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THE ROLE OF SPACE RELATED NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOs) IN CAPACITY BUILDING

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ABSTRACT

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a unique role in international affairs, providing access to resources, expertise, and assistance to supplement State resources. Sometimes the diplomatic skills and unofficial access of NGOs to policymakers through Track Two diplomacy can move a previously stalled critical issue forward and assist policymakers from different countries to find common ground outside official channels. Because they work outside of official channels, they are not bound by State policy that may inhibit negotiations between States. Some also have a convening power that sometimes makes it possible for State representatives to meet space experts and each other for informal discussions on issues of mutual interest. Finally, NGOs can draw attention to issues that may be overlooked or avoided by State organizations.

This paper examines the ways in which NGOs can assist in building scientific, technical, educational, and legal and policy expertise related to space and Earth science, technology and governance of space activities. In particular, it will explore and analyze the ways in which organizations such as the Space Generation Advisory Council, EURISY, the International Space University and the Secure World Foundation contribute to building capacity in developing countries.

WHAT IS AN NGO?

There are approximately 40,000 internationally operating Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs)¹ and there are many more working on the national levels. For instance it is estimated that India has between one and two million of registered NGOs in the country². The numbers illustrate that work of these

entities is indeed needed and is present throughout the globe. Hence the question arises, what do they do and how do they operate?

Usually private persons, without participation of any government, create NGOs; thus, no governmental membership can occur. NGOs are usually created with a vision in mind, a purpose or a cause, which civil society feels strongly about. Historically NGOs deal with issues of human rights, environment, equality, peace, etc. However it was the United Nations (UN), which in 1945 with provisions in the Article 71 of Chapter 10

¹ (Anheier et al, "Global Civil Society 2001", 2001).

²
<http://www.indianngos.com/ngosection/newcomers/whatisanngo.htm>.

of the UN Charter³ popularized the phrase “non-governmental organizations”. ECOSOC on February 27, 1950 gave a definition of an International NGO (INGO) in the resolution 288 (X), as “any international organization that is not founded by an international treaty”. Finally, Chapter 27 of the Agenda 21⁴ recognized the significant role NGOs have played in sustainable development, which led to establishment of the consultative relationship between the UN and NGOs.⁵

In recent decades NGOs have played increasing roles on the international scene. Many issues could not be solved without the participation of NGOs, which do not only work with civil society but are often able to unite people in ways governments cannot, as they fill societal niches governments simply do not. Statistics have shown that the geographical areas in which NGOs are present are more likely to develop cooperative approaches to problem solving, which results in a lower probability for conflict.

What is unique about NGOs is that the people who are members/participants share a common passion, ideals, values that bring them together despite other differences. Many NGOs are solely volunteer-based yet are extremely active and beneficial to the causes for which they are working. This illustrates that a strong belief in social values can be enough of a motivator for people to work together on common issues even if there is no monetary reward. Accomplishing an important goal is sufficient reward.

Because NGOs mostly work on the grassroots level and are generally

highly focused, they are able to understand the problems of the civil society as well as their needs. The hands-on experience and the direct engagement in grassroots activities, while remaining largely independent of political influences, allows NGOs to serve as a bridge between the Civil Society and governments, multinational corporations, and international organizations.

SPACE RELATED NGOs

NGOs are active in many different sectors, including the space sector. Their work in the space sector is essential in outreach activities, education, space awareness, and most important, capacity building. Unfortunately, outer space actors still tend to operate as a closed club, which is not very accessible to those who are not members of the sector already. Therefore NGOs are very useful in making space activities more understandable to the end users and thus gaining their support for space activities.

Especially in the developing world, space related NGOs educate the local communities on the direct benefits of space technologies and how space impacts their lives. Through workshops, conferences, and lectures more local people have an opportunity to educate themselves regarding space matters, interact with space professionals and take the knowledge they gained back to their communities.

This paper examines work of four selected NGOs: Space Generation Advisory Council (SGAC), EURISY, International Space University (ISU), and secure World Foundation (SWF), all of which are involved in capacity building in various areas of the world in terms of outer space.

³ Chapter 10, United Nations Charter.
<http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/chapt10.htm>

⁴ Agenda 21 - Chapter 27: Strengthening the Role of Non-governmental Organizations: Partners for Sustainable Development, Earth Summit, 1992

⁵ 1996/31. Consultative relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations

SPACE GENERATION ADVISORY
COUNCIL (SGAC)

The Space Generation Advisory Council in Support of the United Nations Programme on Space Applications (SGAC) represents young people (students and young professionals) between the ages of 19 and 35 at the United Nations, other international organizations, governments, and space agencies. SGAC was created in 1999 at UNISPACE III where space leaders from all over the world reached the conclusion that youth should have a specific voice at the United Nations. Therefore parallel to UNISPACE III, 160 young people from 60 countries worked together in the Space Generation Forum to generate the Declaration of Space Generation. The main points of this declaration clearly illustrate the role space related NGOs should play in terms of capacity building:

OOSA and UNESCO should promote the integration of space into education curricula of UN member states. This dissemination of resources and knowledge should be a cooperative effort between corporations, Non-Governmental Organizations, and Governments on both domestic and international levels to improve literacy, space knowledge, public awareness and support.

Given many programs throughout the world currently exist with the ideal of reaching developing countries with need-solving space technologies, we recommend a UN endorsed strategic plan which would implement these technologies with cultural and ecological sensitivity in exchange for the discontinuation of globally harmful activities.⁶

In order to fulfill its mandate, SGAC has been given permanent observer status in the UN Committee on the

Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and consultative status with the ECOSOC so that it could regularly report its activities to the UN.

SGAC has a true global network with over 4000 members worldwide who communicate and work together via e-mail lists, online forums and online projects, local, regional and international workshops, conferences and various grassroots activities. The organization has two Regional Coordinators (RCs) from the six UN regions, and currently 66 National Points of Contacts (NPoCs). The focus of the organization is to impact policymaking and thus advise political makers based on opinions and ideas of the youth of the world. Policy input includes regular reports to the member states of the UN COPUOS, including the UNISPACE III Action Teams. In addition, SGAC gives input to national and international space agencies and to governmental entities dealing with space. For instance SGAC was the only NGO invited to the Space Summit in 2002 in Houston, which gathered major space companies, high-level space experts, and heads of space agencies to discuss the future of space. More than that, SGAC was invited by the European Commission to provide the perspective for the future European space workforce during the consultation process for the Green paper on the European Space Policy.⁷

Having such impact on policy making motivates the members of SGAC to participate actively in its activities on national, regional, and international levels. Because members know that through SGAC they have access to the UN and various high-level space persons, they can address the issues they care about and have their voices heard. For instance, in 2007, the members of the SGAC South American region have written reports on the space situation in their respective countries, which were then delivered to the COPUOS delegates.

⁶ Technical Report of the Space Generation Forum, UNISPACEIII, 27 July 1999. <http://www.spacegeneration.org/downloads/documents/UN/sgf-technical-report-july-1999.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.spacegeneration.org/About>

In addition to policy focus, SGAC carries out number of projects around the world including projects on education, space security, and outreach programs. SGAC sends its members to local schools to teach astrophysics, astrobiology, astronomy, science and technology, sustainable development etc. Also the organization organizes space awareness days, movie nights, workshops, conferences, space parties (Yuri's Night), and technical activities. The hands on activities such as the Under the African Skies project, help to build knowledge and confidence activities but most important, it allows SGAC to teach people in developing countries the impact of space technologies in their day to day lives and how they could benefit even further from a number of space applications.

Because of good relationships with the UN OOSA and UNESCO, SGAC is able to send some of its members, from the developing countries, fully funded, to a number of international conferences and workshops. This gives those young people the opportunity to interact and learn from experts in the field, but most of all, it allows them to present their ideas and thoughts in the international foras, where they can gather advice and input from people they would normally have no access to.

In summary, because of its international mandate, SGAC is able to carry out many useful activates around the globe. Its network has significantly gown in the last 10 years, thus, it likes to call itself a network of networks, as it not only represents its members on the international level but it also works as an umbrella for other student and youth groups around the world.

EURISY

EURISY was created in 1989 with the aim of promoting the benefits of space to European society. Since then, EURISY has significantly increased its

membership to include 40 governmental space offices and space agencies, research institutions, international organizations, and private companies involved in space, scientific and technological activities. The organization has contributed significantly to areas such as: space for humanitarian crises, environmental monitoring through satellite systems, and maritime security. One of the goals of EURISY is to shape the relationship between space and the society through many outreach activities – mainly conferences and symposia.

EURISY is independent from any type of political influences; thus, it is able to pursue its own goals. The fact that its membership combines intergovernmental organizations together with NGOs allows EURISY to facilitate and promote dialogue between the civil society and space institutions. More over, EURISY is strategically positioned to bridge space actors with society whilst rising awareness among decision makers, civil society and users regarding the use of space activities for sustainable economic, environmental and development policies⁸.

Currently EURISY is carrying out a 5-year program entitled “Bridging the Gap between Space and Local and Regional Users,” which offers a discussion platform through a series of workshops and conferences, to representatives from European regions and cities in which to share their knowledge and experience as well as learn about new services offered by various space applications and discuss the potential challenges and issues that may arise.

For instance, in March 2008 EURISY organized a workshop in Romania on “Local and Regional Risk Management – Integrated Use of Satellite Information and Services.” 124 participants from 19 countries gathered to exchange best practices on the use of satellite information and services for dealing with risk. There were case studies and working groups where participants were able to exchange ideas and learn from each

⁸ <http://www.eurissy.org>

other's experiences. Last year in Istanbul Turkey, EURISY organized a conference on "Areas and Mechanisms for Collaboration Between Turkish and European Actors on Space Activities." Key players from the Turkish and European space communities met together to discuss ways to cooperate better and to study how the two could benefit from each other and assist each other.

Although EURISY mostly works on the European level, its activities, in terms of capacity building, are very needed and useful. Most Europeans are not very much aware of the benefits space applications offer to them on a daily basis. Moreover, they do not consider space as something that is necessary in their lives. This shows the lack of knowledge and understanding of what useful tools space activities can provide to an average European. Thus, NGOs such as the EURISY play a very important role educating civil society about things that are often taken for granted by them as a result of lack of knowledge.

INTERNATIONAL SPACE UNIVERSITY

This year, the International Space University (ISU)⁹ celebrated its 21st year of operation. Founded originally as a 10-week summer program of lectures and activities focused on teaching the fundamentals of space activities to an international body of graduate level students, ISU now also offers two masters degrees, several short courses and other activities devoted to building capacity in space-related subjects. ISU programs are interdisciplinary, international, and intercultural, and bring together individuals from all backgrounds and generations to improve their knowledge of how to make the most of the broad world of space activities.

ISU programs are conducted in English, and attract participants from all

over the world. Its more than 2500 alumni come from 96 different countries. The ISU faculty and lecturers include experts from most of the world's space faring countries.

The name of the Summer Session Program has now been changed to the Space Studies Program (SSP) to reflect the fact that it is occasionally held in the Southern Hemisphere and has been reduced by one week to fit the needs of government and industry. The two masters programs: the Masters of Space Studies and the Masters of Space Management, last one year and are held on the home campus in Strasbourg, France. They are structured by module so students who need greater flexibility in their schedule can spread out their matriculation over more than a year. In addition, successful completion of the SSP can be used to fulfill the requirements of the first module for students that wish to move on to take the MSS or MSM degrees.

Students in the Space Studies Program spend four weeks in a series of core lectures that provide a basis in most space subjects, including space engineering, spacecraft design, space and Earth science, telecommunications, space in society, space policy and space law. During the last week, and for two additional weeks, they also participate in workshops and departmental activities designed to explore subjects in greater depth than is possible during the core. The final three weeks are devoted to completing research and preparing a detailed report for a team project selected by each of the students from three or four choices presented to them at the start of the program. Recent team projects have focused on the use of space systems for mitigating the effects of earthquakes (Beijing, 2007) and volcanoes (Barcelona, 2008), spaceports (Barcelona, 2008), space traffic management (Beijing 2007), and archival storage on the moon (Beijing 2007).

⁹ See <http://www.isunet.edu>

In addition to its formal activities, ISU also provides tailored programs for special needs. For example, in 2004, ISU prepared a program of presentations that served as a convening mechanism for officials in the various South African government departments interested in or already using space services. That meeting resulted in activities that helped spark the drive toward a South African space policy and space agency.

In sum, each of the ISU programs is focused in some way on building capacity in coping with the international, interdisciplinary, and intercultural nature of outer space activities. Many ISU alumni have taken senior positions in the world's space programs. ISU is working hard to make it possible for more students from developing countries to attend its programs.

SECURE WORLD FOUNDATION

The Secure World Foundation (SWF)¹⁰ is a non-profit operating foundation devoted to the long term sustainability of space activities, the cooperative use of space resources for the benefit of planet Earth, and the development of governance mechanisms to cope with the long term threat posed by near Earth objects (NEOs) that strike Earth on a periodic basis. The Foundation acts as a research body, convener and facilitator to advocate for key space security and other space related topics and to examine their influence on governance and international development.

SWF believes that ensuring the long term sustainability of outer space activities is most effectively achieved through a bottoms-up approach focused on 1) vigorous efforts to reduce the further generation of orbital debris, 2)

development of a code of conduct for space (or rules of the road), leading eventually to a space traffic management (STM) regime, and 3) agreements to ban anti-satellite development and tests.

SWF is interested in assisting emerging space countries in developing their space policies, especially in helping them to take an active part in the governance of space activities and in developing policies that will ensure the long term sustainability of outer space. It pursues these efforts through the development and support of workshops and conferences devoted to these topics.

For example, in November 2008, in partnership with the European Space Policy Institute and the International Academy of Astronautics, SWF will host a workshop in Vienna, Austria on the Fair and Sustainable Use of Outer Space, in which the needs of emerging space powers will receive special attention. In November 2008, SWF is also participating with the Stimson Center on an international workshop on space security to be held in the Rockefeller Foundation's Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy. This workshop, too, explicitly includes representatives from emerging space powers.

As the numbers of countries instituting formal space activities increases, it will be increasingly important to assist those countries become integrated into the world community of space-capable States. The Secure World Foundation will continue to endeavor to assist these efforts.

CONCLUSIONS

In sum, NGOs have an important role in providing information, guidance, and assistance in building space capacity, especially in developing countries. The NGOs mentioned here and the many others that also provide services to civil society will continue to be a growing part of global space activities.

¹⁰ See <http://www.SecureWorldFoundation.org> for detailed information about the SWF program and the many information resources available.

