Co-operation between Non-governmental Volunteer Services and the United Nations Volunteers Programme*

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NATIONAL NONGOVERNMENTAL organizations (NGOs), be they in industrialized or developing countries, are playing an important role in socioeconomic development programmes. In industrialized countries, they have been contributing with funds, training, and manpower to development projects run by NGOs or governments in developing countries. Their governments recognize their efforts and have in many cases been providing substantial amounts of money as subventions and making use of NGO expertise in their bilateral technical assistance.

On the other hand, NGOs in developing countries, in growing numbers are bringing development down to the grassroots level. They mobilize popular participation in self-help projects, promote the development of national culture and self-respect, and link resources available at the national level with needs in marginal communities. Often these national NGOs cooperate with government departments in accepting assistance from NGOs and governments of "donor" countries or from international organizations.

Governments in most countries have a clear-cut policy towards national NGOs, ranging from legal recognition to subvention, and a distribution of tasks between the governmental administration and NGOs. International NGOs (INGOs), a number of which have gained a good reputation in development cooperation, have no such partner at the worldwide level; the United Nations (UN) system has set up its own public relations and fund-raising organizations and gives nominal recognition, but invented the name "non-governmental organization" to show the difference to governments which constitute the international system of the UN.

The above description no longer presents the whole picture. A change of attitude is taking place among UN officials, particularly in parts of the UN

* The ideas expressed in this paper represent the personal opinions of the author.
involved in human rights, social welfare and development programmes. This finds more and more often its expression in operational arrangements between NGOs and some UN organizations, e.g., in joint sponsorship of projects, as with FAO and UNEP, or in contractual work of NGOs for UNHCR or UNFPA. Such arrangements are pioneering within the UN system in two respects:

- They provide inroads for popular participation within a system which has become government biased instead of living up to the full mandate as laid down in the UN Charter;¹
- They establish patterns for cooperation between intergovernmental and international organizations at a worldwide level for developing and industrialized countries, in terms of a distribution of responsibilities, of interaction in decision making, and of transforming the UN from a government-controlled setup into a movement for peace, social justice and socioeconomic development.

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) is an example of a small UN unit which has taken up the challenge of cooperating with NGOs. Established in 1970, it formulated its policy on the basis of experiences mainly provided by nongovernmental volunteer-sending organizations. Subsequently, it kept up a cooperation with these NGOs and added a new group of NGOs to its "constituency," that of domestic development services active in developing countries. Legally, UNV is dependent upon the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN General Assembly, which attached UNV to UNDP in the first place. No conflict between legislators and the NGO cooperating organizations has arisen. In fact, these cooperating organizations have, during the time of their contact with UNV, developed structures of cooperation among each other as well as with governmental agencies active in volunteer work. As a consequence of this cooperation, policy changes are taking place within a number of NGOs, away from organizational individualism to technical cooperation among each other and jointly for others. This interorganizational cooperation increasingly takes the form of pressure on governments as well as indirectly through governments on organizations and agencies of the United Nations. The programme development of UNV in the promotion of domestic development services has been strongly influenced by nongovernmental organizations.

The United Nations and Nongovernmental Organizations

Voluntary agencies are defined in the language of the United Nations as nongovernmental organizations. They bear thus a label of a negative

¹ The Preamble of the UN Charter starts with the words "We the Peoples of the United Nations." It refers to the member states as "our respective governments." A small number of member governments of the United Nations (e.g., the Netherlands) has during recent years included national NGO leaders among its official representation at the UN General Assembly or in ECOSOC (e.g., the United Kingdom).