

THE NGO ACADEMY'S

*Advocacy  
Algorithm*



with Karen Judd Smith

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# Advocacy Algorithm



## Module IV: Lesson 2 / NGO Diplomacy & Influence Part II

# Today

## The stages of international negotiations

- What we mean by influence & the kind of evidence of it there may be
- A quick assessment of effect of the various elements that have been looked at (by us and academics)
- A framework for strategic NGO impact
- A few more observations

# Stages of Influence

- Negotiation processes and outcomes are influenced during the international meetings, AND
- Multilateral negotiations are also influenced during the pre-negotiation/agenda setting phases
- ie consider “How did those negotiations come about in the first place?”

# Key Stages of Influence

- The key stages of influencing the negotiating process:
  - issue framing
  - agenda setting
  - understanding the position of key actors
  - indirectly at the national or domestic levels

# Measures (& Challenges) of Success

- Can the outcomes be tracked back to positions that NGOs took, and does the text reflect those positions?
  - Not always a paper trail (publishing positions can be counterproductive to an effective process)
  - Influence through informal meetings and discussions etc. as for traditional diplomatic negotiations.
  - Since 9/11 increased suspicion of NGOs.

# What do we mean by “influence”?

How to identify “influence”? What kind of “evidence” is there?

- Scholars frequently rely on evidence regarding NGO activities
  - lobbying—submitting information or draft decisions to negotiators on a particular position
  - their access to negotiations—number of NGOs attending negotiations and the rules of participation) and/or
  - NGO resources—knowledge, financial and other assets, number of supporters and their particular role in negotiations.

# Evidence of NGO “influence”?

- How shape the negotiation *process*?  
—issue framing, agenda setting, shaping the positions of key states
- How shape the negotiation *outcomes*?  
—procedural and substantive elements
- Be care of confusing **correlation** with **causation**



# Little or Large Effect?

- NGOs shaped the process by working behind the scenes raising concerns about issues and influencing the position of states
- Alliances with key states are a crucial factor to influence
- NGOs can keep things on the agenda or get things off the agenda
- My own experience: more influence in the setting of the agenda. Less on the outcomes... but set something in motion.
- Betsill concluded “the environmental community had a moderate level of influence on the negotiations and little on the outcomes.”

# Little or Large Effect?

- Linkage with “bottom up approach” strengthens NGO ability to influence
- NGO homogeneity strengthens their ability to influence —more influence when the issue is new and few NGOs
- When the participation is encouraged by the negotiators
- Scientific influence directly (international) and indirectly (national)
- Heightened public concern (media)
- Financial resources

# Little or Large Effect?

- NGOs influence was greater when the agenda was shaped early on
- Influence over time, even though it is less pinpointable
- Also by reframing issues such as forest conservation shifted from an issue of economics to environmental and human rights
- More meaningful to discuss influence on a case by case (indicating the centrality of individual capacity/strategies and agenda than generic approach)

# Massive Action Plan “TIPS”

## **T**hinking About Change

- “An idea whose time has come”
- understanding that nothing stays the same, ever
- leadership as helping direct change.

- **I**nnovation — Reframe old problems in a “new” way by stepping away from a “problem focus” to a “solutions focus”
- **P**romising Proof — Point to projects/national or regional examples of what works, or works well enough to warrant attention. You have to have done (some of) the work.
- **S**uccess — is incremental and generative. Don’t under estimate the potency of small changes to initiate significant change, chose well.



# Some Observations

- NGO coordination has a neutral effect on influence
- NGO influence does not necessarily decline with more restrictive access, and influence may even be enhanced when NGOs are coordinated by state delegations and/or secretariats
- In some cases, involvement in the agenda setting may be necessary (but not sufficient) for influence in later stages
- NGO influence are increased when political stakes are relatively low and can increase their influence through close relations with key states and/or convincing states of the importance of NGO participation

# Today's Homework ...

What kind of an NGO do you consider yours is: environmental, social movement, community based?

What kind of influence does your organization have at the global level? Or can yours have more impact through the local/national levels or the collective international activity as it deals with the global commons?

Is your agenda already on the UN's agenda? If not, how might you get it there?

