

Structuring global advocacy: Explaining transnational organizational forms and networks

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1. Introduction¹

Amnesty International USA recently opened an online store offering T-Shirts with the AI logo under the signature line reading “Fighting Bad Guys Since 1961” (\$17.95-19.95).² Every conceivable consumer item can now be had with AI’s logo on it, including (for \$720) a “Fender Amnesty International Music For Human Rights Acoustic Guitar.” Only a decade ago, such a marketing effort would have been frowned upon by many inside and outside of this venerable transnational human rights organization. The ‘brand’ Amnesty International now sells and it can be used in partnerships with for-profit organizations (such as the Fender Corporation) to attract consumers to certain products as well as principled causes. Do these developments within individual advocacy groups and across the sector overall indicate that advocacy groups are becoming (or have always been) driven by motives similar to those of for-profit organizations? If we answer this question affirmatively, how much explanatory power does the firm analogy have with regard to the transnational advocacy sector?

The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to a better understanding of the non-governmental organizations behind many of the transnational advocacy campaigns recently receiving much attention in the international relations literature. This first generation literature is rich in presenting us with cases of success and provides compelling campaign examples focused on issues such as anti-personnel landmines (Price 1998), women’s rights (Joachim 2007), environmental protection (Wapner 1996), and human rights (Burgerman 2001; Evangelista 1999; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse et al. 1999; Roht-Arriaza 2005). Central to those arguments about the increasing relevance of transnational organizations are usually the principles of a “world polity” advanced by those activists (Boli and Thomas 1999a), the strategies of ‘framing and shaming’ used, and the vulnerabilities of the targets of mobilization. Comparatively little attention is paid to characteristics of the transnational advocacy NGOs themselves.³

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² See, for other examples: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/shop/shop-amnesty>.

³ For example, in Keck and Sikkink’s ground-breaking study ‘Activists beyond Borders,’ the organizations are taken for granted, while network density and synergy effects (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 206/7) are highlighted as relevant

More recently, scholars have begun to question the exclusively principled characterization of transnational NGO mobilization and have also pointed to the selection bias inherent in studying primarily cases of successful NGO mobilization (Price 2003). While some within this next generation of research primarily challenge the assumption of principled mobilization (Bob 2005; Ron et al. 2005), others focus on why certain social problems never become campaign issues (Carpenter 2007) or discuss significant divisions within activist networks (Jordan and Van Tuijl 2000; Hertel 2006). Advocacy NGOs will pick their causes not based on criteria of greatest need, but will choose the ‘battles’ with the most promising prospects for increased fundraising and media exposure. Similarly, NGOs will join transnational networks not because of shared norms, but because of a positive evaluation of the material incentives involved. Tensions between original mandate and material incentives created by a changing external environment may then be manifested in internal tensions and competing proposals for organizational change (Hopgood 2006). Based on a rationalist framework, Cooley and Ron argue with regard to the (service-oriented) humanitarian sector that greater density created by the emergence of more organizations in a given field does not strengthen the voice of civil society (as predicted by Keck/Sikkink), but leads to more insecurity for individual groups competing for limited resources. The authors also identify a number of principal-agent problems prevalent between donors and their non-governmental recipients.

While the critics of transnational activism have provided compelling empirical evidence challenging the unique character of the non-governmental advocacy sector, most of this published work (with a few exceptions) shares the theoretical and methodological problems identified in the first generation of ‘cheerleaders’ of transnational activism. In both cases, the literature is far from an agreement on basic questions about the character of these actors, their motives, and the conditions under which they gain influence over others and policy outcomes. Both literatures are driven by a focus on *campaigns*, *case studies*, and/or the study of how NGOs and networks make *choices* about their targets. Moreover, while claims about the self-interested nature of transnational activism seem to represent a fundamental challenge to principled perspectives, they add little value to our understanding of transnational NGOs as organizations.

explanations for success. However, much of the explanation rests with the fact that those networks advance universal principles.

If the primary objects of study are advocacy organizations such as Amnesty International or Greenpeace, then we have already narrowed our focus to groups which have successfully met the challenge of organizational survival. In other words, we know that they are successful in advancing normative principles *and* taking care of challenges to their survival and global/transnational expansion.⁴ The question is not if transnational NGOs follow principles or self-interest, but how individual organizations and networks succeed or fail in managing the tradeoffs between conflicting demands.

Looking beyond the interests versus principles dichotomy, this chapter presents evidence generated from a preliminary analysis of data generated as part of the first large-scale study of transnational non-governmental organizations (TNGOs). Conducting interviews with the leaders of 180 [95] TNGOs, in addition to gathering data on their fundraising activities, financial health, spending practices and programming provides a basis for shedding new light on questions of their effectiveness, networking habits, and views on accountability issues.⁵ The core claim is that understanding how NGOs organize internally and as parts of networks with other groups provides much needed evidence on what motivates organizational and strategic choices within the transnational NGO sector.⁶ More specifically, this research confirms that organizations with a distinct advocacy agenda represent a distinguishable sub-set within the larger transnational NGO community.

The first section will briefly introduce the TNGO study and its core elements. The second section will explore the TNGO dataset to assess the validity of the distinction between service and advocacy organizations within the transnational NGO world. For some time, scholars studying the activities of large service NGOs have claimed that “going global” requires the expansion of advocacy activities (Lindenberg and Bryant 2001). Many major advocacy campaigns of the past decade (e.g., landmines, small arms, child soldiers, etc.) have featured the prominent participation of large service organizations which increasingly realize that social and

⁴ For an in-depth study of the internal struggles within Amnesty International to balance these frequently conflicting objectives, see (Hopgood 2006).

⁵ The results presented here are preliminary and reflect only about half of the total of interviews (95) completed, transcribed, and coded. While the interview process will be completed by June 2008, the coding is scheduled to be completed during the summer of 2008.

⁶ A similar logic is expressed when Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore argue with regard to intergovernmental organizations (IOs) that “we can better understand what IOs *do* if we better understand what IOs *are*,” (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 9).

political change is a precondition for the sustainable impact of their development efforts on the ground. As a result, the idea of a rights-based approach to development has been advanced by scholars (Uvin 2004) and large development NGOs (e.g. ActionAid) alike. While many larger service organizations have become more advocacy-oriented, a reverse trend does not emerge among the advocacy groups. The continued relevance of this distinction supports the claim that advocacy groups are not only different from their counterparts in the service sector, but also experience and external environment with incentives not entirely captured by the ‘firm’ metaphor.

The third and fourth sections provide evidence drawn from the levels of individual organizations as well as the networks and partnerships created by advocacy groups. If we choose the individual organization as the level of analysis, we find some evidence for the presence of collective action issues, including difficulties in dealing with multiple principals (boards, donors, beneficiaries, etc.) and concerns over competition for scarce resources. If we widen our focus to look at networks and partnerships, the behavior of advocacy groups is less clearly ‘firm-like.’ Advocacy groups regularly form non-hierarchical networks which measurably increase their leverage as a collective and offer an alternative ‘third way’ of organizing beyond hierarchy and market exchanges. There is also evidence that advocacy groups have greater latitude in convincing donors (principals) about their effectiveness. While all firms face a single financial bottom line expressed in profits, advocacy groups tend to face highly segmented markets in which they can more easily specialize to actively pursue donors interested in their specific ‘products’ (e.g., anti-slavery, biodiversity, etc.). Successful groups avoid the trappings of “perverse firm-like behaviors” (valuing income over principles, Prakash/Gugerty, p. 21) by emphasizing achievement of their own unique substantive goals as their primary strategy for securing donors resources. Data show that concerns over finances as an obstacle to goals are less salient to leaders of advocacy-oriented organizations than they are for service providers. Data also corroborate our intuition that leaders of service TNGOs understand effectiveness in terms of measurable outputs and cost minimization, whereas leaders of advocacy groups are more likely to connect effectiveness with abstract ideational goals. This suggests that service delivery organizations may more closely fit the firm model, whereas advocacy-oriented organizations appear to diverge from this model in significant ways.

2. TNGO study: rationale, sample, methodology

To move beyond case study and sector-based arguments, this paper relies on a structured sample consisting of 180 [95] transnational NGOs, selected based on their size, financial efficiency, and main area of activity (conflict resolution, human rights, humanitarian relief, environmental activism, and sustainable development). The current sample is limited to transnational NGOs legally registered as nonprofit organizations in the United States (in other words, have 501(c)(3) status with the US Internal Revenue Service), that have headquarters, staff, and a transnational presence (operations in multiple countries). The organizations were selected using information from the Charity Navigator website⁷ based on their organizational efficiency⁸ and organizational capacity⁹ ratings (www.charitynavigator.com). Tables 1 to 4 in the appendix provide some background information on the sample used in this study. The selection of 180 organizations (plus the same number in alternates) was designed to include organizations across the main sectors of transnational activism (see above) as well as organizations with distinctively different levels of effectiveness and efficiency.

Our researchers typically travelled for a week to an area where some of the organizations selected for this study are based and conducted two-hour interviews based on a protocol previously developed based on existing scholarly research and test interviews with local organizations. All the interviews were conducted with senior leadership, usually the presidents or

⁷ Charity Navigator (CN) awards up to four stars to an organization by evaluating information contained in the 990 forms each organization is required to file with the IRS. CN looks at records of the past five years to calculate indicators of its fundraising and operational efficiency. Based on these data, Charity Navigator assesses the organization's (1) fundraising efficiency, (2) its fundraising expenses, (3) its program expenses, and (4) its administrative expenses.

⁸ *Organizational efficiency*, as defined by Charity Navigator: "Analyzing a charity's efficiency reveals how well it functions day to day. Charities that are efficient spend less money to raise more. Their fundraising efforts stay in line with the scope of the programs and services they provide. They keep administrative costs within reasonable limits. They devote the majority of their spending to the programs and services they exist to provide" (from: How do we rate charities?, www.charitynavigator.com, accessed: April 2008).

⁹ *Organizational capacity*, as defined by Charity Navigator: "We analyze a charity's capacity to determine how well it has sustained its programs and services over time, and whether it can continue to do so, even if it loses support or faces broad economic downturns. By doing so, we show givers how well that charity is positioned to pursue long-term, systemic change. Charities that show consistent growth and maintain financial stability are more likely to last for years to come. They have the financial flexibility to plan strategically and pursue long-term objectives, rather than facing flurries of fundraising to meet payrolls and other short-term financial obligations" (from: How do we rate charities?, www.charitynavigator.com, accessed: April 2008).

CEOs of the organizations. The interview protocol contained four main areas of inquiry: (1) personal and organizational attributes, (2) effectiveness and accountability, (3) networks/partnerships, and (4) leadership and professional engagement. After the transcription of the interviews, the coding team used a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti, (<http://www.atlasti.com/>) to generate qualitative and quantitative data sets based on the information collected about each organization as well as the answers provided during the interviews.

3. The advocacy/service distinction

This section is to provide a rationale for the focus on advocacy groups and explores in what ways advocacy-oriented groups differ from ‘nonprofits’ or service oriented NGOs (Prakash/Gugerty, p. 2, fn.1). What are we gaining from exploring these definitional issues? First, the more generic term ‘non-governmental organization’ (NGO) remains itself contested and scholars have not been able to arrive at a satisfactory positive definition of this key agent of global and local change (Martens 2002; Willetts 2001). Second, there is evidence that the distinction between service and advocacy has become less significant over the past decade, primarily because traditional service providers have come to realize that advocacy is an essential part of creating long-term, sustainable change (see previous section). The section has two main parts. The first sub-section defines the nature of advocacy work and discusses its significance within the relevant literature. The second section then discusses if and how advocacy groups are actually a coherent and unique sector within the transnational NGO world.

3.1. Why focus on advocacy groups?

The literature on transnational activism emerging in the 1990s within the international relations literature addressed a simple puzzle about the increasing prominence of non-governmental organizations: How can groups lacking significant material and military resources shape global governance and domestic social and political change? The answer to this question relied on showing how NGOs acquired unique resources of power while their counterparts (initially, states only) lost control relative to those emerging non-state actors. In this view, power

is derived from the claim to represent universal principles (e.g., human rights or environmental protection), rather than particular interests. As states increasingly proclaim to support those universal values through signing international treaties and conventions, activists find a rhetorical opening to push for the implementation of those norms. Increasingly porous borders, relatively weakening domestic control, and the spread of communication technologies enable advocacy groups to level the playing field.

The principled view is expressed in Keck and Sikkink (1998, 35): “What distinguishes principled activists of the kind we discuss in this volume is the intensely self-conscious and self-reflective nature of their normative awareness.” Central to this idea was the existence of a “world culture” (Meyer et al. 1997; Boli and Thomas 1999b) which represents an ideational space separate from parochial state interests. During the 1990s, the emergence of the constructivist viewpoint within the IR literature enabled scholars to move beyond earlier attempts to theorize about transnational relations, which saw those groups primarily as agents of increased state interdependence (Keohane and Nye 1971). The transnationalism of the 1970s never succeeded in creating a sustained research agenda because it remained limited to a material understanding of world affairs. Transnational activists succeed in their norms-based mobilization because they can ‘shame’ norm violators, recruit like-minded allies and build transnational coalitions, and ultimately persuade others to follow collectively shared understandings of appropriate behavior. Many studies sharing this world view then proceeded to describe the expansion of the transnational non-governmental sector as a sign of an emerging ‘global civil society’ and view each new organization as further proof of the growing strength of the underlying norms (Anheier et al. 2004; Salamon and Sokolowski 2004).

More recent scholarship on transnational activism has challenged the principled view of non-governmental actors and advanced a more traditional material and interest-based explanation for the emergence and expansion of the sector (Cooley and Ron 2002). In this view, transnational activism is not *replacing* a world of material nation states with a principled global civil society, but most likely *reproducing* the domestic power of non-state actors and the global inequalities of the state system (Rohrschneider and Dalton 2002: 511; Tarrow). Transnational activism is driven by ‘market forces’ which are likely to reproduce the existing power differentials between the North and South (Bob 2005). Advocacy organizations such as Amnesty International or Human

Rights Watch pick their targets not primarily based on the greatest violation of human rights principles, but are driven by a need for mass media exposure and maintaining funding sources (Ron et al. 2005). More service-oriented groups find themselves in a competitive environment when they seek out contracts and donor support. As a result, the growth of the transnational non-governmental sector is not interpreted as a sign of the growing strength of global norms, but a source of increasing competition for resources within the community.

Although different positions and recommendations on transnational mobilization are by now well developed and occupied by various academic authors and activist strategies, we still lack systematic, cross-sectoral studies which would help us to evaluate the validity of each side. The field remains largely driven by case studies or a focus on specific campaigns which attracted the attention of scholars because of their success and media prominence. Such examples include the landmines campaign (Price 1998), the establishment of the International Criminal Court (Glasius 2002; Spees 2003), the conflict diamond issue (Le Billon 2006; Tamm 2004), or the role of transnational networks in humanitarian relief (Cooley and Ron 2002) and the promotion of human rights and environmental concerns on the global, national, or local level (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse et al. 1999; Wapner 1995). But case studies tell us little about the entire population of organization within one sector or about the overall picture of transnational advocacy across issue areas.¹⁰

3.2. TNGO study evidence: The advocacy/service distinction¹¹

One of the objectives of the TNGO study is to explore in a more systematic fashion assumptions which have informed many of the single-case or –sectoral studies dominant in the field. Based on the preliminary results of the interview study, we conclude that there is still a theoretically and empirically significant difference between the service and the advocacy sectors. While this general conclusion is largely in line with the conventional wisdom and the assumptions of the introductory chapter, we also find that ‘advocacy’ itself is a more

¹⁰ Rohrschneider/Dalton (2002) provide a first, systematic description and analysis of transnational activism in the environmental field. Smith et al. (1998) offer a similar study for transnational human rights groups.

¹¹ The evidence presented here identifies an advocacy or service organization solely based on the answers given during the interview, not the Charity Navigator data or other external criteria.

heterogeneous concept than previously acknowledged. Advocacy groups do not only differ systematically from service organizations, but they also engage in a wide variety of activities well beyond what the term ‘policy advocacy’ would suggest. Most respondents from the advocacy groups interviewed for this project actually tend to avoid the term ‘advocacy’ altogether and report ‘research’ and ‘public education’ as a primary goal.

Most scholars recognize that transnational NGOs are a very heterogeneous group, comprised of many different types of organizations pursuing very different goals. Theorizing about such a heterogeneous group of organizations is a difficult task because it is hard to identify a single nontrivial characteristic (such as average-cost minimization, for example) that all NGOs share in common. The majority of studies focus on a single sector (e.g., human rights, environmental protection) or even a single organization or campaign. Implicit in this kind of analysis is the assumption that differences among various types of NGOs and sectors exist. Those assumptions are usually not directly tested and other possibly salient differences (such as size or location) are rarely investigated in the literature. One of the more common ways of dividing up the non-governmental sector is by goals and activities, which also serves as a means to define the boundaries of academic sub-disciplines. While international relations scholars tend to focus exclusively on the role of a small number of prominent transnational advocacy groups, scholars of sustainable development primarily focus on local NGOs in the Global South.¹² If we assume that this particular way of breaking down the field of ‘NGO studies’ is a useful intermediary step, then we can develop more precise theories of NGOs by considering their constituent groups separately. But to what extent is this specific dichotomy justified? And how well does the firm analogy explain the motives and behavior of advocacy organizations in particular?

The TNGO study helps to answer these two questions. The interviews with 180 [95] leaders of transnational NGOs contained two relevant sections of inquiry. First, we asked respondents an open-ended question: “What is it that your organization is trying to accomplish?” Respondents answered in their own words and we inductively coded their responses to generate

¹² These differences are also reflected in the primary publication venues. IR scholars will write about NGOs (or ‘global civil society’) in *International Organization*, *World Politics*, or *International Studies Quarterly*, while journals such *World Development* or *Development and Change* serve as outlets for authors interest in the non-governmental development service sector.

nine response categories. Then, we handed respondents a sheet of paper with five activities and asked them to rate how much time their organizations spent on each. We coded their ratings for each of the five categories as primary, non-primary, or ‘does not do.’ If the advocacy/service delivery distinction is accurate, then we should expect to find that respondents had a clear preference for one or the other, but not for both.

To test this proposition, we ran a clustering algorithm on each of the two sets of answers. The algorithm divides organizations into groups according to respondents’ answers so that organizations assigned to the same group are very similar while organizations assigned to different groups are very different. We did not know how many groups would emerge from the data, so we evaluated the resultant cluster trees visually and consulted conventional stopping rule statistics to identify the optimal number of groups for each of the two clustering runs. Once the optimal number of groups was determined, we could then examine the characteristics of the organizations in each of the groups. In both cases, we found that the advocacy/service delivery distinction was robust. Moreover, because the clustering runs generated grouping variables, we were also able to examine other characteristics associated with each type of organization.

We ran the first cluster analysis on responses to the question about organizational goals and strategies, which revealed two groups divided along the advocacy/service delivery line. The cluster tree below indicates two distinct groups on the left, and a couple of small null groups on the right. The compact group furthest to the left represents advocacy-oriented TNGOs and the wider group to its right represents service delivery TNGOs. The width of groups within the cluster tree corresponds to the number of organizations within that group. The height of groups within the cluster tree reflects how similar organizations are within each group. Very short groups indicate that the groups are very distinct from each other, whereas very tall groups indicate that the groups are not very distinct from each other. The cluster tree below shows that while the advocacy/service delivery split clearly emerges, the two groups are not very distinct from one another. This finding suggests that the advocacy/service delivery schema is accurate even despite the observation that most organizations “do a little bit of everything.”

[first dendrogram about here, see Appendix, section 3, cluster analysis I]

With the optimal number of groups identified as two, it is possible to examine the specific characteristics that define each group. In the first group, 95% of respondents mentioned advocacy as a goal, whereas only 5% mentioned service delivery. In the second group, only 13% mentioned that they did advocacy, whereas 75% mentioned that they did service delivery. By analyzing these and the other group traits it is reasonable to characterize the first group as “advocacy-oriented” and the second group as “service delivery-oriented.” This fuzzy dichotomous structure naturally arises from the data and helps confirm the accuracy of the advocacy/service delivery split.

[first two tables about here, see Appendix, section 3, Tables 5 and 6]

One of our contentions in this chapter is that advocacy organizations act more like unbounded networks and service delivery organizations act more like bounded firms. We believe that this distinction is significant because it indicates nuances in the in the real world TNGO sector that suggest important scope conditions for applying theoretical perspectives to different types of TNGOs. To test this contention, we looked for systematic differences between advocacy-oriented TNGOs and service delivery-oriented TNGOs that would bring evidence to bear on whether the theory of the firm would be appropriate to the study of advocacy and/or service delivery organizations.

In our interviews we asked respondents to explain the obstacles they faced in achieving their goals. As might be expected, lack of financial resources was the most common response. At first glance, this finding seems consistent with the firm approach: if TNGOs indeed acted like firms competing for resources, then we would expect to find that finances would be highly salient across all TNGO leaders. But this salience is unevenly distributed between advocacy-oriented and service delivery-oriented TNGOs. Based on the grouping variables generated from the previous cluster, leaders from service delivery TNGOs were 6% (73% versus 67%) more likely to have mentioned funding as an obstacle to goals than those from advocacy-oriented organizations. This suggests that a theoretical perspective on TNGOs that assumed organizational behavior was motivated by finances would be slightly more appropriate for service delivery organizations than for advocacy organizations.

Similar results were obtained by clustering respondents' ratings of how much time their organizations spent engaged in different organizational activities. Two groups emerged from the data, the first of which could be characterized as advocacy-oriented and the second of which could be characterized as service delivery-oriented. The cluster tree below shows the two groups that emerged. The smaller, more compact group on the left represents advocacy-oriented TNGOs, and the larger, more disparate group on the right represents service delivery organizations.

[second dendrogram about here, see Appendix, section 3, cluster analysis II]

Unlike the previous cluster, these results reflect respondents' ratings within predetermined categories. The data show a general reluctance of respondents to have mentioned "advocacy" explicitly, which we ascribe to the sensitivity of leaders to legal regulations in the US that forbid tax-exempt organizations registered as 501(c)(3)s from engaging in various types of political advocacy and lobbying. As such, the major characteristics that distinguish the two groups are identified as 'service delivery' and 'research and public education,' a less loaded term than 'advocacy.' Perusing the traits of each group again supports our contention that the two groups are naturally separated along the conventional lines. Slightly more than 75% of organizations were assigned to the same group across both clustering runs. The data also show that this is the case despite the observation that some service delivery-oriented TNGOs do a little bit of advocacy and some advocacy-oriented TNGOs do a little bit of service delivery.

[second pair of tables about here, see Appendix, section 3, Tables 7 and 8]

Consistent with our previous findings, with this grouping variable we find that leaders from service delivery organizations were 14% (75% versus 61%) more likely to have mentioned finances as an obstacle to goals than were leaders from advocacy-oriented organizations. This again corroborates our contention that while many leaders from service delivery organizations may think like average-cost minimizers, leaders from advocacy-oriented TNGOs tend to be slightly less worried about their bottom lines. We will discuss below some of the reasons why advocacy may produce different kinds of goal-seeking behavior which differ from the behavior of forms or service delivery agencies.

We have only begun to explore the data from the interviews and remain a few weeks or months away from adding additional insights and evidence to this general point. For example, if this claim about advocacy groups is to hold, we would expect answers to vary systematically across several sections of the interview protocol. Leaders of service delivery groups would be expected to talk more frequently about resources and couch definitions of effectiveness in terms of measurable and quantifiable results, at least if they view their organization as successful. In contrast, advocacy groups would place higher premium on their mission and achievement of self-defined goals. In the accountability section, we would expect to find service organizations to be more open to externally imposed measures and readily adopt a model of ‘upward accountability’ (towards donors) with some mention of ‘downward accountability’ (towards beneficiaries). Advocacy groups would be expected to prefer a mission-driven understanding of accountability which privileges internal measures (towards membership and/or staff) and peer accountability within the larger networks an organization is involved in. Since defining accountability for the organization necessarily involves tradeoffs and requires choosing between stakeholders, the service/advocacy divide ought to be salient.

In sum, the firm model has a claim to explaining the behavior of service NGOs because formal hierarchical organization can achieve greater economies of scale and help minimize the average costs of providing goods and services. Based on the interviews with leaders of transnational NGOs, we have some evidence that advocacy organizations may follow a fundamentally different model. This model puts greater emphasis on communicative processes within social networks where marginal costs are much differently structured. The firm analogy will be able to explain some of the behavior of advocacy groups, but it risks downplaying the central role of complex social networks in favor of a more parsimonious but less realistic view of networks as firms. It is possible that the tradeoff (more theoretical clarity/less explanatory power for individual cases or the sector overall) may ultimately not yield enough gains and a more sociologically-driven view will prevail.

4. Transaction costs and organizational boundaries

The introductory chapter claims that advocacy organizations “function in competitive policy markets and therefore adopt firm-like characteristics due to structural imperatives.” It follows that “...a careful appreciation of the similarities and differences between NGOs and firms can help scholars to employ insights from theories of firms to explore the organization and functioning of advocacy NGOs and inform knotty management and policy concerns on NGO accountability, evaluation, and governance” (Prakash/Gugerty, p. 8). In this section, we present data on the internal structure and networking habits of advocacy organizations. The interviews show that the firm analogy is more useful when the analysis focuses on the level of individual organizations. The view is less compelling when the focus shifts to how those advocacy organizations pursue their goals as part of larger networks.

4.1. Transaction costs: Internal structures and governance

The theory of the firm is a useful theoretical perspective for providing empirically testable conjectures about when and why organizations emerge, and as such can serve as a basis for theorizing about the emergence of NGOs. However, The TNGO study shows two results which undermine the applicability of the firm model. First, the external environment for advocacy groups does not create a uniform pressure similar to what profit-making enterprises face. Second, advocacy groups have more leverage over their external environments and are more pro-active in shaping their environment in a collective-cooperative (e.g., networking), rather than individual-competitive manner. Most importantly, transaction costs for advocacy groups are assessed with significant uncertainty since their products are either not quantifiable or focus deliberately on long-term and incremental change. And organizational boundaries are more fluid in advocacy organizations since much of the power that they exert can only be exerted through networks of like-minded individuals with the capacity to shape public opinion and the preferences of key targets.

According to Coase, “a firm will tend to expand until the costs of organizing an extra transaction within the firm becomes equal to the costs of carrying out the same transaction by means of an exchange in the open market or the costs of organizing in another firm” (Coase

1937: 395). This perspective can help account for the behavior of service-oriented NGOs, which address humanitarian crises or development gaps through the provision of *material* resources (e.g., food aid, micro-credit, shelter) or tangible services (e.g., cleft pallet surgeries, potable water). In those cases, a per-unit cost-minimization scheme is a useful way of setting expectations reporting back to donors. A similar approach to advocacy groups is much more problematic, in particular if we begin to quantify results in narrow terms, such as number of political prisoners released or annual funding for environmental protection.

There are several reasons why a human rights organization is not likely to ever approach a potential donor with their *violation-to-dollar* ratios. First, the idea of human rights is fundamentally antithetical to quantification. For better or worse, the human rights idea establishes an equal value for every human life and is inherently opposed to utilitarian calculations. This does not mean that NGOs do not calculate where to invest their resources, but it does limit competition and creates different incentives. Second, advocacy groups frequently pursue goals as part of networks which makes it much more difficult to separate the specific contributions of a single organization. Third, advocacy groups and their networks rarely accomplish their task in ways remotely similar to delivering a specific number of tents or blankets to a given refugee population. Transnational advocacy groups challenge the status quo through ideas, persuasion, lobbying, or even social coercion. They produce norms shaping the public sphere or campaigns targeting institutional change. They frequently seek to empower those domestic actors which have pushed for change for a long time and their influence is more incremental and long-term. While we can easily identify the organization delivering services in a refugee camp, pinning down which the specific bounded organization was responsible for delegitimizing the use of landmines is more difficult.

Why should we believe that a hierarchical organization is the best strategy for assembling the machinery necessary for orchestrating these kinds of complex transnational processes? And what are the transaction costs inherent to advocacy? Concerns for efficiency are one, but not necessarily the primary reason for an advocacy group to organize hierarchically. The institutional identity is not simply about creating boundaries and lowering transaction costs, but represents a significant act of giving voice to a norm or idea at the center of the group's activism. The creation of an organizational form is a first step of "issue emergence" (Carpenter 2007)

providing initial legitimacy to a topic previously ignored or neglected. Advocacy *organizations* play a crucial role in bringing together a collection of self-organized individuals, giving norms a voice aligning interests and strategies, developing campaigns in networks with others, resolving internal conflict, and creating an emotional link between membership/staff and the mandate.

Coase identifies several kinds of transaction costs of the commercial sector including price discovery (negotiation) and enforcement of contracts. These transaction costs can be minimized by trading market mechanisms for the direction of an entrepreneur within the confines of an organization. Employees give up certain freedoms in order to perform more efficiently than they would alone in the marketplace. Similarly, there are many kinds of possible transactions in the process of advocacy campaigns. Actors must undertake the act of norm-formation by agreeing upon guiding principles for action, and then must outline strategies that they believe will lead to desired outcomes. Finally, plans must be devised, delegated, and resourced in order to achieve the stated goals. The next section will shift the focus from the internal to the external. How do advocacy groups interact with their external environment and what types of incentives exist?

4.2. Organizational boundaries: Networking and partnerships

Political transactions are inherently social and cross the boundaries of individual organizations. Advocacy organizations have strong incentives to enter networks and partnerships in order to exchange information and resources, amplify their voice, or extend their reach. From the theory of the firm perspective, networking and partnerships are puzzling and not easily explainable. While it makes intuitive sense to create internal hierarchies which facilitate hiring and training (capture or develop expertise), or fundraising, advocacy NGOs also build and maintain resource-intensive external networks with many of their natural ‘competitors.’ Why would the advocacy organization create distinct boundaries between itself and the policy markets and then proceed to simultaneously reinforce and blur those boundaries? The answer emerging from this study focuses primarily on the benefits which accrue from partnering with others or from building short-term coalitions during specific campaigns (see Appendix, Table 9). The

following quote represents a typical response to the question about the potential benefits of collaboration.

“Oh there’s huge benefits. It’s about making the issue heard rather than a single voice; it’s about building popular momentum...building momentum...you don’t really need ‘popular’ ...around issues that otherwise wouldn’t have traction (Interview 1).

The empirical questions of import are how to define the boundaries of advocacy organizations (is it the administrative unit of an NGO or rather the collection of networks that they participate in?), and how to predict participation in extra-organizational networks.

Just as firms combine capital and labor to produce economic output, advocacy NGOs combine norms, information, strategies, and communication channels to disseminate ideas through social networks and produce a collective consensus about appropriate behavior. Since advocacy groups primarily rely on communicative power, the notion of public debate is the equivalent of a marketplace transaction, which is usually mediated by “gatekeepers” such as dominant players in the issue area or the mass media (Bob 2005). Although advocacy groups will often directly address their targets (e.g., a repressive government or a multinational corporation responsible for sweatshop conditions), the main intended audience is frequently the general public, whether locally or globally. In a for-profit marketplace the exchange is only meaningful to the participants and usually does not involve the larger public in determining if an exchange will or will not take place. What is unique about the market place of ideas is that participants exchange competing claims about ‘truth’ and the validity of norms, not just about goods or services and their prices. ‘Shaming’ as a technique works only when those targeted by a campaign care about their reputation in the eyes of the general public. While trying to influence public opinion, advocacy groups band together in order to collude on the process of norm-promotion. In this sense, the process of extending advocacy beyond an individual organization is much more driven by concerns for legitimacy (persuasive efficacy), while firms engage in similar behavior primarily in search for increased efficiency. In both cases the internal hierarchy is no longer the preferred modus operandi to attain a given goal, but seeking legitimacy and advocating change requires different methods of engaging with an external environment.

Are transnational advocacy groups more likely to produce a certain good within the organization if the desired product is characterized by high asset specificity and requires

significant investment (Williamson 1986)? There is some evidence that expertise is particularly relevant in the environmental sector¹³ and may also increase in relevance for human rights groups pursuing elite-based or legalistic strategies in their advocacy work. These developments create a demand for certain training and knowledge within the organization which may not have existed earlier. For example, Amnesty International would rely for decades predominately on letter-writing campaigns to free political prisoners, but also build overtime a professional staff primarily concentrated in the International Secretariat. Tensions between the voluntary and the professional side are a prominent part of Amnesty's history and are partly driving the need of the organization to exploit information (about human rights violations) as a means to compete with other groups and attract funding. One of the key assets of Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch is their ability to produce ('make', not 'buy') accurate reports about human rights conditions and be legitimately seen as representing universal principles.

A few examples challenge the claim that formal organizations are more likely to arise in complicated issue areas requiring substantial expertise. The success of the landmines campaign was driven by creating a social movement putting the issue into the limelight of global attention, while previous efforts of the International Red Cross as the expert organization made no difference. The landmines campaign took off when many organizations with no or little expertise on the issue created a network pushing the issue onto the agenda of states. For many decades, expert organizations working on how states conduct warfare or disarm had no measureable effect. Only when more media-driven groups joined the fray and redefined the issue as a global humanitarian crisis, change took place. While the landmines example is certainly a prime case for selection bias focusing only on success stories, it does highlight why the firm analogy may not only be falsifiable, but may face fundamental challenges to its basic assumptions about actor behavior in the advocacy world.

Creating networks and partnerships are certainly not frictionless – groups must first internally define their stances and their intended strategy sets before exerting influence externally. Once a partnership base expands too far, it may become more costly (or less effective) to maintain the partnership than it would be for an NGO to debate the issue openly in

¹³See Peter Haas's work on epistemic communities {Haas, 1992 #441}.

the public sphere. The interviews (and the following quote) indicate that the idea of ‘networking’ (Prakash/Gugerty, p. 13) should be further broken down into two types of collaborations – more formally constituted *partnerships* and more loosely organized *networks*.

“A partnership is sort of ah, we’re almost blood brothers. We’re in this together. Whereas a network you’re just, you’ve got, you’re going to talk, you can learn, you can gain and ah, you can give. But there’s oh, nothing.... Like Covenant in a handshake, there’s.... there’s ah, a partnership should be like a marriage, I think it’s in many ways we’re both are accountable to each other and both get benefits and both have responsibilities. Whereas a network is just more loose” (Interview 2).

Further analysis of the data is likely to yield additional insights into which types of organizations are more likely to prefer going it alone, working loosely with others, or building intense partnerships with others. We know that service-driven organizations bidding for a contract to deliver certain goods to a given region will have incentives to partner with local organizations. This insight is confirmed in Table 9 (Appendix), where service organizations name ‘better access’ and ‘broader programs’ more frequently when asked about the benefits of collaboration. In contrast, advocacy groups are more likely to name ‘increased legitimacy’ and ‘better results’ as advantages of collaboration.

Similar differences emerge with regard to the data on ‘obstacles of collaboration’ (see Appendix, Table 10). Advocacy groups much more frequently name ‘loss of control,’ ‘compatibility of missions,’ and ‘organizational cultures’ as disincentives to collaboration. While service groups are more likely to find themselves in short-term contractual situations where the goals are externally imposed, advocacy groups are more concerned about maintaining their autonomy. Both tables also confirm that service providers are more focused on the financial bottom line, since they are more likely to view ‘increased funding’ as a benefit of collaboration.

5. Conclusions

The introductory chapter to this project provides us with a compelling claim about how to advance our understanding of transnational advocacy organizations. It provides a framework of hypotheses the validity of which can be evaluated across organizations which vary in size, mandate, internal structures, effectiveness, fundraising strategies, and networking/partnership behavior. The academic literature on transnational advocacy groups has yet to explore the

relevance of those differences in accounting for the successes or failures of activist mobilization. Much of this debate has focused solely on the dichotomy of principles vs. interests, where both sides view behavior focusing on organizational survival and growth as contradictory to what these groups allegedly stand for. Those explaining the successes of transnational activism insist that the power of advocacy groups is derived primarily from their principled positions and makes the organizations unique players in global affairs.¹⁴ Those challenging the norms-driven view of transnational activism claim that self-interest undermines, in one way or another, the missions these groups ought to pursue. Thus, defenders and critics adopt highly normative views which tend to distract from the reality of transnational activism on the ground. A more productive scholarly engagement with the transnational advocacy sector accepts that the objects of study are simultaneously principled and self-interested.

The key to explaining differences among these organizations is not to be found in the interest/norms dichotomy, but in a more systematic understanding of variation on the level of individual organizations and the networks and partnerships they create. Thus, the first claim supported by the TNGO study argues that advocacy groups represent a distinct and coherent subset of organizations within the larger TNGO world. Current scholarship tends to generalize either across the entirety of (transnational) ‘non-governmental organizations’ (NGOs) or across specific sectors such as human rights or humanitarian relief. This research shows that conventional views focused on similarities based on mandate or tax status are not likely to advance our understanding of the nature and impact of transnational activism. Instead of focusing on mandate or legal regulations imposing conformity, researchers should explore other possible differences across transnational advocacy groups as possible explanatory variables.

A second result of this inquiry confirms the existence of a distinguished advocacy sector in the transnational non-governmental world. Two developments during the past decade have begun to undermine the separation between those two groups. First, the overall growth of the transnational NGO sector has allowed individual organizations to expand their mandates and reach. Second, large service organizations have increasingly become aware of the need to add explicit advocacy strategies to either secure access to the beneficiaries or to create more

¹⁴ This was originally a sensible position, since their task was to show how actors with no significant material resources could shape the social environment of states.

sustainable long-term social change through empowerment and self-reliance. While the advocacy/service divide may become less salient compared to other differences within the TNGO sector, we still find it to be salient. Obviously, all NGOs face difficult tradeoffs between a firm-like concern for the bottom line and a principled regard for their mandate. We find that concerns over resources are slightly more salient to leaders of service delivery organizations than for advocacy organizations and suspect that this difference is attributable to the nature of advocacy work itself, which is more directly concerned with persuasion and ideational processes than with minimizing operating costs. The clustering results presented here confirm this separation and the findings were robust when we prompted respondents to characterize what their organizations did in their own words and also when we asked them explicitly how much time they spent engaged in specific activities.

The third (and least developed) result of this research focuses on how advocacy groups may actually behave differently from service organizations or firms. We explore transaction costs and organizational boundaries as key concepts of the firm analogy and find strong evidence which sets advocacy groups apart from other not-for-profits or profit-making enterprises. We find from our interviews that advocacy organizations operate more as nodes in unbounded social networks rather than as bounded institutions with clear hierarchies and hard distinctions between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ actors. In practice, our interview respondents systematically blurred the lines between their own organizations’ internal leadership, staff and operations and those of donors, partner organizations and distant volunteers. On paper, advocacy TNGOs appear to the outside world as bounded hierarchical organizations with official headquarters, professionalized staff, and unitary objectives. However, our study reveals that this formality is primarily sustained for tax and legal purposes, but may be less relevant for attaining advocacy goals.

While there are high levels of “isomorphism” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) and compliance with externally established norms of what constitutes a proper not-for-profit, the organization itself is frequently little more than a ‘shell’ supporting a wider network of principled actors and campaigning. Therefore, while we view the transnational advocacy sector as a coherent and distinct—albeit fuzzy— subgroup of NGOs writ large, we are only at the beginning of assessing the validity of the firm analogy in explaining the behavior of individual actors and networks within this sector. Our data suggests that advocacy NGOs exhibit many

similarities to firms in dealing with organizational survival and competition for funding. But as communicative actors nested in dense social networks, advocacy groups have developed ways of organizing beyond the two alternatives of hierarchy and the market. Advocacy groups enter networks integrated by shared norms and understandings as an alternative to producing results through exchange or vertical integration.

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Appendix: Tables, figures, and dendrograms

For section 2: TNGO study

Table 1. Effectiveness of Sample Organizations

	All NGOs		Sample NGOs	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
1	39	11.68%	21	11.67%
2	91	27.25%	48	26.67%
3	38	11.38%	21	11.67%
4	166	49.7%	90	50%
Total	334	100	180	100
Mean	2.991018		3	
Std. D.	1.113624		1.113653	

Table 2. Effectiveness by Sector

	1	2	3	4	Total
Environment	5 19.23%	7 26.92%	3 11.54%	11 42.31%	26
Human Rights	6 23.08%	5 19.23%	6 23.08%	9 34.62%	26
Humanitarian Relief	0 0%	11 29.73%	1 2.7%	25 67.57%	37
Sustainable Development	6 7.89%	21 27.63%	9 11.84%	40 52.63%	76
Conflict Resolution	4 26.67%	4 26.67%	2 13.33%	5 33.33%	15
Total	21 11.67%	48 26.67%	21 11.67%	90 50%	180

Pearson chi2(12) = 23.2581 Pr = 0.026

Table 3. Effectiveness by Budget Size

	1	2	3	4	Total
Small	14 19.44%	23 31.94%	12 16.67%	23 31.94%	72
Big	6 8.22%	19 26.03%	8 10.96%	40 54.79%	73
Giant	1 2.86%	6 17.14%	1 2.86%	27 77.14%	35
Total	21 11.67%	48 26.67%	21 11.67%	90 50%	180

Pearson $\chi^2(6) = 22.8486$ Pr = 0.001

Figure 1. Effectiveness by Budget Size

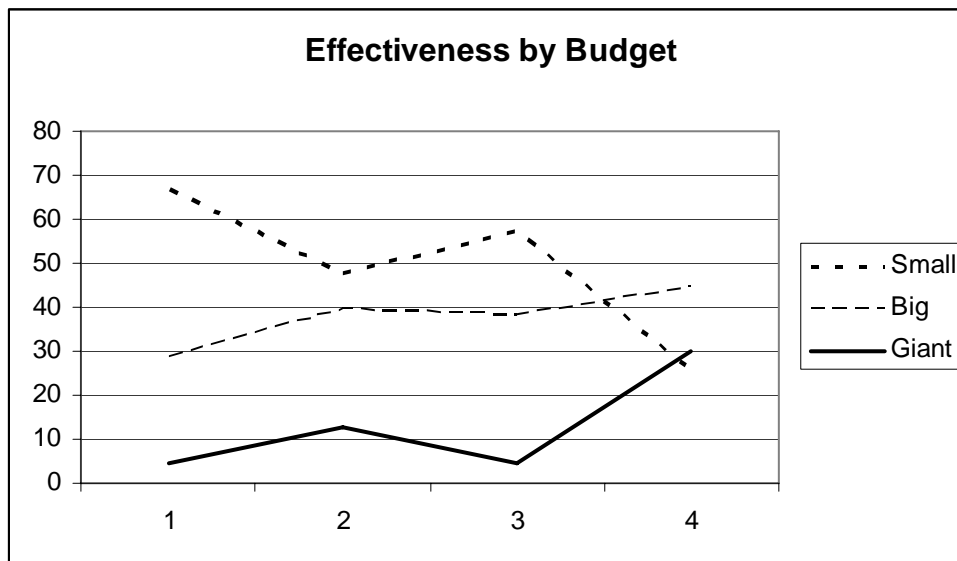


Table 4. Effectiveness by Function

	1	2	3	4	Total
Advocacy	10 21.28%	9 19.15%	11 23.4%	17 36.17%	47
Service	5 6.94%	22 30.56%	8 11.11%	37 51.39%	72
Both	4 9.09%	13 29.55%	2 4.55%	25 56.82%	44
Other	2 11.76%	4 23.53%	0 0%	11 64.71%	17
Total	21 11.67%	48 26.67%	21 11.67%	90 50%	180

Pearson chi2(9) = 19.3861 Pr = 0.022

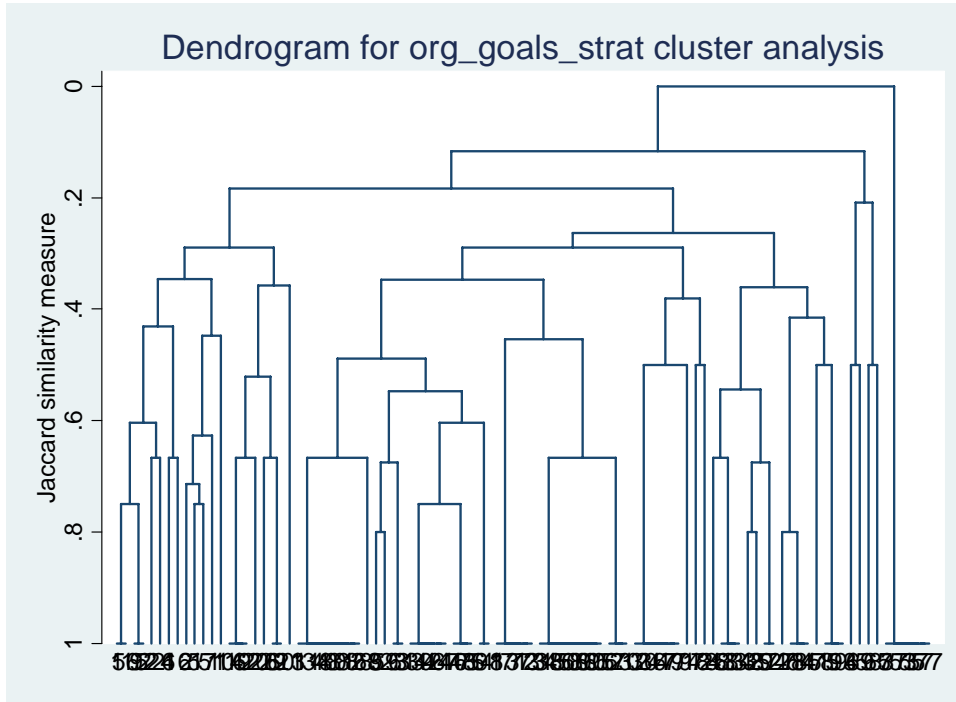
Table 5. Budget by Function

	Function				Total
	Advocacy	Service	Both	Other	
Budget					
Small	28 38.89	30 41.67	8 11.11	6 8.33	72 100
Big	16 21.92	27 36.99	21 28.77	9 12.33	73 100
Giant	3 8.57	15 42.86	15 42.86	2 5.71	35 100
Total	47 26.11	72 40	44 24.44	17 9.44	180 100

Pearson chi2(6) = 21.3060 Pr = 0.002

For section 3: service/advocacy distinction

Cluster analysis I



Cluster analysis II

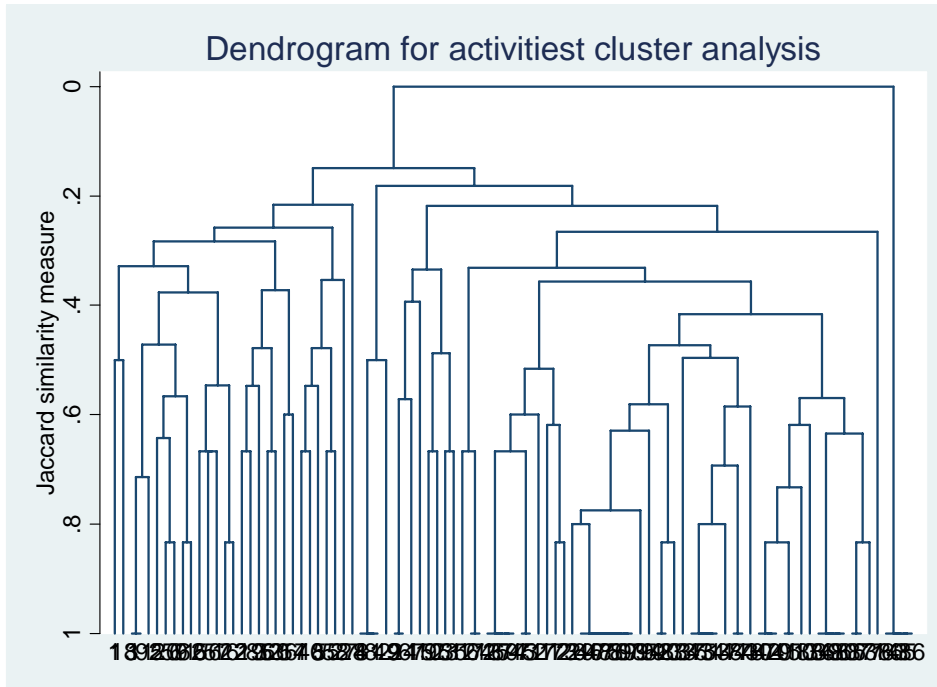


Table 5. Trait probabilities for advocacy-oriented TNGOs

(n=21)	
Education	48%
Advocacy	95%
Grassroots mobilization	43%
Compliance and enforcement	19%
Service delivery	5%
Research	29%
Capacity building	52%
Fundraising	38%

Table 6. Trait probabilities for service delivery TNGOs

(n=64)	
Education	50%
Advocacy	13%
Grassroots mobilization	20%
Compliance and enforcement	2%
Service delivery	75%
Research	2%
Capacity building	59%
Fundraising	25%

Table 7. Trait probabilities for advocacy-oriented TNGOs

(n=29)		
Direct Aid and Services	Primary	31%
	Secondary	7%
	Does not do	59%
Research and Public Education	Primary	97%
	Secondary	3%
	Does not do	0%
Mobilization of Public	Primary	45%
	Secondary	24%
	Does not do	31%
Advocacy	Primary	48%
	Secondary	38%
	Does not do	14%
Monitoring	Primary	28%
	Secondary	45%
	Does not do	14%

Table 8. Trait probabilities for service delivery TNGOs

(n=62)		
Direct Aid and Services	Primary	90%
	Secondary	5%
	Does not do	5%
Research and Public Education	Primary	6%
	Secondary	71%
	Does not do	18%
Mobilization of Public	Primary	5%
	Secondary	27%
	Does not do	56%
Advocacy	Primary	16%
	Secondary	44%
	Does not do	29%
Monitoring	Primary	5%
	Secondary	27%
	Does not do	56%

For section 4: Transaction costs and organizational boundaries

Table 9. Benefits of Collaboration

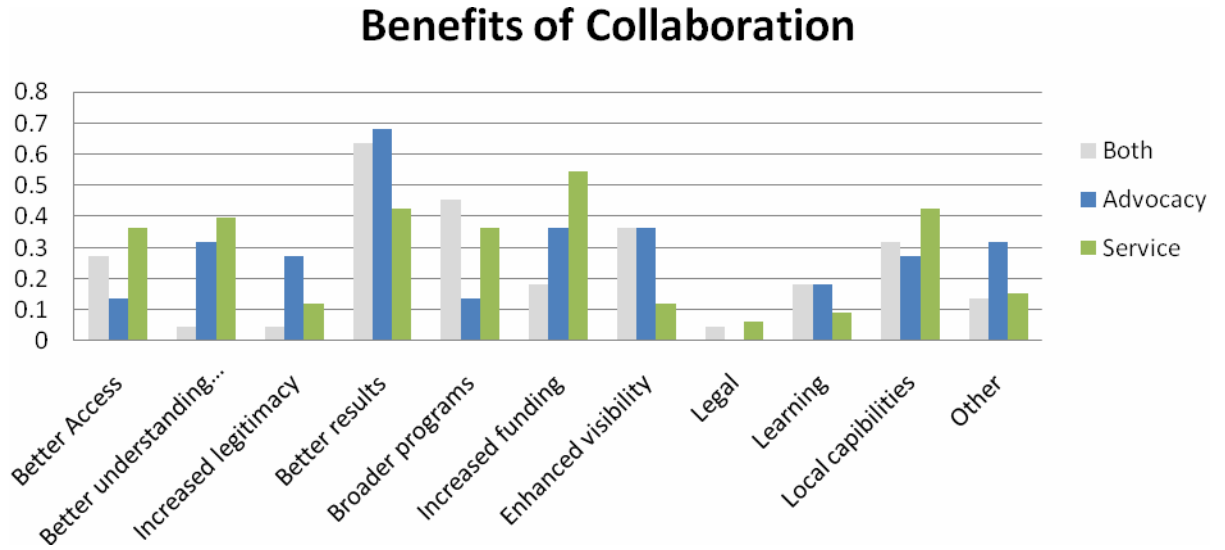


Table 10. Obstacles to Collaboration

