

Giuliana Sorce (Ed.). Global perspectives on NGO communication for social change. New York, NY: Routledge, 2021, pp. 222. ISBN 978-1-03203-713-4

Richard Moist, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Institute of Communication and Marketing, Switzerland
richard.moist@hslu.ch

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) face an increasingly challenging and complicated context in which to achieve social change. Current trends toward illiberal populism and rising authoritarianism combine with the challenges of fake news and the protracted difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. In these circumstances, the critical role played by NGOs in civil society has only been heightened. *Global Perspectives on NGO Communication for Social Change* provides us with a timely and comprehensive examination of the key role that communication plays in enabling NGOs for social change to engage with their stakeholders and to impact society. This edited volume examines how NGOs strive to achieve this. Structured in two parts, the book first focuses on thematic perspectives before then devoting the second half to case studies, which provide the reader with a rich array of initiatives used to communicate and engage audiences. It presents clear global perspectives, as well as giving us nuanced national and local viewpoints from a broad range of countries, including cases from Brazil, Bangladesh, Nigeria, South Africa and China.

Media and communication are pivotal to how organisations engage with stakeholders. This book explores how different forms of communication are used, not only featuring the traditional form of media relations or indeed a focus on the use of social media, but also examining the use of other channels of communication. As Giuliana Sorce emphasizes in the wider-ranging and comprehensive introduction, the book considers how NGOs also look for practical, if sometimes uncon-

ventional, channels to communicate with their audiences.

So-called hybrid forms are explored by Delaney Harness in a chapter analyzing “The Strategy of NGO Journalism in the Fight for Refugee Rights.” By considering the examples of Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Human Rights First (HRF) in the USA, Harness demonstrates how NGOs are able to change or adapt their journalistic role depending on factors such as the positioning of other stakeholders and the significance of the topic. Harness shows how digital technologies have changed the roles of NGOs advocating refugee rights. Unlike in past decades, Harness points out how media outlets need NGOs to produce content and directly use their images and briefings.

New technology provides new ways of storytelling, from HRW video feeds to gamification tools. Naima Alam, whose chapter illustrates “Narrative Strategies for Animated Development Communication,” gives examples from the NGO Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC), which is also notable as pointed out by Alam for currently being the world’s largest NGO. This chapter describes the use of “explainer videos” to communicate social issues as part of a hybrid narrative strategy. Used on Facebook and YouTube, as well as websites, Alam states how these are part of an “entertain-education” strategy in the NGO’s advocacy communication. Moreover, simple takeaways also direct the reader to how animated content could be applied to other topics as well.

Emel Ozdora Aksak and Daniela V. Dimitrova provide further insights into common issues faced by NGOs in their case study about the Development Workshop



Cooperative's (DWC) advocacy for seasonal agricultural workers in Turkey. Practical lessons from initiatives are shared, including the use of face-to-face communication and offering material without copyright. An important point is also made by one DWC interviewee regarding the impact of social media posts: "How did you impact the lives of people with your actions?" – a valuable question for communicators to keep in mind when developing any content.

Social media nonetheless bring a plethora of new opportunities. Maha Bashri explores the importance of local context in a case study of Sadagaat and the Hawadith Street Initiative in Sudan, further demonstrating the strengths of a collection that gives significant attention to the global south. In a section on "Organizational Legitimacy and Communication on Social Networking Sites," Bashri provides analysis of how social network site (SNS) posts enable the two NGOs to share information and to mobilize supporters. A key difference compared to western NGOs is observed – namely, the use of SNS in Sudan rather than websites. Bashri explains that this is a communication strategy to distribute information where an NGO's stakeholder will actually seek it.

Wider elements of communication management are covered in further chapters. The importance of the larger picture is emphasized in Delia Dumitrica's chapter on "Integrating Social Media in NGO Strategic Communication." Thus, communication should be examined holistically. As demonstrated in the book, offline still matters. Dumitrica's lessons from Dutch NGOs make notable reference to the larger communications context and note that NGOs blend online and offline communication, and do not overlook the relevance of methods such as calling supporters on the phone, distributing leaflets or sending electronic newsletters.

While the integration of new communication channels can be described as being in flux, a contrasting image of communication challenges is depicted in Luwei Rose Luqiu's case study of organizing by labor NGOs in China. In a chapter on the

government's needs versus the demands of labor, the difficulties faced by NGOs in their communication management are insightfully explained. Luqiu sets the scene of the highly problematic local context: A high threshold to register NGOs and an already weakened Chinese civil society after regulatory changes led to many Chinese NGOs losing funding in 2017. This vivid case study reminds us of the important work conducted by NGOs for social change in China, despite government restrictions and pressures. As Luqiu explains, a strategy of passive communication is chosen as a strategy for survival. Examining the case of Inno Community Development Organisation (Inno), Luqiu states how instead of advocacy, their communication strategy becomes one of conflict avoidance, keeping a low profile and focusing on community service.

As demonstrated in the Inno case, winning the trust of stakeholders is complicated by local conditions and requires a pragmatic approach. This theme of building trust is further taken up in Vidhi Chaudhri and James Everett Hein's chapter on "NGO-Business Partnerships." They emphasize that corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability have intensified the application of such partnerships as a strategy for positive social change. In this light, NGO-Business partnerships can be viewed as a "mechanism" for implementing CSR goals. Their example focuses on the case of Shell's partnership in Nigeria with the National Coalition on Gas Flaring and Oil Spills in the Niger Delta (NACGOND) and examines partnership fit and the challenges of partnerships in non-western country contexts. Mutual benefits are confirmed, however, the difficulties of the collaboration between Shell and NACGOND are also illustrated. NGO-Business partnerships are carefully analyzed, with a concluding view that the trend toward more such partnerships will continue.

Communication management also includes the question of resources. Kenneth C. C. Yang and Yowei Kang, in their chapter on "Resource Mobilization Strategies for Social Changes among Climate Change

“NGOs in the United States,” focus on environmental NGOs (ENGOS). They reflect on the importance of NGOs taking into consideration their own current capacities when planning and implementing ICT activities. Their text mining study supports the understanding of what technologies have been utilized as tools for resource mobilization.

Mass media is full of near daily references to the constant risks to organizations from cyber-attacks. NGOs are also at risk, which presents another aspect for NGOs to consider in their communication strategies. This is picked up by Isabel Löfgren in the case study “Practicing a Politics of Artistic and Communicative Trans Care: Casa Chama and Transvestigender Rights in Brazil.” Löfgren describes a phishing attack on Casa Chama and notes the importance of NGOs deploying cyber security measures, a topic which itself may offer further scope for exploration.

To conclude, NGOs are under increasing pressure and as this book clearly illustrates, face numerous and diverse challenges in both global and local contexts. It is international in scope and critically deals with a large number of social issues, from workers’ rights and gender equality to climate change and refugees. It succeeds in taking a holistic approach, giving samples of many communication strategies, and offers an effective balance between broader themes and case studies. It therefore brings together common issues including communication management, media relations and resource management. This valuable contribution to the literature gives us insightful illustrations into how NGOs use differing communication strategies and tactics for social change and serves the needs of both scholars and practitioners alike.