Civil Society Actors as Catalysts for Transnational Social Learning
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ABSTRACT

This article explores the roles of transnational civil society organizations and networks in transnational social learning. It begins with an investigation into social learning within problem domains and into the ways in which such domain learning builds perspectives and capacities for effective action among domain organizations and institutions. It suggests that domain learning involves problem definition, direction setting, implementation of collective action, and performance monitoring. Transnational civil society actors appear to take five roles in domain learning: (1) identifying issues, (2) facilitating voice of marginalized stakeholders, (3) amplifying the importance of issues, (4) building bridges among diverse stakeholders, and (5) monitoring and assessing solutions. The paper then explores the circumstances in which transnational civil society actors can be expected to make special contributions in important problem domains in the future.

KEY WORDS: transnational civil society networks, international nongovernmental organizations, social learning, problem domains, global governance

INTRODUCTION

Civil society actors, such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), social movements, and advocacy networks, are becoming major players in transnational governance and problem-solving. Together with nation-states, intergovernmental organizations and multinational corporations, transnational civil society organizations and networks have engaged in defining and in learning how to solve transnational problems in domains ranging from human rights to environmental protection to corruption to poverty alleviation and development. Transnational problem domains are social, economic, and environmental challenges facing society that affect populations across borders and require the involvement of actors in more than one country to resolve. The civil society sector is composed of associations, institutions and public discourses organized around shared values, in contrast to the organization of the state sector around authority and the market sector around exchange (Najam, 1996; Edwards, 2004; Kaldor, 2003; Keane, 2003).

Scholars have drawn on international relations and social movement theory to chronicle the international emergence and influence of civil society actors (e.g., Clark, 2003; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Khagram et al., 2002; Smith et al., 1997; Taylor, 2004; Batliwala and Brown, 2006). Accounting for this influence has required a broader focus than traditional international relations explanations of national power and interests as primary shapers of international policies and behavior. Scholars have argued, for example, that it is not possible to explain the signing of the Treaty on Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons without taking into account the roles played by Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, or

to explain the emergence of the current human rights regime without focusing on the role of Amnesty International (Johnson, 2000; Risse, 2000).

This article poses two questions: What contributions do civil society actors make to transnational social learning processes ? And in what domains are such contributions particularly likely? These questions focus the analysis beyond particular cases to examine the larger trends suggested by the involvement of civil society actors in transnational problem solving and governance. Past research has examined civil society involvement in transnational governance by focusing on their impacts on norm creation (see Risse et al., 1999 and Finnemore, 1998), on information politics (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), on the spread of democratic ideals (Florini, 2003), and on the delivery of services (Lindenberg and Bryant, 2001). This article uses a social learning lens to examine the role of transnational civil society actors in collective problem-solving.

The growing number of interconnected, complex, long-term challenges associated with the expansion and globalization of human societies is seriously testing the capacities of existing institutional arrangements (Rischard, 2002; Florini, 2003). These challenges often require the involvement of multiple stakeholders across many levels over long time periods. In addition, the knowledge and skills that are required to identify, address, and solve these challenges is frequently incomplete and is shifting rapidly. In an increasingly turbulent, interdependent and uncertain world, social learning capacities are pivotal to managing risks and recognizing opportunities. This article first explores the concept of

social learning and then turns to the contributions to social learning made by transnational civil society organizations and networks.

SOCIAL LEARNING

'Social learning' refers here to processes that increase awareness, capacities and repertoires of action amongst actors in a social domain. Social learning increases domain capacities, as organizational learning and individual learning increase the capacities of organizations and individuals. We are particularly interested in social learning as a process of enhancing awareness, capacity and action to address transnational problem domains (Botkin et al., 1979; Korten, 1981; Milbrath, 1989; Finger and Verlaan, 1995; Brown, 1999; The Social Learning Group, 2000; Clark, 2001). More specifically, we are concerned with learning that reshapes domain perspectives and actions on critical problems. Problem domains involve many diverse actors with stakes in problem-solving activities. Examples include civil society actors, business interests, and government agencies concerned about managing a sensitive ecosystem (Weber, 2003) or preventing dangerous marketing practices for baby foods (Johnson, 1986).

It has been widely accepted that individuals and organizations can learn, but the concept of social learning in larger social systems, including entire societies, remains controversial. Some scholars maintain that societies can and do learn, as indicated by fundamental changes in societal institutions and practices (e.g., Botkin, 1979; Milbrath, 1989: 89). Others question whether societies as entities can learn, though they argue that it is important "to identify the social groupings of individuals within which learning

occurs, and the institutional forms that stabilize and transmit the resulting lessons." (Clark, 2001: 382; see also Brown and Ashman, 1999). We focus here on examining processes by which learning occurs within interorganizational problem domains. Systematic changes in the beliefs, norms and institutions that shape behavior of domains and domain actors indicates the possibility of social learning (e.g., Risse et al., 1999; Risse, 2000; Khagram et al., 2002; Ingelhart, 1990; Boli and Thomas, 1999).

In organizational contexts theorists have distinguished between orders of learning that affect different aspects of organizational functioning. First order learning focuses on improving immediate performance; second order learning addresses norms, values, and 'taken-for-granted' expectations that guide choices and interpretations of events (Argyris and Schön, 1996). Social learning might improve the performance of the domain, or it might fundamentally revise domain frames and goals. Domain learning may become evident in changes in domain interactions, performance or perspectives. Transnational domain learning appears to have occurred in the domains of human rights (Risse et al., 1999), environmental risk management (Hoffman, 2001), and project management at the World Bank (Fox and Brown, 1998), though controversies continue about aspects of those changes. Domain learning often involves learning begun at the individual and organizational levels that becomes embedded in changed perspectives and capacities at the domain level.

Discussions of social learning in particular domains sometimes focus on "issue maturity" as a way of describing stages of the process (Zadek, 2004). At the earliest stage, "latent"

issues may be perceived by a few actors in the domain and the evidence about issue causes and effects may be skimpy or controversial. At the "emerging" stage, there is wider political and media awareness of the issue and more evidence about its causes and effects, with some actors beginning to experiment with innovations to deal with it. The "consolidating" stage is characterized by the emergence of more voluntary initiatives, increasing acceptance of practices for dealing with the issue, and discussion of litigation and possible legislation as well as voluntary standards. At the "institutionalizing" stage, norms of practice are established and the key actors in the domain build responsiveness to the issue into their regular practices. As issues mature, new awareness, mental models, and behaviors are developed and built into the capacities of the domain and its members (Zadek, 2004; Hoffman, 2001).

Social learning in problem domains can be described in terms of processes related to issue evolution. This evolution is represented by the domain learning spiral in Figure 1. While different investigators use different terms to describe these processes, most include some version of four: (1) problem definition, (2) direction setting, (3) implementation and action taking, and (4) evaluation and revision (Brown, 1999; The Social Learning Group, 2001; Zadek, 2004). Note that while these phases have a linear logic, it is not clear that they always occur in this sequence. Indeed, some investigations suggest that at the national level these phases are shaped by interaction with many other forces, while at the transnational level the interaction of apparently non-linear national patterns integrates into a more linear process (The Social Learning Group, 2001, Vol 2: 183).

Problem definition is a knowledge-intensive phase, particularly when the problem is poorly understood or subject to radically different interpretations by different stakeholders. Issue framing in terms of overall concepts and values is central to the problem definition process, and frames may be radically affected by new knowledge and by stakeholders' efforts to articulate frames favorable to their interests. This phase also involves the initial stages of agenda-setting and the mobilization of stakeholders interested in the issue. In transnational domains, problem definition processes may take a long time and involve much controversy over the problem and its impacts, as in the cases of environmental risks or human rights issues. Problem definition moves an issue from latency into the emerging stage of issue maturity.

Direction setting processes build an agenda for action on the problem. These processes include coalition building across organizations, sectors and countries among concerned stakeholders, issue analysis and risk assessment to create better understanding of options and consequences, and goal and strategy formulation across coalition members committed to problem-solving. This phase uses knowledge-intensive activities to create a base for the action-intensive activities needed for later phases of problem-solving.

The implementation and action taking phase builds on the wider awareness and improved understanding of the problem generated by earlier phases. Its activities focus on planning for action, capacity building, institution development, and eventually collective action on the issues. These functions can be action-intensive rather than knowledge intensive, since knowledge resources and institutional support for action have been created in

earlier phases; however, frequently actors are faced with uncertainty as to the consequences of their actions, and with incomplete information about the nature of the problem or the appropriateness of solutions. By adopting a learning approach, actors in a problem domain can practice adaptive management in which implementation is undertaken as a form of experimentation that enables learning from action (Lee, 1993; Rondinelli, 1983). The complexity of the implementation process varies by the types of actions adopted and the size and scale at which these actions are undertaken.

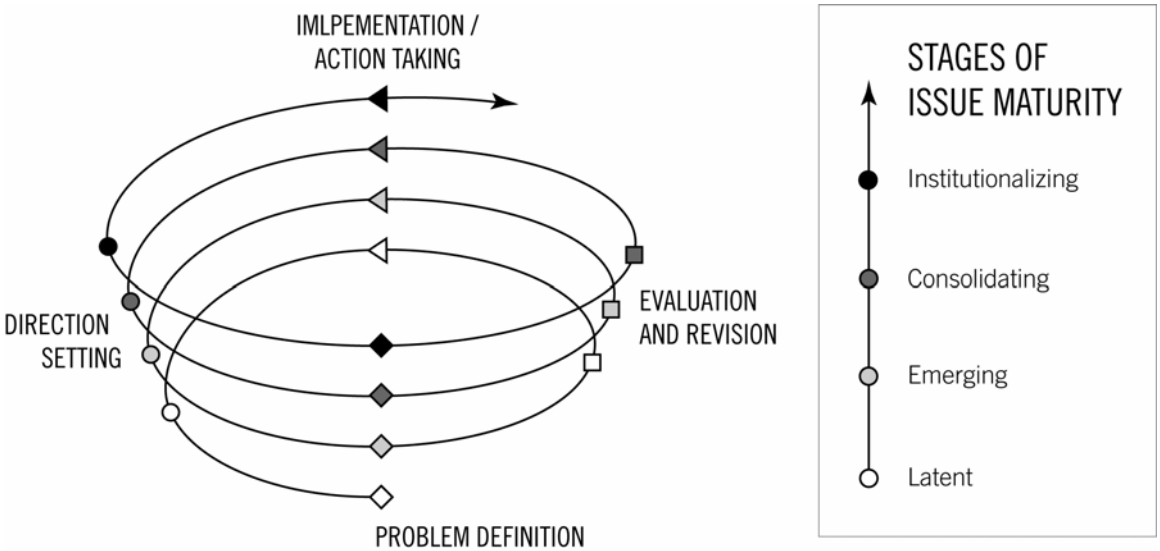
Finally, the evaluation and revision phase uses experience with early problem-solving activities to improve and institutionalize new awareness, norms, practices and behaviors generated by the domain learning process. It includes first-order learning initiatives for error detection and operational learning from initial problem-solving activities. It may also involve second-order learning, which leads to an exploration of values, redefinition of the problem, and more strategic domain learning on the basis of that experience. Out of evaluation and revision activities emerge revised and reinforced responses to a mature issue as well as the recognition of new or associated issues that may require further domain learning. Complex problems may require multiple cycles of this learning process.

Figure one represents the domain learning spiral and its processes of issue evolution. The stages of issue maturity are portrayed in the progression to the right of the spiral. The figure suggests that actors in a problem domain may build knowledge and capacity at each stage of issue maturity, and spiral upwards and out toward improved understanding

of the problem, wider inclusion of stakeholders, and enhanced problem-solving performance. Such domain learning expands the awareness and capacities of the domain to deal with problems in the future.

On the other hand, not all domain learning is necessarily constructive. It is possible for domains to become locked in self-fulfilling cycles that make new learning and alternative actions very difficult, or for the process to spiral inward to narrowly-defined and less-inclusive solutions than those implied by the expanding spiral. The next section specifically explores the roles of transnational civil society actors in such domain learning processes.

Figure 1: A Problem Domain Learning Spiral and Stages of Issue Maturity



CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND DOMAIN LEARNING

Scholars have been confronted with a puzzle in the growing role of civil society actors in transnational governance. Without the state authority of governments or the economic power of business, how do civil society actors wield transnational influence? Researchers have argued that civil society influence derives from their use of credible information and symbols, their persuasive tactics, the moral pressure of principled ideas, and their expertise in work on critical problems (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Florini, 2000; Edwards and Gaventa, 2001; Clark, 2003a; 2003b). Some transnational civil society actors are *organizations* that operate in several countries. Others are *transnational networks* characterized by information sharing, common analyses, and shared discourses, or *transnational coalitions* that share strategies and coordinate tactics in addition to network capacities. Yet others are *transnational social movements* that add the capacity

to mobilize collective action in multiple countries (Khagram et al., 2002; see also Gordenker and Weiss, 1995). Our focus here is on the roles that such organizations and networks play in transnational domain learning. We can identify at least five such transnational civil society roles: (1) identifying emerging issues, (2) facilitating grassroots voice, (3) building bridges to link diverse stakeholders, (4) amplifying the public visibility and importance of issues, and (5) monitoring problem-solving performance. We will briefly discuss and illustrate each of these roles below.

1. IDENTIFYING ISSUES

The identification of transnational problems is a social and political construction process that frames problems in terms of prevailing values and norms, articulates their consequences, and mobilizes initial stakeholder concerns (Snow and Bedford, 1988; Klandermans, 1997; Hajer, 1995). The way in which an issue is framed is subject to social negotiation that includes not only what actors say but also what they do in the problem domain. Transnational civil society actors contribute to identifying problems by lobbying international agencies, by symbolic media campaigns, and by communicating experiences to raise public awareness.

Amnesty International, for example, exemplifies the role of issue identifier (Risse, 2000). Amnesty International works with local branches to identify specific violations of human rights, often within countries ruled by repressive regimes, and to mobilize world public opinion to support victims of those abuses. Amnesty draws on the transnational agreement embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to challenge regime behavior and create transnational costs for rights abusers.. Over the years, thousands of

political prisoners have been helped by public outcries and government pressures in response to Amnesty's work. Amnesty has been able to carry out this role because the Universal Declaration and other documents, to which many countries are signatories, establish shared transnational expectations for human rights. Even regimes with little commitment to civil and political rights dislike being publicly identified as a rights violator, and over time the interaction of transnational and national actors can put significant pressure on regimes to comply with human rights norms, even if they are initially resistant to limits on their sovereignty (Brysk and Jacquemine, 2006).

Identifying and framing problems as violations of widely-held expectations can have powerful effects. Reframing the discourse about gene modification in agriculture as adding a 'terminator gene' to seeds or relabeling female circumcision as 'female genital mutilation' can profoundly affect how the issues are seen by the general public. Frames that emphasize harm to vulnerable populations or barriers to equality of opportunity have wide resonance and a kind of 'stickiness' that prevents other frames from emerging (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; The Social Learning Group, 2001). Transnational civil society actors can articulate frames that enable actors from different countries to recognize their shared interests. The transnational women's movement, for example, united diverse national movements—against rape of women political prisoners in Latin America, dowry deaths in South Asia, female genital mutilation in Africa, and spousal abuse in North America—under the frames of "violence against women" and "human rights" and so mobilized many more supporters (Keck and Sikkink, 2001: 165-198). Problem

identification makes special use of the social creativity and legitimacy of transnational civil society actors.

2. ENABLING VOICE

Transnational problems often have powerful impacts on populations that are poor, marginalized, and vulnerable, and on other silent stakeholders including non-human species and future generations. A key role for some civil society actors is representing these unheard voices and helping marginalized groups affected by transnational issues to organize themselves, build capacity to engage with decision-makers, and develop influence strategies and campaigns for more voice in decisions that affect them. In the loosely organized context of transnational policy-making it is easy to overlook the concerns and interests of silent stakeholders and of grassroots groups with little political clout.

For example, indigenous groups in many countries have been the victims of the construction of large dams that provide power, irrigation and other services to some populations while submerging the lands and livelihoods of others with less voice in decision-making (Hall, 1992; Khagram, 2004). Over the last several decades transnational NGOs and networks like Environmental Defense Fund and Oxfam-UK have worked with indigenous groups to enable their voice through identifying upcoming dam projects, organizing resistance, and building alliances for lobbying national governments, transnational corporations, and intergovernmental agencies in order to make sure that local interests are considered in planning and constructing dams (Hall, 1992). Not all of these campaigns have been successful, but continued experience has built a transnational

network of indigenous people's organizations that is increasingly sophisticated about influencing transnational policy-making. The rate of construction of large dams has plummeted in recent decades, given the increased political, social and economic costs of dealing with organized resistance. In addition, indigenous groups are treated with increased respect as they demonstrate their capacity to exert political voice in decisions that affect them.

A critical issue for transnational civil society actors involved in strengthening the voice of marginalized groups is avoiding the temptation to substitute their own views for those of their constituents. Ironically campaign targets may help them resist that temptation: World Bank staff, challenged to respond to the needs of grassroots groups affected by Bank projects, increasingly demand evidence that transnational civil society actors in fact represent real constituents. Over the last several decades those constituents have begun to build their own transnational networks and organizations, such as Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), which represents urban slum dwellers, or Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), which carries out research and policy advocacy for a federation of unions of street vendors and domestic workers (Batliwala, 2002).

3. AMPLIFYING ISSUES

Transnational civil society actors may also contribute to social learning by amplifying the visibility and impact of emerging issues. Processes of amplification include leverage through mobilizing and targeting key actors, lending legitimacy to the issue, emphasizing its impacts on wider constituencies, and engaging in symbolic actions that draw attention

to the problem. Issue amplification gains broader visibility for the issue, raises public awareness and support, and mobilizes wider and deeper coalitions for problem-solving.

An example of issue amplification is the role of Jubilee 2000 in the transnational campaign for debt forgiveness for heavily indebted poor countries (Pettifor, 2000). . This campaign drew on the tradition of forgiving debts in many different world religions. It had become evident that servicing national debt, often incurred by authoritarian leaders who lined their own pockets rather than make productive use of the loans, was seriously undermining the capacity of many developing countries to invest in sustainable development. Jubilee 2000 mobilized churches, NGOs, and other concerned groups to advocate recycling developing country debt into development projects. They organized thousands of demonstrators in many countries to influence policy-makers. The campaign helped supporters to understand the complexities of international debt and its impacts, and to build alliances across many religions, parties, and unions. The World Bank program for converting debt into social spending in highly indebted poor countries is in part a response to civil society amplification of support for debt forgiveness.

Transnational amplification processes may take many forms. Sometimes they convert otherwise abstract findings (e.g. about climate change or Third World debt) into information relevant to policy, media and the public through scientific and policy reports or through creative communication campaigns, as in the trademark events of NGOs like Greenpeace. On other occasions they endow initially extreme ideas with wider respectability and influence. The idea of women's suffrage, for example, became a

credible campaign as it was taken up by a widely-based women's movement (Keck and Sikkink, 2001: 51-58). In other cases, civil society actors mobilize transnational forces to affect national decision-makers. The human rights and environmental movements publicize local violations to use a "boomerang effect" to influence intransigent national decision-makers by international pressure (Risse et al., 1999). This amplification role can be controversial: Some perceive transnational civil society actors, particularly Northern-based agencies, to wield disproportionate influence without adequate acknowledgement or compensation to Southern partners (Batliwala, 2002). In some cases, transnational and local actors can complement each other; in others their interests can be in conflict (Brechin, 2003; Dudley and Stolton, 1999). Amplifying the visibility of issues can be abused if transnational actors are not accountable to the stakeholders they claim to represent.

4. BUILDING BRIDGES

It is often easy to focus on differences in transnational problems and so exacerbate separation and conflicts that make problem-solving difficult. Some transnational civil society actors emphasize building bridges among diverse stakeholders in contested problem domains by convening meetings of diverse actors, negotiating shared definitions of problems and possible directions, and facilitating identification and deployment of complementary resources and capacities. Some have built bridges across levels, from local to national to global; others have worked across national boundaries; still others have emphasized connection across the business, government and civil society sectors (Brown, 1991). Bridge-building can include the creation and use of boundary-spanning

devices such as reports, maps or computer models that serve to bring diverse stakeholders together (Cash, 2001: 440).

Transparency International (TI), for example, has been a particularly successful bridge-building initiative on the problem of transnational corruption (Galtung 2000). TI was created as a transnational vehicle for corruption reform. From the start it focused on building coalitions among government officials, civil society leaders and business executives to create programs that would limit corruption in international business and development projects. TI decided against a "whistle-blowing" approach that would emphasize unmasking specific cases of corruption in order to build reform coalitions with leaders from many sectors. TI built alliances of national leaders to support international regulation and catalyzed wide discussion of national rankings of perceived "corrupt practices" and "bribe paying." It also fostered the creation of independent national organizations to promote governance reform at the national level. Many of these initiatives are planned and implemented in partnership with the World Bank, which once dismissed corruption as an unchangeable "fact of life." TI has built bridges across many different gulfs in its campaigns to reduce corruption.

Building bridges across the differences in wealth, power, and perspective that characterize many transnational issues is no small task. It requires skills such as managing conflict, facilitating constructive dialogue, fostering mutual understanding, negotiating mutually acceptable deals, and creatively synthesizing across diverse perspectives (Gray, 1989; Austin, 2000). Bridging work may also focus on linking local

to national civil society movements to build sustained capacity for dealing with the domestic effects of a transnational problem (Rodrigues, 2004). As a mediator among stakeholders, civil society actors can facilitate engagements among complementary resources that enable domain learning that cannot be accomplished by a single level, sector or country.

4. MONITORING PERFORMANCE

Monitoring systems that supply information and analysis about the effectiveness of social problem-solving initiatives can identify problem areas, improve implementation, accelerate problem-solving, and provide information for holding actors accountable. They may also identify new problems or unintended consequences. Such feedback can be critical for domain learning. Transnational civil society actors, sometimes in cooperation with experts, the media and other monitoring agencies, can play important roles in getting and analyzing data about the impacts of problem solving. This "watch dog" role of transnational civil society organizations and networks is often cited as being a key part of successful transnational problem-solving (Mock, 2003). Transnational civil society actors may help various actors process that data for learning purposes.

For example, transnational civil society actors have played important monitoring roles in campaigns to regulate and certify forest and apparel products (Bartley 2003). These certification systems emerged in the 1990s in part due to civil society campaigns focused on the Nike Corporation's labor standards in Indonesian factories and the sale of tropical timber at Home Depot. The establishment of monitoring initiatives, such as the Forestry Stewardship Council, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and the CSA-International,

resulted from concern regarding the environmental conditions and deforestation practices in the forest products industry. Monitoring by the Fair Labor Association, Social Accountability International, and Worldwide Responsible Apparel Production emerged in response to protests about low labor standards and sweatshops in the apparel industry. Transnational civil society actors work through partnerships with corporations or representation on Boards to play important roles in developing performance criteria and monitoring industry compliance with those criteria (Bartley 2003).

Transnational civil society actors can develop new or monitor existing standards for evaluating transnational problem management. Civil society actors may have privileged access to information from their constituencies or other marginalized groups. The International Baby Food Campaign, for example, created a network to monitor compliance with new regulations on marketing infant formula in rural Africa. On the other hand, some circumstances exceed civil society capacities to monitor performance: The UN's Global Compact offers a forum for corporate learning to foster norms of human rights, labor standards, and environmental conservation, but there is considerable skepticism about the feasibility of having its civil society members assess all of its corporate members (Ruggie, 2002; 2003).

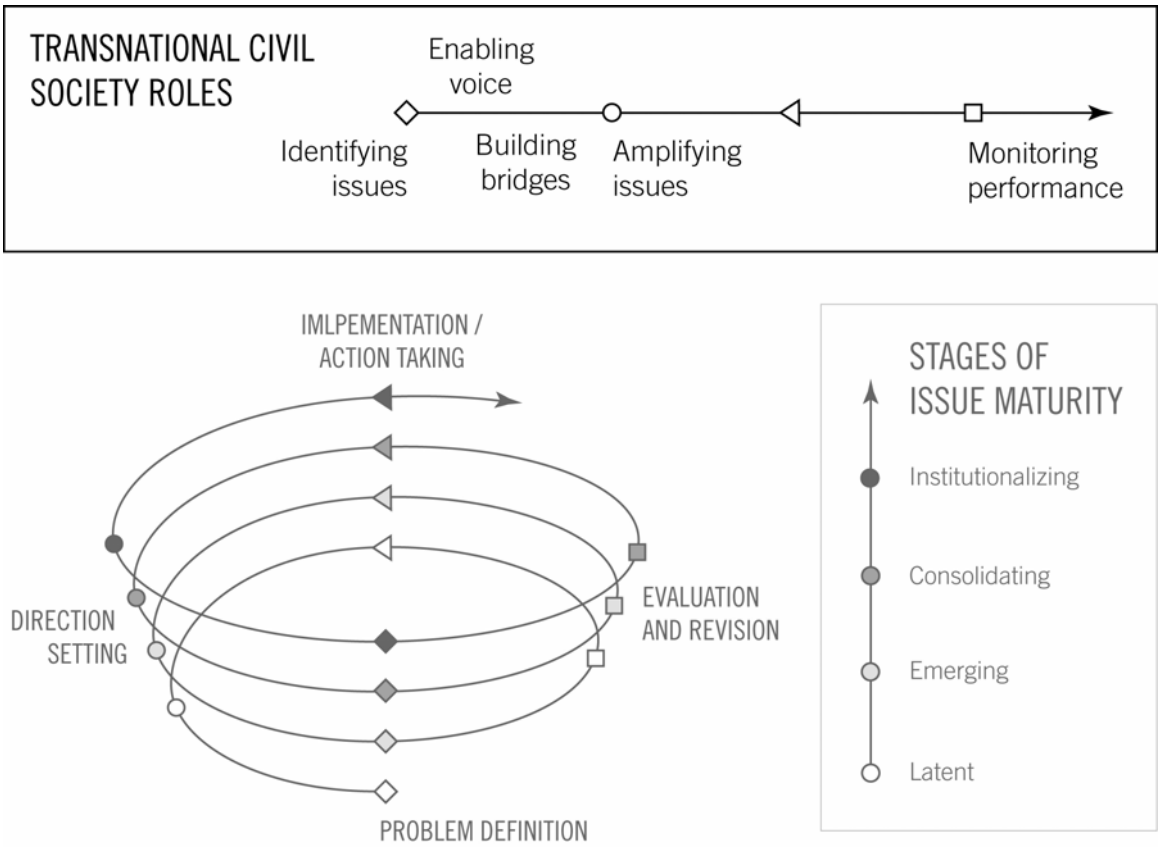
CONCLUSION

These examples suggest that transnational civil society organizations and networks can contribute to domain learning even when they have neither the resources of the corporate sector nor the authority of government agencies. Figure 2 builds on the domain learning

spiral and stages of issue maturity depicted in Figure 1 by indicating the points along issue evolution at which the contributions of civil society actors seem most likely. Note that civil society contributions, with the exception of performance monitoring, tend to cluster at the problem defining and direction setting aspects of domain learning. While enabling voice and bridge building can be relevant to many phases, they are particularly important in framing the issues in the problem definition and direction setting stages, since the frames established there fundamentally shape action and subsequent evaluation. Civil society organizations and networks are endowed in the currencies of ideas, information and values rather than with formal power or financial resources. Even the monitoring role can be seen as part of the problem definition in that it provides information and ideas for redefining old or identifying new problems.

While civil society actors often play roles in the implementation of problem solutions, it is in shaping definitions and directions that they exert their most important impacts on domain learning. Implementation actions undertaken by transnational civil society actors, such as establishing demonstration projects or delivering services, are seldom the size and scale of solutions that are required for transnational problem solving. Implementation to address transnational problems requires actions by powerful and well-resourced actors such as governments, international organizations and large firms.

Figure 2. Transnational Civil Society Roles in a Domain Learning Spiral



Although it is possible to define transnational civil society actor contributions along the issue evolution spiral, the stage of issue maturity at which civil society actors are most likely to contribute can vary across problem domains. In the human rights domain, for example, civil society actors were part of the coalition that brought the issue out of latency (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). In the environmental domains of acid rain, ozone depletion and climate change, civil society actors engaged after the issue had been defined by the scientific community (The Social Learning Group, 2001).

Given these patterns, what can we say about the domains in which transnational civil society organizations and networks are most likely to be important actors? First, domains in which the *problems are linked to strongly held values* are likely to draw attention from existing civil society organizations and networks or to catalyze the creation of new civil society actors. The impacts of free trade on a variety of important values, from economic justice to environmental degradation, set the stage for widespread involvement by civil society actors. Second, domain *problems that affect vulnerable groups* are more likely to elicit civil society initiatives. Concern about marginalized populations and their voice in transnational decision-making, such as the fate of indigenous peoples dispossessed by large dams, often catalyzes civil society action. Third, when past domain dynamics have already generated *social and intellectual capital to support transnational campaigns,* often in the form of advocacy alliances and experience, civil society activism is more likely. Fourth, civil society roles in domain learning are particularly likely when they have developed *legitimacy with their constituents and with the larger publics.* So civil society participation in the domain learning processes around large dam construction became increasingly likely as indigenous groups developed their own organizations and as larger publics recognized the injustices being done to them.

In what kinds of domains are civil society actors less likely to play important roles in social learning? What characteristics make useful civil society participation more problematic? First, they may be marginalized in situations where some parties *dominate decision-making to the exclusion of civil society actors.* It has been difficult for civil society actors to influence the World Bank's policies on structural adjustment, for

example, or the Bush Administration's prosecution of the war in Iraq and its impacts on civilian populations. Second, civil society actors have less influence when *information is not available or problems are poorly understood.* Initiatives that increase transparency of governments and corporations and efforts to clarify the impacts of complex problems like climate change can increase the likelihood of civil society participation in transnational problem-solving and social learning. Third, civil society actors may have *difficulty working effectively across polarized values and ideologies*, in part because they are quite vulnerable to value and ideological polarization themselves. Transparency International, for example, struggled to resist the temptation to "whistle-blow" about specific instances of corruption in order to build broad coalitions for reform. Fourth, civil society actors contribute less to domain learning when they have not grappled successfully with *questions about their own legitimacy, transparency and accountability* with respect to the issues. When their potential influence is grounded in their principles and values, civil society actors cannot afford to let continuing legitimacy questions erode their credibility. Civil society organizations and networks are likely to contribute less to domain learning in the contexts of large power differences, lack of transparency or understanding of the problems, polarized value and ideological positions, and unresolved questions about their own legitimacy.

In our increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, the demand for social learning appears to be escalating at many levels. While many factors can inhibit the roles of transnational civil society organizations and networks in social learning, they have been playing increasingly important roles in domain learning in several areas for the last

two decades (Nye and Donohue, 2000; Florini, 2003). Social learning is neither easy nor automatic. It demands investments of time, effort and resources and it requires the capacity to use differences in perspective and information to synthesize new knowledge and innovative responses to complex problems. The experiences of recent years suggest that the growing capacities of transnational civil society actors can be an important asset in grappling with global problems and global governance—provided that civil society actors as well as government and business stakeholders continue to invent ways to work together constructively in creating new ideas, solutions and institutions.

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