, and if so how and why? The study started with literature review, followed by approximately 20 exploratory interviews with leaders in ‘blended NGOs’ (‘brick and mortar’ NGOs that wish to adopt digital strategies) and fully digitally enabled platforms this past year.

During 2015-2016, we continued interviews; planned for a pilot collaboration project with Greenpeace International on data collection focused on citizen engagement outcomes; presented at several conferences on our learnings, and successfully applied to internal Maxwell research grant windows as well as to the West Foundation. The latter will enable us to fund ongoing research on digital NGOs. Tosca was also elected to the board of Public Interest Registry (PIR), the nonprofit that is the wholesale operator of the Internet domain name .ORG as well as .NGO, to strengthen their understanding of the NGO sector. The knowledge on the Internet’s crucial infrastructure role for civil society, Internet Governance and the role of NGOs in that as well as factors related to effective online presence of NGOs along with contacts obtained through Tosca’s board role will support parts of our research agenda outlined above.

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 investigates what major TNGOs have found to be the most

promising leadership development practices and what can they learn from each other in that regard. 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. The final deliverable for this research project will be ready during the second part of 2016 in the form of a white paper and other dissemination material such as blog posts, executive briefs etc.

We applied to the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio center in Italy for a grant for visiting scholars to spend a month finalizing our book on the future of TNGOs. The results of our application will be known by September 2016 and – if successful – would mean a month long writing sabbatical in June-July 2017.

**Education |** The TNGO Initiative provided a course and other learning opportunities to students at the Maxwell School and Syracuse University through various activities.

*Graduate level.* Tosca Bruno-van Vijfeijken taught a graduate course titled *Global Governance and Civil Society* in the fall semester 2015. The TNGO team also administered the *Certificate of Advanced Study on Civil Society Organizations* which annually draws several students.

In addition, the Initiative provided volunteering opportunities to graduate students interested in the TNGO sector. Our volunteers were able to support us in a number of projects including our digital NGO research, communication and marketing of the Leadership Institute, promotion of our visitor talks, research support to our visiting NGO fellow, among others. We highly value student volunteer engagement.

In addition, we hosted high-profile speakers throughout 2015-16, including:

- Alp Aslandogan, President, Alliance for Shared Values (part of the Gulen transnational movement)
- Christopher Pallas, Assistant Professor of Conflict Management, Kennesaw State University
- Eric Rosenthal, Executive Director, Disability Rights International
- Ken Berger, Managing Director, Algorhythm (Former President and CEO, Charity Navigator)
- Uwe Gneiting, Research and Evaluation Advisor, Oxfam America's Private Sector Department

In addition, we hosted a Moynihan TNGO Fellow for a period of two weeks in February 2016 – *Brian Cute, CEO of Public Interest Registry*. Five graduate students had the opportunity to complete research for Brian around the topic of how millennials can be motivated to contribute to social causes (through donation of their time, talents, networks and money).

Brian also gave a public talk on the topic “*Civil Society Organizations and the Internet: Critical Issues*” along with an informal career talk for graduate students interested in working in the non-profit sector. Our Fellows’ research nicely complemented our digital NGO platform research.

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 several Maxwell courses. The interview series can be found on our [website](#).

**Practitioner Engagement** | The TNGO Leadership Institute – including its spin offs (see below -- represents the flagship of our practitioner engagement efforts.

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 processes and how lessons learned might be adopted moving forward. The team has been asked to continue their engagement with Amnesty during the final assessment phase as well, where the team will continue to provide feedback on the change management and leadership process, and will also act as a facilitator for other evaluation areas including Human Rights Impact, Visibility and Credibility, among others. We are pleased to work with Ramesh Singh, International Organization Director of Greenpeace International on this assignment – Ramesh is responsible for the Human Rights Impact dimension of the assignment.

We also continued our collaboration with CARE International to document their ongoing change process. An internal report on this will be submitted to CARE during the summer of 2016 as a last formal deliverable under our contract, and the team will begin working on a teaching case in 2017, which will be made public with the concurrence of CARE.

### *The TNGO Leadership Institute*

In 2011, the TNGO Initiative launched an annual leadership preparation program for second tier NGO leaders 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.

In June 2016, we hosted the fifth TNGO Leadership Institute. We were able to offer the program to a very diverse cohort, both in terms of the size of the organizations they represented, geography and length/nature of experience at the top-tier of leadership. The cohort was a delight group to work with. Please visit the Leadership Institute [website](#) for more details on the 2016 program as well as updates on the upcoming Leadership Institute.

The Syracuse public, open enrollment program has also resulted in requests from some major TNGOs to have us design and offer in-house, customized senior leadership development programs in their organizations. As such, we will be offering a senior leadership development program with ActionAid International, Amnesty, and Greenpeace for the fourth time in August 2016.

### *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 learning in formats useful to practitioners as well as scholars. For additional information, please visit our [website](#).

### III. Plans for 2016-17

- *Research:* We expect to publish a practitioner-oriented white paper on 'next and best practices' in senior leadership development in TNGOs late 2016.
- 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:* Design for delivery of a pilot Leadership Institute on Digitally Enabled Activism; Potential delivery of another customized Senior Leadership Development Programs for ActionAid/Greenpeace/Amnesty/Oxfam.

## Thank you

We thank the team members of the TNGO Initiative for their contribution in 2015-16: Catherine Gerard, Peg Hermann, Steve Lux, Fariha Sarawat, Janessa Price, Olga Boichak, Jaclyn Dorothy Petruzzelli, Joseph Michael Dedmon, Alma Begic, Danielle Wohlenberg, Daniela Rodriguez, Catalina Lara San Martin, Oleksiy Anokhin, Mirjakhon Turdiev, and Shreeya Neupane. We thank the Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs for its continued financial support since 2013 and its staff for their administrative support throughout the years.

July 2016

Tosca Bruno-van Vijfeijken and the TNGO Initiative team