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**Autonomy of NGOs:
Analysis of Two NGOs in Terms of How They Frame Their
Purpose**

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María Paz Gómez Molina

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María Paz Gómez Molina

Calificación

Nombre del profesor, Título académico

Tamara Ann Trowsell, Ph.D. en Relaciones
Internacionales

Firma del profesor

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Nombres y apellidos:

Código

Cédula de identidad:

Lugar y fecha:

María Paz Gómez Molina

00117366

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RESUMEN

Los requisitos que las organizaciones no gubernamentales (ONG) tienen para mantener su supervivencia incrementan su vulnerabilidad hacia influencias externas y limita su autonomía. Este estudio cualitativo examina mediante las teorías organizacionales y se poder inteligente cómo las organizaciones *Women Deliver* e *International Youth Alliance for Family Planning* materializan sus objetivos. La primera sección describe brevemente las teorías de ecología poblacional, dependencia de recursos, isomorfismo internacional y de poder inteligente. La segunda sección compara la articulación del propósito de las dos ONG. Finalmente, el artículo sugiere qué aspectos de las organizaciones incrementan su dependencia y a qué mecanismos pueden recurrir para conservar su autonomía.

Palabras clave: Organizaciones no gubernamentales, Relaciones Internacionales, Desarrollo, Autonomía, Dependencia

ABSTRACT

The survival requirements of non-profit organizations might increase their vulnerability to external influences and restrain their autonomy. This qualitative article examines how the NGOs Women Deliver and International Youth Alliance for Family Planning articulate their purpose through the lenses of organizational theories and smart power. The article first provides a brief description of population ecology, resource dependence, institutional isomorphism, and smart power. Then it describes and compares how the two NGOs frame their purpose. Finally, it elucidates in which aspects the non-profits are more prone to dependency and the mechanisms they can use to maintain autonomy.

Key words: non-governmental organizations, international relations, development, dependence, autonomy

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Autonomy of NGOs: Analysis of Two NGOs in Terms of How They Frame Their Purpose

Introduction

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have proliferated during the last three decades, so have their funding dependence and the competition among them. The 1945 Charter of the United Nations (UN) recognized non-governmental organizations having a role in global affairs, since article 71 that mentions they “could be accredited to the UN for consulting purposes” (Martens 2002, 271). Yet in 1973, non-profits remain relatively unpopular, and just three percent of their donations came from governments. These contributions increased up to 50 percent in 1995 (Orduna 2004, 18). By the end of the 1990’s, UN agencies provided more than \$2 billion annually to NGOs, and private foundations also began allocating their funds for security, peace, environment, human rights, and development through NGOs (Reimann 2006, 49-54). Therefore, both international and national actors have contributed to the existence of NGOs and their increasing influence on global affairs.

Although global affairs are not of common interest and appear irrelevant for our daily lives, their decision-making outcomes are important. NGOs portray an image of citizens’ and civil society’s supporters, so their performance does not only matter to political scientists but to a wide variety of experts who can rely on them to influence global affairs. For that reason, scholars of International Relations (IR) consider that nonprofit making entities combine the skills and means of their staff to achieve shared objectives (Martens 2002, 278 – 279), and they emphasize the autonomy and neutrality as key elements of NGO performance.

The credibility crisis NGOs suffered in the 1980’s and the fact that many of them mold their purpose to those of their donors or of their environments challenge this assumption (Albiñana 2007). Although NGOs have become a great influencer in global and domestic politics in recent years, they are still vulnerable to external influences. Therefore, their survival requirements, such as funding and legitimacy building, might restrain their autonomy and make them targets of powerful actors, who want to play a part in determining someone else’s political or social environment.

In this regard, this paper aims to examine how autonomous two NGOs are in framing their purpose in light of these considerations. Under the assumption that the international system consists of a range of power dynamics and actors, who coexist in an unequal environment (Allan 2001, 89), this paper utilizes the lenses of organizational theories and smart power to analyze the cases of Women Deliver and International Youth Alliance for Family Planning (IYAFFP). The first section of the article describes the main assumptions and patterns of the organizational theories and the smart power perspective. The second section develops the cases of the two NGOs by addressing their creation and evolution, their purpose and activities, and their financial and monitoring models. The third section compares the cases of Woman Deliver and IYAFFP through theoretical analysis and elucidates in which aspects the non-profits are more prone to dependency and which mechanisms they can use to maintain autonomy. Finally, the article concludes with the main insights of the study and practical recommendation for upcoming studies about NGOs.

Literature Review

Organizations are playing a key role in global affairs, and scholars have already assessed them as a matter of study from the wide range theories of IR. Under the assumption of an anarchical international system where sovereign states act according to a balance of power, realists argue that the emergence of organizations reflects the distribution of power in the world (Mearsheimer 1994/95, 7). According to this view, great powers create organizations to legitimize their own actions, and any organization that does not accomplish the goals of great powers would not survive. Instead, liberals consider that organizations have the capacity to enhance or halt collaboration among countries to “deter cheaters and protect victims” (14). Institutionalists, consequently, expect organizations to influence the behavior of states and generate political pressure.

Conversely, constructivists and “critical theorists take ideas very seriously. In fact, they believe that discourse, or how we think and talk about the world, largely shapes practices” (37). Critical approaches rely heavily on institutions and the role of organizations, since they aim to change reality rather than only understand it (38), and they believe that institutions or any ideational force could change the environment (40). In sum, international theories have already acknowledged the impact of organizations in the international spectrum, yet the

studies of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are recent and constitute an important theoretical debate.

Most IR studies about NGOs consider they work in conjunction with states, rather than regarding at them independently (Spiro 2013, 223). On the one hand, realists are right when they regard NGOs as political actors, since they advocate certain ideals and might represent a particular group (224). But taking for granted that states manipulate NGOs' purposes might limit to a great extent the assessment of non-profit organizations. On the other hand, liberals believe that the domestic environment matters more than the external one to determine state behavior in international politics (Mearsheimer 2001, 14-17). These scholars might see NGOs as another participant of the domestic civil society. About the new structure of global decision-making, Peter J. Spiro argues that "any group with power will be able to use it" (Spiro 2013, 225), so critical theorists believe that powerful actors could shape behaviors through narratives.

A general agreement about NGOs among political scientists is that a successful non-profit would give shape to a particular policy area, convincing policy-makers or implementing sustainable solutions (226). In other words, the model of non-governmental organizations that analysts study is one that accomplishes goals and largely challenges shortcomings, such as getting enough financing or avoiding legislative barriers (Reimann 2006, 45-46). Therefore, the literature regarding NGO performance has been mainly developed through organizational approaches rather than theories of international relations.

Theoretical Framework

Organizational Theories

Organizational theories study the design and structures of organizations, as well as their internal and external environment (Scott & Davis 2007). The main organizational strands –organizational ecology, resource dependence and institutional theory– developed from several works that appeared in the late 1970's. Organizational ecologists seek to comprehend how organizations adapt to survive in the given environmental conditions, and resource dependency theorists focus on how the necessity of resources constrains the action of organizations (Orrù, Woolsey & Hamilton 1991, 361). In a different stream, institutionalists

turn their attention to the normative influence that organizations experience; DiMaggio and Powell call to this phenomenon isomorphism.

Organizational ecology, assumes that the environment influences the behavior of organizations, since many external factors can constrain or expand their activities. These factors the necessity of resources or the demand for services from a particular sector of the population, as well as the density and competition among other organizations. The 'ecology' concept in this approach relates to the idea that "each organization exists in a niche defined by several dimensions." Each niche consists of different species coexisting and sharing a common feature in their structure. The ecology approach considers the mechanisms of resources collecting and processes of action as key elements to identify the nature of non-governmental-organization species in a particular niche (Potter 2008, 93). In other words, the conditions that determine the organizations' environment are the basis for understanding the nature and survival dynamics of NGOs.

Under this assumption, the ecology approach considers that density is an important aspect for the adaptation of organizations. In some cases, density is associated with competition and the extinction of a number of organizations or, at least, their move to another niche. In other cases, however, high density is associated with legitimacy and the opportunity to show donors that they defend a cause worth to fund (94).

The nature of the organizations would determine their adaptation capacity and how prone they are to influence. Organizational ecology theory distinguishes two types of NGOs: the collectivist that receives funds from other entities and the individualist that raises its own funds (Potter 2008, 94). While the collectivist organizations rely more on the preferences within the environment, individualistic organizations seek opportunities to generate their own incomes. Threat and opportunity models explain this phenomenon. When collectivist organizations perceive threat as in the case of resource scarcity, they might decide to move to another niche or close. In contrast, individualistic ones have better adaptation and resilience conditions due to their self-financing and innovation capacities, so they could survive in the same niche (95-97).

These models illustrate that when the dependence on external funds is greater, organizations have less autonomy. NGOs compete for limited funds with a group of

organizations with similar objectives. If they want to survive, must convince donors. Considering that the environment influences a species' existence in a particular niche, NGOs would have to reflect the values and beliefs of that niche to be considered the best. When a high density of NGOs coexist in the same niche, governments or another powerful group might be supporting them. In this case, the environment molds an organizational style that would ensure their existence; for those wanting to accomplish different goals, they would have to obtain their own financing. In brief, this approach examines how external factors could influence organizational behavior to ensure existence.

Alternatively, resource dependence theory assumes that the fact that NGOs do not have the capability to sustain themselves makes them dependent upon their sponsors. By resource, they refer to any valuable input for an organization, who is unable to obtain by its own means. Dependency means that one actor is subordinated to another and has to accomplish some specific outcomes, so the extent of dependence would vary according to the conditions of the interaction between the organization and its sponsors. The five main factors are "concentration, controllability, nonmobility, nonsubstitutability, and essentiality." Namely, an organization is more dependent on its resource providers when there are few suppliers, agreements are rigid, or they cannot chose to go with another sponsor (Frooman 1999, 195). Therefore, resource dependence theory relies on similar foundations to the organizational ecology approach, but it already considers power as a factor that helps to shape or not the organization's purpose.

When the exchange between two parties is asymmetrical, the entity that gives more valuable elements has power over the one that receives that value or gives less. Willer, Lovaglia and Markovsky (1997) define power as "the structurally determined potential for obtaining favored payoffs in relations where interests are opposed" (quoted in Frooman 1999, 196). NGOs that have a great extent of dependency have to abandon or adapt their goals to include sponsors' desires. For instance, the massive development aid that Latin American NGOs received from developed countries during the 1980s and 1990s obliged these organizations to demand services or purchase goods from these countries or to spread liberal democratic principles (Restrepo 2012, 279-280). Understanding it from the opposite perspective, one could also say that the more an organization feels dependent upon their providers, the less autonomous it is.

The resource dependence approach regards the interaction of power between the organization and its donors. Frooman categorized four types of relations that could occur between NGOs and donors, according to Pfeffer and Salancik's (1978) assumptions. When the relation has a symmetry of power, which means that no one is dependent on the other, or the two are very dependent on the other, there is a low interdependence or high interdependence, respectively. When the relation has an asymmetrical nature, the power to influence could be on the sponsors or on the organization (Frooman 1999, 198-99). The NGO would have the chance to influence governmental decisions and promote change if it holds the power. But, what happens if an NGO is subordinated to its contributors and is powerful towards governments that give it access to the communities with whom they work?

Following with the analysis of dependency—the most relevant for this article—the resource dependence theory acknowledges that the structures of NGOs have to adapt to their external environments. Callen, Klein and Tinkelman explain this effect:

Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) define "resource dependence" as the organization's need to construct internal mechanisms toward managing or strategically adapting to its external environments. One way a nonprofit organization can manage its external environments is to place directors on its board in proportion to the directors' abilities to influence the outside world to the organization's advantage, for example through fundraising, through helping the organization to collaborate with government or other organizations, or by improving the organization's outside image. (Callen, Klein and Tinkelman 2010, 107)

In other words, if the survival and success of nonprofit organizations rely on others' resources, they would have to adapt their image and their activities from the beginning. Only by engaging in a marketing strategy, which involves more staff, money, and time would these NGOs become attractive for funding. Further, organizations have to vary their activities through time, since when resources are scarce they should multiply their efforts for fundraising (123).

In short, resource dependence theory observes the dynamics of power between the nonprofits and their funders or other suppliers. In an asymmetrical exchange, the powerful party will limit or shape the behavior of the other. This dynamic could occur between more than two parties and create a network of actors shaping the behavior of others directly or indirectly. If donors are the powerful actors, they could restrain non-profits to access other sources of income, thereby, becoming indispensable and reducing the organization their

means for survival. Consequently dependence on resources could impact the framing of an NGO's purpose and the construction of its board.

The institutional approach analyzes how the environment shapes organizations. By institutional environment, Meyer and Rowan (1977) refers to the socially agreed rules and beliefs that guide people's daily lives. Organizations also incorporate these rules and become similar to one another through time (Tucker, Singh & Meinhard 1991, 390). This effect is what Powell and DiMaggio called "institutional isomorphism" after examining organizational homogeneity in industrialized societies. This approach, akin to organizational ecology, considers that organizations assimilate sociocultural patterns to gain legitimacy. Although similarity is not the result of competition for scarce resources, it is the result of being accepted within a certain environment to continue receiving contributions (Mizruchi & Fein 1999, 656).

According to Powell and DiMaggio (1983), institutional isomorphism is a good reference for understanding modern organizational dynamics (657). He argues states' preferences are "an important source of isomorphism in organizational fields and in shaping the demography of organizational populations" (Tucker, Singh & Meinhard 1991, 391). In a similar fashion, the principles and initiatives supported by the UN have introduced the values of peace, security, progress, and sustainable development into the modern international society. The competition for resources is a real and modern aspect in the life of organizations, but the increasing international or regional normative frameworks are also real. Therefore, the fundraising and survival strategies of NGOs are probably changing due to their expansion throughout the world and their transformation into global actors.

Institutional isomorphism occurs through three kinds of interactions: coercive, mimetic, and normative. The coercive mechanism is similar to the resource dependence approach, whereby the dependent actor has the pressure to get some expected outcomes by the powerful one. Mimesis refers to the strategy some organizations apply to construct their profile. Since NGOs might be uncertain of the accurate procedure to follow, they would prefer "to mimic a peer that they perceive to be successful". Finally, normative isomorphism occurs within organizations, since the professionals receive similar training and outside the organizations with other professionals that hold the same ideas (Mizruchi & Fein 1999, 658).

Organizations become homogenous through one or more of these mechanisms, so the ruling institutions would shape the purpose and style of those organizations.

To sum up, the organizational ecology theory focuses on how organizations survive under given environmental conditions, and how they change when perceiving the threat of extinction. The resource dependence approach concerns instead in the relation between organizations and stakeholders and the necessity of organizations to secure sufficient resources for survival. The institutional perspective incorporates the normative aspect of the environments in which organizations exist and considers that legitimacy is what constrains the behavior of organizations rather than resources per se. Organizational theories ignore the possible scenario that NGOs are not only influenced by external factors but are created as a tool of powerful actors, so this paper uses smart power as a fourth approach to examine the autonomy of NGOs.

Smart Power

Smart Power proposes a turn on the perspective of how NGOs initiate and why they have grown during the last decades. Under this perspective, the growth of NGOs and its relevance corresponds to a top-down structure (Reimann 2006, 46). Kim Reimann argues that scholars have not analyzed the whole phenomenon of NGO formation, although they have acknowledged that after the Cold War period the international system changed. The new global order provides more opportunity for citizens to obtain resources and to have access into agenda-setting arenas and political issues (48). Enterprises and other private actors not only donate to service NGOs working in development and humanitarian missions, but also to advocacy organizations that aim to change the system and promote the one that they believe to be better (53). Hence, the question is: who supports the existence of nonprofit organizations?

After the Cold War, the concept of development was tied to the idea of setting up democratic institutions and respecting human rights. Foreign aid then was framed under this notion and boosted by the anxiety of Western developed countries to democratize other territories of the world. As an example, Reimann explains what occurred in Germany:

Political foundations in North America and Europe dedicated to promoting democracy worldwide have also supported the work of service and advocacy NGOs. Now an integral part of the larger foreign policy project of Western governments to support

democracy in developing countries, most political foundations were established in the past 20 years and were modeled on the older German political foundations. Centered on a major political party, German political foundations were set up in the early postwar period to encourage democracy in Germany. Over time the foundations gradually expanded their focus to promoting democracy overseas. By the 1990s, more than half of the \$450 million spent by the five major German political foundations was devoted to overseas programs, much of it funding NGOs working in the area of human rights and democratic development. (53)

This description demonstrates that powerful actors, such as foundations and political groups, were interested in the proliferation of NGOs. These organizations were a legitimate means to spread democracy and to justify their interests beyond the promotion of human rights (54 – 55).

The US government also realized the potential of NGOs to legitimize their geopolitical interests, particularly in undeveloped countries, using the message of democracy and human rights. The former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton ratified this perspective during her confirmation hearings in 2009. She stated, "America cannot solve the most pressing problems on our own, and the world cannot solve them without America. We must use what has been called 'smart power', the full range of tools at our disposal." Joseph Nye (2009a) developed this concept as the combination of the attraction from the soft power and the coercion from the hard power. According to Nye, the decision-makers who desire to implement smart-power strategies require contextual intelligence, meaning "the intuitive skill... to align tactics with objectives to create smart strategies" (Nye 2009b, 160-62).

Therefore, since Smart Power's perspective, nonprofit organizations are not independent, because their existence depends on those who finance and approve their causes. Organizations could enjoy some extent of autonomy to perform their activities and to achieve their goals, but they are vehicles of other objectives like democratization or antiterrorism. This means that NGOs are tools of states or elite groups that cannot intervene on a specific issue by themselves, and their actions are framed by the interests of powerful actors. Here, the smart power approach suggests that NGOs are a device to fulfill the objective of a smart strategy of a more powerful actor, but, at the same time, they are more powerful or have the capability to influence their target.

Until this point, the article provides a brief description of the main organizational theories and smart power, assessing the main aspects of each approach. According to

organizational theories, NGOs struggle to survive competing with their peers for resources or legitimacy. Non-profits' autonomy then would depend on how much the environment constrains their activities and their purpose. Through the lenses of smart power, NGOs are mere tools of states or elite groups to hide their actual interests below the façade of democracy and human rights. By doing this, they could access to domestic politics in developing countries and carry out actions that, otherwise, would be unfeasible. The article analyze two NGOs through each of these theories, after describing each of them.

Description of the organizations

This section provides a description of two NGOs: their origin and evolution, their purpose and activities, their donors, and the context where they work. The 2016 Women Deliver Conference motivated this study due to the great similarity between the purposes of many attending organizations, including Women Deliver and its sponsors. The first case study is precisely Women Deliver, since they arranged the conference under the basis of the global agenda for development trends. It is worth noting that this fact is not necessarily an effect of dependency, so no conclusions are taken in advance. The second case is the International Youth Alliance for Family Planning, which presented its project and expanded its working network during the conference. The working method and purpose of this organization share some features with Women Deliver, and the non-profit has plenty of accessible information. These two characteristics made IYAFP a good case for examining in this paper, along with Women Deliver.

Women Deliver

Women Deliver has had a rapid growth and has gained legitimacy as an influential organization throughout the world. In 2007, the sexual and reproductive rights advocate Jill W. Sheffield, organized the Women Deliver Conference in London due to the high rate of global maternal mortality. The aim of this conference was to join together women rights' advocates and promote cooperation between them. The initiative turned long term by founding the NGO Women Deliver in New York. Then, in 2010, the organization engaged in two additional projects: the advocacy to include the Millennium Goal of improving maternal health in the global development agenda, and a training program for youth advocates. Six years later, the non-profit launched the Deliver for Good program, which promotes the

compliment of the Sustainable Development Goals by demonstrating how these achievements could improve conditions for women. Women Deliver has engaged more than 400 advocates under the age of 30 from more than 100 countries with the Youth Leadership Program, and had empowered them through training, speaking opportunities and seed grants. Today, the organization not only advocates to reduce maternal mortality but to improve the conditions of “health, rights, and wellbeing of girls and women” (Women Deliver 2016a).

This global advocate organization aims to make of the health and reproductive rights, a cross-sectoral approach within the field of global development and to boost the impact of the advocacy to improve conditions for girls and women around the world. To do so, Women Deliver identifies four key activities: catalyze action, communicate, convene, and build capacity (Women Deliver 2016b). They guide local organizations to incorporate a human rights based approach to their projects, and they invest in initiatives with positive outcomes for the wellbeing of girls and women (Women Deliver 2016c). Media, either digital or traditional, is an important ally for Women Deliver, since it allows the organization to communicate about training programs, opportunities, and creative material to organizations and leaders (Women Deliver 2016 d). As a convener, “Women Deliver is globally recognized for its conferences, bringing together stakeholders from multiple sectors, issues, and groups.” Further, Women Deliver organizes specific events with particular objectives and encourages corporate partnerships in order to raise awareness of the necessity to invest in women (Women Deliver 2016e). Finally, the organization “engage[s] influencers and advocates from global development, research, media, government, and the private sector to promote the investment case for advancing progress for girls and women” through local initiatives (Women Deliver 2016f). Therefore, Women Deliver offers some services and implements many projects regarding these activities and its main purpose.

The organization’s programs had achieved effective results during 2016 due to their financing, evaluation and monitoring mechanisms, and their targets. Women Deliver received funding from “multi-laterals, governments, corporations, and non-governmental organizations” (Women Deliver 2017, 11). Some of these sponsors were: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Care USA, PATH, UN Women and other UN Agencies, Denmark, Finland, France, Norway, Canada, Sweden, USAID, and many more (12). The organization keeps track

of its own activities, as well as the work done by its advocacy leaders. The number of attendees to the conferences and the outcomes of rights-based programs are some of the indicators mentioned as progress of the organization, yet the NGO does not point out a particular method to measure impact. Women Deliver presents annual audited financial statements to comply with accountability with their donors. Further, “a digital advocacy tracker was launched to capture the work that Young Leaders are engaged in at the community, national, and international levels” (8). The global advocate organization has, therefore, several stakeholders and fronts of work – desk job, preparation of the conference and special events, fundraising and partnership strategies and implementation, e-training, research and data-processing, etc.

International Youth Alliance for Family Planning

IYAFP was instead born from a group of young people, who were starting their advocacy careers, during an international conference of Family Planning in 2013. The Co-Founders – a Canadian, a Nigerian, and a Turk – marked the multi-cultural characteristic of the organization since the beginning. The staff has people from different nationalities, so the identities that actually join them are youth and family planning advocacy. Further, IYAFP is now represented in more than 60 countries by Country Coordinators and their teams. Although the non-profit has its headquarters in Washington DC, the main platform of work is the internet (IYAFP 2017a). The Executive Board, staff and other members of the organization are connected on an online platform, where they communicate about their projects, share material, and schedule webinars for training. In short, “The International Youth Alliance for Family Planning is an alliance of young individuals, youth associations, organizations, and communities with a common mission to support provision of comprehensive reproductive health care services with a particular focus on family planning for youth” (2).

IYAFP aims to empower people aged under 30 with affordable and high-quality family planning information, in order to reduce sexual and reproductive threats – such as maternal mortality, unsafe abortion, adolescent pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) – and encourage economic and social growth (IYAFP 2016b, 6). The methodology of the non-profit is to connect with young advocates throughout the world and “establish a friendship and sense of belonging with Country Coordinators and members as soon as they join the IYAFP family.” IYAFP establishes some parameters of action and let the Country Coordinators

work with their own approach and their own agendas, since the staff considers that sexual and reproductive health and rights “exist everywhere” and involve plenty of issues. Therefore, their *raison-d’être* is to provide support and guidance, tools and knowledge, opportunities and direct funding to young people that is already working and creating impact with local projects. The activities to accomplish their purpose are to “connect youth with opportunities” and “support youth to grow”, to leave “youth lead the agenda”, and to work for the growth of the youth movement (IYAFP 2017b).

The activities performed by the staff and members of IYAFP are possible due to three kind of collaboration, and they result in two dimensions of impact. The Bill and Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health is the major donor and is also a partner in the Empowering Evidence Driven Advocacy project, which aims “to improve the implementation of existing family planning policies... in response to evidence-driven advocacy”. In this regard, having donors and partners is key for IYAFP to be sustained both economically and functionally. Although the organization’s staff does fundraising and networking, it is also responsibility of each Country Coordinator to build a network of stakeholders in their countries, including donors, partners and volunteers. Volunteers are precisely who run the organization, although their work is not to fulfill the IYAFP agenda. Actually, their function is to know their context and create projects with their own perspective, so they, in fact, volunteer to partner with IYAFP and form part of a bigger project.

In this regard, the contribution of the actors, including IYAFP staff, matters globally and locally. To measure their impact in local chapters, they take into account how many young leaders, entrepreneurs, and change-makers they engage, how many collaborations with local organizations they got, and how many initiatives to improve the community’s knowledge of family planning they had. In the global sphere, IYAFP proves its success through improving “financial and educational support for youth leaders,” enhancing “networking and lesson-sharing in successful advocacy”, and creating “stronger, united messaging for governments and policymakers” (IYAFP 2017b).

Similar Issue, Different Approach

Prior to the theoretical analysis, it is worth comparing some key aspects of the two cases. Women Deliver corresponds more to a traditional structure of a NGO, with a founder

with vast experience in the non-profit sector and in the sexual and reproductive health and rights field. The organization has a concrete agenda with specific projects and a stricter control mechanism. Further, sponsors give money directly to Women Deliver, and then it distributes to activities, scholarships, seed grants, etc. IYAFP instead was created with an innovative structure based on decentralization. All the members are young, and for the majority, this is the first international NGO to which they belong and for which they work. This non-profit does not have fixed programs and activities but parameters of behavior for Country Coordinators to understand their role in IYAFP. Decentralization rules IYAFP's activities in all aspects, from scheduling to implementation of programs and from fundraising to impacting, although the main objective seeks effective global outcomes. In brief, these organizations have similar goals but address them in completely different manners, and precisely their differences could determine the course of their activities and the extent of their autonomy.

Women Deliver

Acknowledging that Women Deliver aims to enhance and improve the outcomes of gender advocacy throughout the world, one could infer that its niche is broad. The international non-governmental organization is positioning itself as a global platform to train, serve, and connect the gender-advocacy community. The non-profit addresses development through the Sustainable Development Goals as an aggregated value, and it argues that investing and advocating for women rights would drive us to fulfill the expectations of the 2030 Agenda. Therefore, the niche or environment of the organization consists of the international actors who work in gender and development, the firms, organizations, and individuals interested in collaborating with these causes, developed countries that fund these initiatives and developing countries that host these programs.

In this regard, the *collectivist* organization that receives funding from external means has some susceptible aspects. First, the legitimacy of the organization might be determined by the discourse its sponsors want to support, since Women Deliver is not only applying that discourse to its actions but also transmitting a global message through the conferences, the e-training platform, and the media. Second, even though gender and development are interconnected issues, the fact that the organization has opted for development discourse, suggests two hypotheses: (1) Women Deliver incorporated the global development agenda to

capture more funders, or (2) the discourse makes it easier for the organization to work in particular areas of interest. In both cases, the background history of the organization suggests that it has experienced a process of adaptation for getting stronger and better adjusted to its niche.

Even though external actors finance the organization, Women Deliver has a low degree of dependence due to resources. As stated above, according to the resource dependence theory, an organization would be more tied to its sponsors if there are few suppliers or if the agreements are rigid. Women Deliver's donor base is very diverse though, and the way in which Women Deliver uses the money is attractive and trustable. In other words, the strategy of Women Deliver – investing in training and effective resources for gender advocacy – appeals funders, who know little about social projects and effective solutions but have confidence that their money will get good outcomes in hands of a staff with great expertise in the topic. Only ten years after the first conference, Women Deliver was able to enjoy economic security and propel new projects with global reach.

The assumptions of resource dependence are, however, not absolutely discarded from the case of Women Deliver. It is important to acknowledge that donors might have influence in small aspects of the organization and its activities. For instance, the 2016 conference was settled in Copenhagen, Denmark, one of the major donors of Women Deliver, along with the other Scandinavian States. Further, the 2019 Conference will take place in Canada, another main donor, whose government holds the principles that the organization defends and transmits. It requires a deeper investigation to determine if donors had pushed Women Deliver to set the conferences in their countries, but it is known that not all the donations are given in money. The travel agency in charge of arranging the flights for Denmark was Canadian, for example, and it was part of the Canadian donations. Nevertheless, the relations between Women Deliver and the donors are characterized by empathy and confidence, and the highly interdependent environment permits the organization to have a great extent of autonomy.

In terms of institutional isomorphism, resources are not the only means to pressure the organizations or to shape their purpose. Women Deliver has the economic stability to abandon certain contributors, if they impose unfeasible or unacceptable conditions, but the majority of the donors respond to a particular profile. Consequently, the question to have in

mind is what happened first: did the organization schematize its type of donor, or did the organization adopt a certain discourse to gain legitimacy? By examining the background of the non-profit, the answer could be that the organization was conscious of its type of donors from the beginning, but its purpose has expanded and modified in order to keep and increase the support of those sponsors. The first conference was focused on maternal mortality, and now the topic of the conferences is sexual and reproductive health and rights. The first organizational target was gender advocates; young people and advocates with related causes are now important targets for Women Deliver. Further, the organization is engaging with different mechanisms to strengthen girls' and women's rights through soccer, for example, and attracting a new kind of contributors.

Women Deliver has mainly experienced mimetic and normative isomorphism. Regarding the first one, the organization has adopted certain patterns to gain legitimacy and continue receiving resources. The homogeneity among this organization, its partners and sponsors is also a matter of the staff's preparation. For example, Mrs. Sheffield had a long career with gender advocacy and non-profits when she coordinated the first conference, so she already knew the dynamics within the altruistic and global community. The former is essential for Women Deliver's purpose, since it aims to be a global reference when it comes to sexual and reproductive health and rights advocacy.

It is important for Women Deliver to maintain an interesting profile within the global community. Aside from states and International Organizations who do play a key role in creating international law, firms, organizations and civil society, the media, individuals, and even criminals are also global actors. Non-governmental actors were able to toughen and create solid networks throughout the world with the latest and fastest technological advances. Although approaches such as cosmopolitanism or those that acknowledge the emergence of a new diplomatic scheme, consider that current-day NGOs have a more powerful role in global affairs, this could still be an illusion of the new world order. In other words, actors that have military and legal capabilities are far more powerful than international non-governmental organizations that do not even have economic sufficiency.

Henceforth, NGOs could not be more powerful than states, because they cannot exert coercion against them. However, NGOs could have a louder voice in two possible scenarios: (1) if a bunch of organizations with a clear opinion towards a particular issue have the media

as their ally, and (2) if the organization, or organizations, have close relations with a powerful group of states with a specific concern. Those circumstances ease to NGOs the challenge of bringing to the global agendas a topic that, according to them, is of common concern. The background of Women Deliver, again, reveals both of these paths, because the organization has legitimized itself as a global leader organization in the field of gender and development advocacy with three main devices. First, Women Deliver represents the voice of plenty local and global non-profits with the same or similar goals. Second, one of the key activities of the organization is to position its brand in the media. Third but not the least, girls' and women's rights advocates transmit their message by means of the shared rhetoric in the international community managed by the UN: liberal democracy and human rights. As a result, an inherent interest of the states that support Women Deliver might be to promote these principles and spread them to other parts of the world, such as underdeveloped countries in Asia and Africa. Not necessarily as their main aim but developed states with liberal democratic regimes, choose to finance projects that proceed with the mechanisms that, according to their experience and opinion, will get the better results.

To sum up, Women Deliver enjoys a great extent of economic security due to its long list of contributors, so fundraising has become an organic rather than a predominant activity. However, the organization is not exempt from influences. Women Deliver has not revolutionized the global agenda but followed it, even though it led the efforts to position the Millennium Goal of reducing the global mortality rate in the international activities and then the gender-based approach in the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Women Deliver has, in fact, echoed the initiatives to which states had already agreed and some committed. Further, Women Deliver has decided to convey its message through the message of others – by using the development agenda to guide girls' and women's emancipation. The analysis, therefore, demonstrates that the environment, staff and contributors of Women Deliver do have an impact when shaping the purpose of the organization, and the assumptions of institutional isomorphism and smart power are the ones that best fit the explanation.

International Youth Alliance for Family Planning

Although IYAFP has expanded to 60 states with its Country Coordinators, it is a smaller and less experienced organization with low-impact local projects. This means that IYAFP has

not yet positioned itself as a global leader in the field of family planning advocacy, neither has it achieved global impact with its activities. The organization has one main contributor, and the monitoring mechanisms are not as developed and technical as those of Women Deliver. The path of IYAFP is still uncertain, and precisely its outcomes might depend on external factors influencing their behavior and shaping their purpose.

Nonetheless, the IYAFP staff has managed to achieve great progress during its 3.5 years of existence through its networking capacities. Now, it is important to understand what the term *networking* involves in this context. As stated above, non-profits have a common challenge to survive, and plenty of ways exist to achieve it, such as fundraising and partnering. Although IYAFP carries out these activities, the Co-Founders had first opted for an innovative model: decentralization. IYAFP, therefore, has different kinds of networking at different levels: (1) gets contacts and connections to enhance the organization as a whole, (2) engages more young advocates on family planning and reinforces the bonds with its members throughout the world, and (3) obtains local support and contribution by delegating responsibility to the Country Coordinators who manage the organization's local chapters. Through the presented theories, this paper identifies how this model and different dynamics might contribute or restrain the autonomous ability of the organization.

Considering that the circumstances surrounding the organization determine its survival requirements –as the organizational ecology theory underlines– IYAFP has great possibilities to survive as an international organization but little possibilities in each local niche where its members advocate. Meanwhile, IYAFP is a representation of an individualistic organization, which responds better to an opportunity model, the local chapters of the organization could vary its structure, its style, and its model. In terms of the ecology approach, it is suitable to deduce that IYAFP has little dependence on contiguous factors, because it does not rely on a particular environment and is not constrained to a specific niche to develop its activities: either by enhancing family planning advocacy or fundraising and partnering. However, the members of IYAFP who embody the purpose of the organization in each country may have greater dependence on their environment, and their capability to confront or adapt to the conditions would determine their success.

In a similar fashion, when analyzing direct dependence on resources, it is important to observe the global and local dimensions of the organization. The central office of IYAFP does

receive contributions, with its main donor the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation, but also gathers funds through research and advisory services. IYAFP's principles and specific objectives lines up with those of the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation, making IYAFP an attractive organization to partner. However, these similarities are not the result of coercive or persuasive behavior from the donors, because IYAFP is not obliged to report about all its activities with the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation. They offer their consultancy services in exchange and work together with the Foundation in Family Planning research. Local chapters are more vulnerable to be dependent upon local donors and partners, but here the headquarters play a key role. The organization's central office functions as the supervisor and leader of these chapters who support local groups' initiatives. This study is, however, insufficient to get insights as to how dependent or autonomous IYAFP is in each country, since that would require a more extensive investigation of each chapter.

The external and internal institutional influence seems to be a more relevant factor when shaping the purpose and activities of this youth non-profit. First, IYAFP was created by three young family-planning advocates during an international conference, so they have a similar learning profile and interests. Second, the training that IYAFP imparts to its members deploys guidelines and tools from the usual trend of education in advocacy and development. Third, IYAFP has to gain legitimacy and become a reference on family planning for three targets: clients, supporters, and members. As with Women Deliver, IYAFP experiences institutional isomorphism via mimetic and normative aspects of the organization, its members, and the dynamics of advocacy and projects implementation.

IYAFP aims to shape public policy by incorporating effective actions of family planning, so one of the organization's activities is to explicitly influence political agendas. Even if the organization and its chapters have the possibility to partner and join efforts with public entities, it is a principle of IYAFP to not receive funds from governments. In this way, it is not possible to identify an evident link between the interests of states and the permanence and growth of IYAFP, either globally or locally. However, an interesting element to analyze is that IYAFP has sought for an innovative structure, which permits greater opportunities of survival and fewer financial and administrative burdens. This procedure could therefore be an appropriate alternative when deciding to avoid state contributions, since the responsibilities of the organization reduce and the expenses to cover too. Further, by not setting a unique

agenda, it leaves its Country Coordinators the task of implementing change according to the parameters of each jurisdiction, thereby, eluding potential political confrontations and normative barriers. For that reason, it is not possible to understand this case through the lenses of smart power, though it illustrates a way for non-profits to avoid smart power strategies.

Briefly, the way in which IYAFP proceeds suggests distinct insights from those of Women Deliver, and decentralization seems to be a potential mechanism to be a more autonomous organization. As assumed by resource dependence theorists, an organization has more autonomy when it has less need for donors and has the capacity to finance itself. That is the case of IYAFP, yet the conditions of each chapter in relation to their autonomy and their efficiency are unclear. That is why this analysis has mainly focused in the activity of IYAFP within its headquarters and staff. In this regard, the principal finding is that neither fundraising and associating nor environmental factors have actually biased the purpose of the organization. However, institutional elements –the development and family planning agendas, the general guidelines for projects implementation and advocacy actions, the learning programs and international events– do shape the purpose of IYAFP to a great extent. Also, the perspective that the board and other members of IYAFP share as a result of institutional isomorphism constitutes further planning and structuring of the organization as well.

Conclusion

The objective of this article was to examine the extent of autonomy in Women Deliver and International Youth Alliance for Family Planning by means of four approaches, and the analysis identified how these perspectives could explain the diverse behaviors or activities of the NGOs. Although the cases that this study utilizes have shown little direct dependency on others due to the necessity of resources, the analysis suggests that global development agendas exert an important pressure on normative characteristics. By following these parameters, organizations are able to gain greater legitimacy and maintain stakeholder confidence. At the same time, they can still use creative survival tactics without direct state influence. Women Deliver, for instance, have myriad of sponsors for economic stability and to reduce the power that donors could have over the organization.

A key insight of this study is that NGOs are not absolutely autonomous. Because non-profits might not survive through self-determination, they embrace external influences be that through coercive, normative, or practical means. Recognizing that NGOs are not absolutely autonomous and that their efficiency depends much on how successful their survival tactics have been would enrich the conclusions of upcoming studies. Consequently, the discipline of international relations should acknowledge this fact and incorporate the possible biases into the models of NGOs that researchers use when examining NGO roles or activities.

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