Support Organizations and Citizen Aid: Possibilities and Limits

Working Paper for The RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service
University of Texas at Austin
This is a working paper, please do not cite

RGK-ARNOVA President's Award 2017

Susan Appe, University at Albany, SUNY, Albany, NY USA
Allison Schnable, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN USA
(**authorship equally shared)

Abstract

Citizen aid for relief and development has expanded rapidly in the 21st century, as belief in individuals' power as change agents has been given global scope through electronic communication and cheap travel. The number of American aid organizations operating in the global South has grown to nearly 10,000. These GINGOs—grassroots international NGOs—are small-budget, volunteer-driven organizations typically launched by Americans without professional experience in international development or nonprofit management. These groups prize the expressive and voluntaristic dimensions of development work, yet face challenges of amateurism, material scarcity, fragmentation, paternalism, and restricted focus. We investigate whether support organizations, whose primary goals are to build the capacity of organizations and strengthen the organizational field, offer GINGOs any solutions to their inherent weaknesses. We draw on 15 semi-structured interviews with a stratified selection of support organizations, including associations tailored towards international development and towards nonprofit work at large. We find that support organizations offer resources to help GINGOs in managerial and administrative domains. Fewer support organizations help GINGOs build technical development skills, and fewer still push GINGOs to critically reflect on their role in development. Peer learning models and online platforms offer particular promise, given the weaknesses built in to GINGOs' approach to aid.

Keywords: grassroots international nongovernmental organizations, capacity building, support organizations, volunteers

Introduction

Citizen aid for relief and development has expanded rapidly in the 21st century, as belief in individuals' power as change agents has been given global scope through electronic communication and cheap travel. In addition to the well-documented trend of voluntourism, thousands of citizens in the global North have established associations to do volunteer-based

relief and development projects. The number of such organizations based in the United States and operating in the global South has grown to nearly 10,000[1]. These groups typically emerge from tourism (or less often, family ties) to the South by Americans with no training or professional experience in development. The leaders draw on small donations and volunteer labor to make development a "personal project"[2].

We refer to these organizations as grassroots international NGOs, or GINGOs. These groups operate in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but are most common in Haiti and Mexico (the less-developed countries geographically closest to the U.S.) and in India, Kenya and Peru[3]. The most typical sectors of activity are education (most often school-building or funding scholarships), medical clinics, small business, and water[4]. Like the Dutch Private Development Initiatives examined by Kinsbergen[5], GINGOs are apt to focus on Korten's[6] "first generation" development strategies—direct provision of goods and services[7]. While many GINGOs use discourse of "empowerment" or "sustainability," their citizen aid is designed around ongoing subsidies and volunteer labor from the U.S.[8]

While they are distinct in terms of their funding structure, time horizons, and incentives, GINGOs have important similarities and are subject to some of the same critiques as international volunteering and voluntourism programs[9]. One of these is the importance of emotion in driving global Northerners' involvement in citizen aid. Interviews with volunteers have shown that feelings of a "warm glow"[9] and the "intimacy"[10] within the international volunteering experience motivate some, while others are driven by the "fun factor" of hands-on international projects.[11] Volunteers for GINGOs resemble the voluntourists studied by Mostafanezhad, who notes the "centrality of sentimentality" to international volunteering[12]. The ideal of personal relationships with others in the global South is cherished by GINGO volunteers.

But volunteers' emotional attachment to those they aim to help is not necessarily equivalent to solidarity. Haaland and Wallevik[13] are wary of conflating solidarity, or a sense of shared fate, with the personalized charity of citizen initiatives, while Mostafanezhad critiques the sentimentality of these personal encounters for veiling broader power relations[14].

The primacy of these emotional experiences also creates practical barriers to GINGOs being effective development actors. Americans start these organizations out of an urge to aid particular communities and to "do it themselves." GINGOs are often reluctant to develop relationships with other aid agencies. In fact, GINGO founders and volunteers often purposefully frame their work in contrast to larger, professionalized INGOs working in development aid[15]. They do not seek to professionalize their own organizations, lest their work become tied up in NGO "red tape" instead of direct relationships with aid beneficiaries. One leader of a GINGO explained: "We may have been re-inventing the wheel—but it was OUR wheel!"[16]. Another GINGO founder likewise uses the wheel analogy: "I don't want to RE-invent the wheel, but there's so much need out there, what I want to do is more, I want to personally connect with people"[17]. In other words, GINGO volunteers prioritize the emotional and relational components of their work at the price of learning development work and organizational management through trial and error. This desire for personal connection and organizational independence might produce a strong sense of commitment by GINGO founders and supporters but also risks development approaches that are inefficient in the delivery of aid, or at worst, donor-driven, unsustainable, and potentially exploitative.

But GINGOs that address their weaknesses have potential to contribute as small-scale development actors. Further capacity could leverage their strengths. For example, though their budgets are small, relying on donations from everyday citizens grants them considerable

autonomy. They are not subject to the demands of funding cycles or the fickle tastes of donor agencies. They avoid the pressure common in the aid world to carry out projects where results can be tidily measured and the projects taken to scale. As Kinsbergen shows of Dutch initiatives, such organizations can remain in one community over a decade or more on a project of a limited scope, such as supporting a school[18]. Other groups are able to create durable relationships between emigrants and their new home communities and their communities of origin[19]. Some citizen aid groups create small-scale but sustainable partnerships with local institutions such as religious congregations, cooperatives, or government ministries[20].

However, unlike in the Netherlands, small development organizations in the U.S. have not been the target of financial support or capacity building from the national development agency or from large NGOs[21]. Any effort to do so would need to contend with these organizations' geographic dispersal. Previously, 20% of nonprofit organizations working in international development were found in New York City and Washington, D.C. but since 1990 it has decreased to about 11%[22]. GINGOs are based in every state and in one-third of all U.S. counties. Such dispersal makes it difficult for GINGOs to identify peer organizations and to see themselves as part of an organizational field.

We argue that GINGOs' potential as effective development actors rests on their ability to do several things. First, they must be competently managed organizations, even if small ones. Second, they must acquire some technical capacity in their development sector, at the very least learning how to avoid doing harm through inept provision of services. Third, they must be able to critically assess their role in the development space, recognizing, as development actors of all kinds should, how their work fits into broader patterns of power and politics. Thus, this article begins from the assumption that GINGOs have potential to contribute as small-scale

development actors, but that most of them require some capacity building to address the weaknesses built in to their approach to aid.

We focus our analysis on support organizations in the U.S. as prime potential sources for capacity building for two reasons. First, the majority of GINGO leaders spend only weeks or months a year at their program sites thus most of the organizational management and planning is based in the U.S. Second, U.S. support organizations have both the mandate and geographic coverage to build capacity among a highly dispersed population of NGOs. We define *support organizations* as associations with state, regional, or national scope whose primary goals are to build the capacity of nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations and strengthen the organizational field more generally. In this article, our aim is to learn how and to what extent support organizations in the U.S. help to address the weaknesses of GINGOs as development actors. This paper is part of a research agenda of both authors to examine how GINGOs can contribute to the narrower tasks of economic development and the broader goals of global solidarity.

Literature Review

While citizen aid takes some non-organizational forms, we categorize American GINGOs as a subset of the broader field of nonprofit organizations. These groups are bound by the legal regulations of other U.S.-based nonprofits, and in previous work we find that GINGO leaders informally draw on lessons learned from their involvement in domestically-oriented nonprofit groups[23]. Theorists of the nonprofit sector have distinguished between instrumental and expressive rationales for nonprofit organizations[24]. While an instrumental assessment of the nonprofit sector values the maximally efficient delivery of services, an expressive perspective sees distinct value in the way that volunteers can experience fellowship or satisfaction even if

efficiency is sacrificed. From this perspective the nonprofit sector is unique not just because of the variety of services it can offer, but because of the delivery of the services offers emotional and moral possibilities unavailable through the state or market[25]. Expressive rationales drive volunteers' involvement in GINGOs, but GINGOs risk prioritizing volunteers' emotional experience over effective aid provision.

Given the emotional and expressive characteristics of GINGOs, what are the structures that can address their operational weaknesses and build their capacity to do development? Here we briefly outline several entities poised to serve nonprofit organizations, and then home in on literature specific to support organizations and how they attempt to address sector weaknesses. The field for nonprofit capacity building is diverse. As professional expectations for nonprofit organizations increased, distinctive training and learning in the form of formal academic and often accredited programs were created in American *university settings*[26]. Indeed, there has been an increase in academic departments focused on training nonprofit leaders[27]. Similarly, *research institutions,* some affiliated with a university and others not, have become apt in capacity building for organizations. *Foundations* and other types of funders emerged as champions for and implementers of nonprofit organizations often with an incentive to target their grantees. *Trade or professional organizations,* which are often member-based organizations for individual professionals, have touted professional development and building capacity among nonprofit leaders. 'Trade shows' have popped up across many professions in the U.S. and the nonprofit sector is no exception. Additionally, many local *chambers of commerce* in the U.S. consider nonprofit organizations as part of the business community, and include them in the ranks of their membership, allowing them to access available services such as capacity building. And finally, we observe that nonprofit leaders are more frequently turning to *online networks and platforms*

that have become available and provide opportunities for organizational learning.

Support Organizations

We focus on support organizations as potential facilitators of capacity building that serve the nonprofit and NGOs of many types and sizes in the U.S. Support organizations are "value-based agencies whose primary task is to provide services and resources that strengthen the capacities of their constituents to accomplish their missions"[28]. Additional terms used to describe support organizations for nonprofit organizations include umbrella organizations, infrastructure organizations, networks, federations, confederations, coalitions and consortiums. Support organizations exist to serve the sector, often focusing on professional development, research, advocacy and education[29]. We draw on Brown and Kalegaonkar's work on support organizations that aim to address challenges in the nonprofit sector[30]. Brown and Kalegaonkar outline the following internal sector issues: *amateurism, material scarcity, fragmentation, paternalism* and *restricted focus*[31]. We outline how these challenges, while applicable to nonprofit organizations more generally, are particularly present in the GINGO model.

Sector-wide internal challenges present themselves in particular ways among GINGOs. As noted above, GINGOs founders might be equipped with emotion and passion, but many have little, if any, experience in leading a development organization. We have found that many GINGO founders are active community members, for example as volunteers in churches and local organizations or as small business owners. While they have some experience in volunteering and managing organizations, many have little experience specific to development work, which aligns with the first internal sector issue outlined by Brown and Kalegaonkar[32]: *amateurism.* This trait is pronounced in the case of GINGOs as much of the work is volunteer-based which speaks to the organization's grassroots vision but might also hinder effective

achievement of an organization's mission and its objectives. Additionally, GINGOs operate on small budgets based on individual donations, aligning with what Brown and Kalegaonkar call the sector's issue with *material scarcity*[33]. GINGOs tend to have a limited understanding about fund development and often default to unsuccessful bids for grants in lieu of other revenue streams. *Fragmentation* likewise presents particular challenges for GINGOs, as perhaps in part due to the geographic dispersal mentioned earlier, they have been found to work in isolation. Conceivably by design as they seek personal connection and organizational independence, they are often and are not linked into larger networks or collaboration opportunities, which can limit effectiveness; this also makes them prone to re-producing failed projects of the past.

Furthermore, GINGOs exemplify the tendency of nonprofit organizations to have what Brown and Kalegaonkar call *restricted focus*. Indeed, many GINGOs focus on a specific programmatic area and/or location, and while it can be considered a positive attribute, it can also inhibit GINGOs' ability to provide effective services because they are selective and fail to see the "larger picture"[34]. *Paternalism* is the final internal issue to the nonprofit sector identified by Brown and Kalegaonkar. Like with many NGOs working in development, paternalism is often unintentional but is a challenge as Northern volunteers in GINGOs control the resources provided to Southern recipient communities and thus can control the priorities of the communities and risk omitting local knowledge, capacity and responsibility.

Research Approach

We seek to contribute to theory by articulating ways that support organizations help nonprofits build capacity even when such organizations desire to maintain their voluntaristic and expressive qualities. Because the approaches of U.S. support organizations are diverse and because we expected that these groups would vary in their understanding of and interactions with

GINGOs, we chose to carry out semi-structured interviews with a stratified selection of support organizations. We first generated a population of support organizations that work with NGOs and nonprofit organizations in the U.S. These groups all are "associations of associations," although some accept individual members.

The population of support organizations can be divided into four categories, all of which were represented in our study (see Table 1). State-level NGO support organizations are member-based associations and networks of NGOs working in international development. The geographic scope of membership and participation is state-wide. National-level NGO support organizations are member-based associations and networks of NGOs working in international development. The geographic scope is not necessarily defined. National-level nonprofit support organizations are member-based associations and networks that are national in scope and serve nonprofit organizations of diverse types. State-level nonprofit support organizations are member-based associations and networks for nonprofit organizations at the state level.

We employed several strategies to compile the list of support organizations that might serve GINGOs. Some organizations were known to us through previous fieldwork or were suggested by colleagues. We broadened the scope by reading through a sample of 60 websites randomly selected from a database of websites of GINGOs, complied in 2014. Potential support organizations were identified through links and mentions in the website text. We then used a snowball selection method, following web links and "Suggested Organizations" on Facebook pages to identify other potential support organizations, until we reached saturation and no additional organizations could be identified. Finally, we identified and selected the state-level nonprofit support organizations through the National Council of Nonprofits' "Find Your State Association" map (https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/find-your-state-association).

Table 1: Interview Participants

Organization Type	Organization Name	Position	Location
State-level NGO support organization	Posner Center for International Development	Program Director	Denver, Colorado
State-level NGO support organization	Minnesota International NGO Network (MINN)	Board President	Minneapolis, MN
State-level NGO support organization	Global Washington	Executive Director	Seattle, WA
State-level NGO support organization	Global PDX	Coordinator	Portland, OR
State-level NGO support organization	Boston Network for International Development	Executive Director	Boston, MA
National-level NGO support organization	InterAction	Chief Executive Officer	Washington, DC
National-level NGO support organization	International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)	Coordinator for Standards and Practice	Washington, DC
National-level NGO support organization	Society for International Development-Washington Chapter	Chief Executive Officer	Washington, DC
National-level NGO support organization	Accord	Co-chair of Research Association	Washington, DC
National-level nonprofit support organization	BoardSource	Director of Education	Washington, DC
National-level nonprofit support organization	Independent Sector	Director of Policy Development and Analysis	Washington, DC
State-level nonprofit support organization	New York Council of Nonprofits, Inc. (NYCON)	Vice President, Strategic Communications and Stakeholder Engagement	Albany, NY
State-level nonprofit support organization	Colorado Nonprofits	Statewide Membership Coordinator	Denver, Colorado
State-level nonprofit support organization	Forefront	Director of Education	Chicago, IL
State-level nonprofit support organization	California Association of Nonprofits	Chief Executive Officer	San Francisco, CA

The interviews were conducted over the phone or by Skype and lasted an average of 50 minutes. The interviews included general questions about the support organization, membership and participation structure, benefits to the members and other stakeholders it serves, and specific questions about serving GINGOs. Our analysis is also informed by a checklist filled out by during the interview by all participants, which listed services provided to their members and if

they are available to GINGOs. Interviews were transcribed and all transcriptions were analyzed through a preliminary paper-and-pencil analysis with open coding to identify support organizations' functions and relationships to GINGOs. With a second close reading of the interview transcriptions, we sorted the data into themes and engaged in memo writing[35] to describe support organizations, their capacity building services and their interactions with GINGOs.

Findings: Support Organizations Not Serving GINGOs

First, do support organizations have GINGOs among their members, and do they recognize these organizations' distinct weaknesses? For the most part, no. Only one support organization among those interviewed had a substantial membership base of GINGOs: the Posner Center for International Development (see Box 1). Most support organizations identified ad hoc ways in which they encountered GINGOs, but confirmed that their interactions with these groups were limited. State-level associations for NGOs were most likely to serve GINGOs, but did not observe GINGOs consistently using services and programming. The NGO-serving support organizations identified GINGOs as a growing constituency and as having been discussed programmatically, but concluded that GINGOs are difficult to target. For example, InterAction's CEO explained, "We have discussed grassroots international NGOs. Our challenge has been is, given their limited resources, what can they afford? … But there's been a sort of lamenting that there hasn't been [contact], we haven't created the space yet for this community to engage"[36]. GINGOs were described as difficult to serve. The Executive Director of Global Washington, which has been around for 10 years serving many types of organizations with a connection to Washington state and doing global work, explained: "It's kind of a place I think where international NGOs fall through the cracks because they're not being served by some of

the other backbone organizations around the nation"[37]. Another example from a specific support organization serving the policy-area education in emergencies admits: "How to get some of the diversity of representation from maybe some of these more grassroots-level ones has been a question for us"[38].

Often support organizations lumped GINGOs with other small organizations and recognized that these smaller groups were under-served. Independent Sector laments: "[G]enerally we feel like we don't have enough small community-based organizations, or organizations that have limited staff as a part of our membership or participation. That's an area where we feel like we need to grow"[39]. The state-level nonprofit associations were more likely to offer resources around fund development and basic organizational management and governance that are useful to smaller and start-up nonprofits. Independent Sector's Director of Policy Development and Analysis explains: "People would say, 'I have a passion, I have a grand idea. I'm starting a nonprofit, I'd like for you to give me funding.' The first thing I try to do is have a conversation about the value of collaboration and partnerships with existing organizations, before they fully launch into their new venture. I almost always failed, because everybody thinks they can do it better"[40]. Support organizations serving nonprofits tend to get inquiries from smaller, start-up nonprofits who have a working board in charge of day-to-day operations and who need help with governance and systems building[41].

While national-level support organizations welcome small organizations as members, most report that these groups do not see the value in membership. Independent Sector explained, "It's usually the larger organizations engage with us more frequently. I think in part, because they have the capacity to think about issues on a more regular basis, than maybe the organizations that are local and on the ground and sort of like, 'I got too much to worry about'"[42]

The consequence is that many national organizations tailor their services to larger, more established organizations. Still, many support organizations offer membership on a sliding scale based on operating budget as a way to attract smaller organization and some have started to offer individual memberships. Global PDX found that once it offered an individual-level membership, that organizations of GINGO size tended to join as individuals at a smaller costs rather than as organizations in order to save costs, which the Coordinator says was expected: "That's fine. They're still engaged and we're still supporting them"[43].

Though seeking to make membership affordable, support organizations vary in how they conduct outreach and target their membership, but the majority do not have systematic strategies and no specific strategy to target GINGOs. Support organizations called outreach as "organic"[44]. Many of the support organizations observed that while they use different methods to "make the case of why there's value of engaging" as a member[45] and seem to "always sort of [be] pitching" membership and participation[46], they noted it often is word of mouth from peer organizations[47]. Others note that even while there is no specific outreach to GINGOs, GINGOs also did not seek them out. A state-level organization that serves organizations in international development reported occasionally seeing GINGOs request assistance, but that these overtures were the exception rather than the rule.

Other ways in which nonprofits are drawn to support organizations and are through services and resources such as access to listservs[48], job postings[49], bundling services for members, for example like group purchasing programs[50], and participating in events like legal audit clinics[51]. Still, in the end, none of these services and resources are segmented according to member type nor targeted to GINGOs, with the exception of the Posner Center (see Box 1).

Box 1: The Posner Center for International Development

The Posner Center for International Development represents a distinct model among support organizations: a membership organization of roughly 60 development NGOs, anchored in a co-working space in Denver, Colorado. Member organizations range in budget from less than $25,000 annually to $25 million. Its Program Director estimates that half of their members are GINGOs.

Posner provides an office space that is leased by GINGOs, a handful of midsize NGOs, and two large NGOs, Engineers Without Borders-USA and iDE. The office space plays a crucial role in allowing member NGOs to build capacity through intense networking and peer learning. Members have regional working groups, thematic working groups (including a monitoring and evaluation club), and a monthly meeting for executive directors. The Center does capacity building through programs offered on site—both brownbag "development dialogues" and daylong "toolbox" sessions on technical or management topics. Posner also plays a visible convening role in Colorado by hosting speakers and other events related to international development.

According to the Program Director, Posner's strengths in working with GINGOs come from physical co-presence and the opportunity for GINGOs to learn both from peers and from more established organizations. She explained, "I think a lot of them are looking …to belong to a certain degree. People who are working out of their houses or I think for a lot of them they get colleagues by coming here. They might be two in the U.S. or one in the U.S. and then they're 18 in Uganda but the day to day can be lonely." The sharing of space allows GINGO leaders to informally ask for help from more experienced development workers. In turn, GINGO leaders—often young and interested in building social bonds—"form the heart of the community" that makes the space more appealing to established NGOs and builds the overall visibility of the Center (Posner Center).

What Do Support Organizations Offer To Their Membership?

If support organizations are not yet targeting GINGOs, do they offer resources that could help them overcome their vulnerabilities as development actors? We found that support organizations offer a number of resources to address the sector's problems of amateurism and fragmentation—particularly in the area of organizational management. The support organizations we interviewed collectively offer training and compendia of best practices, opportunities for networking, informational resources, as well as representation vis-à-vis government and other

outside bodies. Support organizations that focus on international development or on nonprofit organizations generally seek "to create an environment that helps [their members] achieve their missions" and be a "facilitator" for the nonprofit or NGO sectors[52].

Specifically, support organizations national in scope are likely to play convening roles, to engage in advocacy on behalf of the sector, and to create sector-wide standards of conduct. Independent Sector publishes *Principles for Good Governance and Ethical Practice* for nonprofit organizations; similarly, Interaction has developed a set of ethical and voluntary standards for relief and development NGOs. These national-level groups employ staff to monitor pending legislation in Washington, D.C. on issues that affect members and to develop statements on behalf of members to communicate with policymakers. Additionally, these national-level groups often have well-developed training materials available online to the public. The selected state-level organizations tend to develop closer relationships with their members and to offer in-person trainings and other forms of one-on-one capacity building. These organizations might be to be more accessible for smaller nonprofits and to offer informational resources relevant to organizations at the beginning of their life cycle (for instance, guidance on incorporation and basic governance). Their networking activities are focused less on developing a shared voice for the sector and more about allowing organizations to make connections that could lead to funding, fruitful collaborations and organizational effectiveness.

Training programs

Capacity building is a central task for support organizations. One Vice President of a nonprofit state association explains: "[We seek] to help nonprofits reach their full potential. We're capacity builders at the heart so our goal is to try to bring together as many resources as we can to support nonprofits and all of their diverse needs"[53]. Support organizations often make

these training programs available to the public for a small fee, often with discounts or fee waivers for their members.

In-person workshops and conferences are the traditional techniques for offering training. Since support organizations serve nonprofits working in a variety of fields, such trainings often are centered on governance and management topics. Every nonprofit-oriented support organizations offered training in board and leadership development, financial management, fund development, strategic planning, and monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, support organizations often respond to demands for specific skill sets expressed by membership. The Minnesota International NGO Network's President reported that members identify needs for training that include fundraising, monitoring and evaluation, communication as well as marketing[54]. Organizations exclusively supporting NGOs offered training on topics relevant to international work, such as using GIS and impact evaluation in low-resource settings. But except for International Network for Education in Emergencies[55], which focuses on the education sector, these internationally-oriented organizations offered limited training on specific development sectors, likely because their membership did not achieve critical mass to demand training in any one development area.

Training models often emphasize peer learning. Independent Sector and Forefront, both nonprofit-serving organizations, run cohort-based programs that bring leaders together for a series of training sessions. Forefront's Director of Education explains: "We have found that there's a lot of benefits to that experience of moving through the cohort together. There's that networking that happens, there's the community building that happens. There's a lot of cross-pollinating that starts to happen, especially when we're focused"[56]. Here, networking is integrated into trainings for capacity building, as will be further discussed in the following

section.

Forefront also has what it calls a "micro-mentorship program" with a database of peer advisers[57]. Nonprofit leaders submit to Forefront a request for a consultation with a peer advisor. Forefront searches among its members for a match, and the advisor and advisee meet for a two-hour consultation session. Likewise, BoardSource has created an online service called "community exchange" which promotes peer exchanges for training purposes. The Director of Education explains: "through our website, … members can sign up, ask each other questions, [and] interact with BoardSource on certain issues" in order to further build their capacity[58].

Networking and peer-building programs

The examples of Independent Sector, Forefront, and BoardSource suggest support organizations' goals of capacity building and network building are closely linked. Virtually all of the organizations we interviewed named "connecting" or "networking" their members as a goal. For example, the New York Council of Nonprofits seeks "to create community"[59], Forefront in Chicago was initially started to serve foundations and they wanted "to build community amongst their grantees and [build] a network"[60]. Other terms that emerged in interviews included "communities of practice" to create learning opportunities[61] and spaces like conferences as "opportunities to connect"[62]. Support organizations want to serve as a "connector"[63], engage in "facilitating learning"[64], as well as "creat[e] a community [and to] forge relationships"[65] and form "clubs" and "infinity groups" among nonprofit leaders[66].

Why networking? The previous section suggests that networks are an important conduit for peer-based capacity building and learning. Some NGO support organizations offered thematic networks or working groups on areas such as monitoring and evaluation, water, and gender and inclusive development. The Director from Independent Sector argued that networks

are especially important to support organizations because they provide a structure to transmit the knowledge and skills that are especially salient for members. Other support organizations reflected on creating spaces for networking might specifically address challenges created by GINGOs' dispersal and inexperience. For example, Global PDX's Coordinator explained: "I think people operate in silos, and so again, they think they're the only person doing something. We have a lot of folks around here who have created a 501(c)(3) because they have a passion for a certain community, or a passion for a certain approach or whatever, but they may not necessarily know what they're doing"[67].

National-level organizations are also keen to use networks for agenda-setting. International Network for Education in Emergencies convenes several smaller networks among its members. Its Working Group on Standards and Practices generated the Minimum Standards on Education in Emergencies that are meant to guide governments and NGOs working in disaster and post-conflict settings[68]. Independent Sector relied on state and city-level networks to convene nonprofit organizations in a set of town-hall meetings that helped generate a set of sector-wide accountability standards in 2005[69].

While shared tasks and structured programs can help NGOs build their networks, the Posner Center's model of shared space provides additional informal opportunities for networking. Posner describes itself as a "themed center", not just a joint work place. It seeks to create "an environment for sharing"[70]. It draws on techniques used by incubators and Silicon Valley firms to bring their members together. The Program Director explains:

> it's about bringing together the community. .... Programmatically, every Wednesday, we do cookie thirty. Every Wednesday at 2:30, we convene for cookies … like a popup party of 15 or 20 minutes and then people go back to their desks. That's a conven[ing] thing that we do[71].

Sharing Information

In addition to capacity building and networking, most of the support organizations provide informational resources to both members and other stakeholders. Two organizations have member-only Facebook pages, where members can share information and post questions[72]. Other organizations described sharing information through member-only reports, newsletters, and webpages[73]. Additional resources provided might be job boards, access to online knowledge centers or libraries and available pro bono legal services.

Some support organizations have also sought to provide informational resources (and trainings) to organizations outside of nonprofit organizations, such as to industries that might serve their nonprofit members. For example, Independent Sector has provided information and training to lawyers and accountants about issues related to the nonprofit sector. Others have the logic that getting the word out to external stakeholders about their members will help with revenue and fund development, even when they themselves do not fundraise or provide grants for their membership. The Executive Director of Global Washington said, "The one commonality across all NGOs is they want fundraising. They want more donations. We don't do fundraising for our members. We don't do grant making, but what we've realized is we have an expertise to raise the profile of our members with a donor audience. We've structured our work now around publicity campaigns to really focus in on our members doing work"[74].

In fact, several organizations reported that resources related to funding are especially important to their members[75]. Colorado Nonprofits circulates funding announcements to its members, while Forefront has provided donor databases to its nonprofit members since the 1970s, when such databases were printed hard-copy lists gathered in binders. However, most support organizations do not themselves offer funding resources. An exception is that Posner Center has experimented with a small grant program of $3,000 to $20,000 to encourage

collaboration among its members.

All of the support organizations we interviewed have moved to offering resource exchange programs to online platforms. This includes using webinars, podcasts, and LinkedIn spaces, for examples[76]. The Boston Network for International Development provides three big categories of open-sourced information to achieve its objective to be an online network hub that includes a database of organizations that is fairly updated and robust; an ongoing and updated calendar of events, and a database of job openings for organizations, both jobs in terms of full time, paid professional jobs and also different volunteer opportunities in international development[77]. These methods of offering resources online and allowing organizations to connect across distance may be well-suited to geographically-dispersed GINGOs.

Discussion

GINGOs are small-scale development actors with expressive and voluntaristic characteristics. We contend that in order to be effective development actors, they must overcome a number of weaknesses. Because they are usually led by volunteers with little professional training in organizational management and development, they must become competent *amateurs* both in organizational management and the technical disciplines of development. While many of the groups wish to remain small, they must manage *material scarcity* so that their projects are not disrupted; other GINGOs wish to increase their budgets enough to deepen the efforts in the communities where they work. *Fragmentation* seems to be the preferred mode of operation for many GINGOs; they prefer to maintain personal relationships with their selected Southern partners, and are willing to re-invent the wheel, as long as it is their "own" wheel. Yet this combination of fragmentation with a lack of technical competence can lead to failed projects and disillusioned donors and partners. The groups are also

prone to *restricted focus* and *paternalism* as they design projects around the interests of their volunteers and donors, however, arguably larger NGOs do the same. More specific to the GINGO model, these challenges are a result of searching for emotional connection with others in the global South. Therefore, a risk is that GINGO leaders can neglect how their own efforts relate to broader power relations and the structural constraints on development.

Having identified support organizations as the bodies best positioned to work with geographically dispersed GINGOs, we turned to the question of if and how these support organizations can help GINGOs overcome these weaknesses. We found that at present, support organizations do not regularly serve GINGOs. Often support organizations have diverse membership bases and offer a wide range of services. Services related to trainings for capacity building and opportunities for networking did not have strict boundaries, rather many capacity building opportunities were linked to networking and vice versa. Informational resources are similarly linked to other services and are not only one directional (i.e., from support organizations to membership) but exchanges among peers for learning are increasingly encouraged. Furthermore, various online platforms are being explored to better build capacity and serve the NGO and nonprofit sector.

While we find that support organizations often do not target membership types nor segment their services for organizations like GINGOs, the services they provide might mediate some of the challenges that GINGOs face. We contend that of the challenges which Brown and Kalegaonkar outline, support organizations are best positioned to address *amateurism*, *material scarcity*, and to some extent *fragmentation* among GINGOs. To a lesser degree we found that support organizations are able to address issues of *paternalism* and *restricted focus*[78].

The issues related to ***amateurism,*** particularly weak organizational management and,

more common, limited experience in development aid work, can further be addressed through training and capacity building. Volunteer-run GINGOs fit into a common denominator across most small nonprofit organizations, that is, they tend to need skills related to managing a nonprofit organization such as financial management, board governance and systems building. However, while many GINGO volunteers have limited experience in managing a nonprofit organization, they likely have little expertise in international development. Technical skills related to international development, such as latrine construction or bore well design, are know-how that GINGOs might very well and are in limited supply from support organizations. In fact, support organizations are possibly not the best suited to resolve these *types* of amateurism. Even support organizations which serve NGOs in international development note that they mostly provide their membership with organizational management capacity building such as fundraising, monitoring and evaluation, communication and marketing. The Posner Center might provide the best model to serving needs related to amateurism: it intentionally brings together GINGOs and larger NGOs in ways that allow for informal and peer learning. The co-working model used by Posner relies on larger, more-experienced development NGOs to bear a significant financial burden to maintain the space, so while promising, this model is difficult to replicate.

Material scarcity is a reality for GINGOs given their lean budgets. While (again, besides Posner) support organizations did not often provide financial resources, more access to learning and informational resources about fund development might be an area where support organizations can better serve GINGOs. That is, a default mode for GINGOs is that once an organization is launched, often with the support of personal and professional contacts and networks of the founder, like many new nonprofits, a GINGO explores funding through grant

opportunities. Support organizations might be able to help GINGOs understand that fund development does not only entail grant writing. Based on our research, grants are likely not a viable nor sustainable revenue source for organizations like GINGOs. This provides an example of when support organizations might be able to in part help GINGOs recognize and understand their identity within the broader organizational field of nonprofits and NGOs. GINGOs in practice are expressive, volunteer-based organizations, and as such we contend that they are not best suited to write and, then if awarded, positioned to manage grants. Support organizations might also address material scarcity through peer learning; as managing finances in international contexts provides particular challenges, especially for those accustomed to global North practices of banking and purchasing. GINGOs can learn a good deal from peers about the realities of financial management in the field of development.

While support organizations provide good networking opportunities, we question whether or not they would engage in networking to access expertise and experience given their ***fragmentation***. However, potential solutions to these realities are peer-to-peer learning models promoted by support organizations and online opportunities. Peer learning and online platforms such as webinars, live stream training, and perhaps more flexible online forums and exchanges among peers could help engage GINGOs volunteers in networking spaces, even if their geographic dispersal in the U.S. encourages their fragmentation and isolation.

Finally, the selected support organizations are poised to address all of GINGOs' weaknesses. The problem of ***paternalism*** is a challenge given GINGOs' personalized approach to development aid. GINGO volunteers in the global North are making decisions within uncertain environments and tend to, at best not know the context where they are working well enough to always make effective decisions, and at worse implicitly or explicitly disregard local

knowledge and capacity of their global South recipient communities when making decisions. Given these consequences, how might support organizations provide spaces that allow GINGOs to critically reflect on their role as development actors? Conversations among NGOs about their failures and about the inherent contradictions of development work are difficult, even for organizations committed to critical reflection. When these conversations are facilitated by support organizations, they happen in smaller settings among professionalized peers. Support organizations face a challenge in convening GINGOs, who are motivated by expressive rationales, to reflect on the contradictions and shortcomings of their work. Finally, the issue of ***restricted focus*** is inherent in the GINGO model, thus we would argue that considering GINGOs are in the 'first generation' of development strategies as mentioned, 'solving' this issue is not a priority for support organizations.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to identify promising practices from support organizations where GINGOs might benefit. We have found that there is limited interaction between support organizations and GINGOs. However, our research suggests that there are potential practices and resources provided by support organizations that might serve GINGOs in addressing their inherent weaknesses in aid provision. Support organizations' services can help GINGOs in operational and management functions, however we find fewer opportunities that address GINGOs' technical skills in the development field. And we argue that very few support organizations have taken on any leadership in facilitating GINGOs to critically reflect on their functions and approaches in the larger development arena. The means in which support organizations could serve GINGOs, through peer learning and online opportunities in particular, would allow for building capacity even while maintaining GINGOs' expressive and voluntaristic

characteristics, keeping them distinct from other types of development actors.

We note the limitations of our exploratory study. First, we sought to understand what GINGOs might need in order to be effective development actors. Better research on the GINGOs and other citizen aid groups' development outcomes will allow us to refine our suggestions.[79] Second, our analysis focused on the possibilities for building GINGOs' capacity "at home." This research does not capture any relationships or networks in the distant places where GINGOs are operating. We assume this is less common given that GINGO leaders spend only weeks or months each year at their project sites, leaving limited time for on-site networking and learning. However, some GINGOs have noted possibilities of on-site learning, for example, one GINGO leader stated, "It's just easier to brainstorm with people [in Kenya] than back here [in Buffalo, NY USA]"[80]. The extent of networking and shared or peer learning on the ground in the global South by GINGOs and its link to building capacity deserves further research attention.

GINGOs are defined by expressive rather than instrumental action. We recognize the emotional and voluntaristic characteristics of these types of citizen aid. Our research finds that the emergent methods in which support organizations are engaging with their membership base in training, networking, and sharing information are applicable to this type of citizen aid. We owe it to the practice of development to explore further opportunities that build the capacity of citizen aid through GINGOs and similar groups. Whatever their size and however great their passion, development actors owe their partners more than re-inventing the wheel.

[1] A Schnable, New American relief and development organizations: Voluntarizing global aid. *Social Problems*, *62*(2), 2015a, 309-329.
[2] For a larger discussion on the intersection of the personal and the professional in aid work, see A Fechter, The personal and the professional: Aid workers' relationships and values in the development process. *Third World Quarterly,* 33, 2012, 1387-1404. And work by R. Chambers, Responsible well-being—a personal agenda for development', World Development, 25(11), 1997, p 1749.
[3] A Schnable, The Projects, People, and Purposes of American Grassroots International NGOs: Evidence from a National Sample. Paper presented at European Association of Development Institutes (EADI) Conference, Bergen, Norway, August 2017
[4] *Ibid*
[5] S Kinsbergen, *Behind the Pictures: Understanding Private Development Initiatives.* Ph.D. Dissertation, Radboud University, The Netherlands, 2014; see also Schulpen, L. and Kinsbergen, S. 50+ and Sexy? Ten years of research on Dutch private development initiatives. Conference paper, ISTR International Conference, Stockholm 2016 and this issue.
[6] DC Korten, *Getting to the 21st century: Voluntary action and the global agenda.* Kumarian Press, 1990.
[7] A Schnable, The Projects, People, and Purposes.
[8] A Schnable, *Do-it-Yourself Aid: The Emergence of American Grassroots Development Organizations*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 2015.
[9] J Fylkesnes, Motivation behind Norwegian Citizen Initiatives in the Gambia: A Case Study. Paper presented at 'Citizen Aid and Grassroots Humanitarianism: Development Futures?' at University of Sussex, 2018.
[10] M Conran, They really love me!
[11] S Kinsbergen, *Behind the Pictures*
[12] M Mostafanezhad, Getting in Touch with your Inner Angelina: Celebrity Humanitarianism and the Cultural Politics of Gendered Generosity in Volunteer Tourism', *Third World Quarterly,* 34(3), 2013, 485–9.
[13] H Haaland and H Wallevik, Citizens as Actors in the Development Field: The Case of an Accidental Aid-Agent's Activities in Aid-Land. In *Forum for Development Studies*, 44(2), 2017, 203-222.
[14] M Mostafanezhad, Getting in Touch with your Inner Angelina.
[15] S Appe and F Telch, Grassroots international NGOs: Using comparative interpretive policy analysis to understand meanings in private development aid. Paper presented at Journal for Comparative Policy Analysis International Comparative Policy Analysis Forum, 2017.
[16] A Schnable, *Do-it-Yourself Aid*
[17] S Appe and F Telch, Grassroots international NGOs
[18] Kinsbergen (2018)
[19] S Appe and F Telch, Grassroots international NGOs
[20] A Schnable, *Do-it-Yourself Aid*
[21] S Kinsbergen, *Behind the Pictures*
[22] A Schnable, New American relief and development organizations
[23] A Schnable, *Do-it-Yourself Aid*
[24] P Frumkin, *On being nonprofit: A conceptual and policy primer.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.
[25] LD Brown and DC Korten, *Understanding voluntary organizations: Guidelines for donors.* Policy, Planning and Research working papers; no. WPS 258. Washington, DC: World Bank, 1989.
[26] A Bies and A Blackwood, A, Accountability, ethics, evaluation, and governance in nonprofit management education: Trends and treatment. Journal of Public Affairs Education, 13(3/4), 2007 519–547; M O'Neill, Developmental contexts of nonprofit management education. Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 16, 2005, 5–17.
[27] DE Burlingame, Nonprofit and philanthropic studies education: The need to emphasize leadership and liberal arts. Journal of Public Affairs Education, 15(1), 2009, 59–67; M O'Neill, Developmental contexts of nonprofit; NB Wish and RM Mirabella, Curricular variations in nonprofit management graduate programs. Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 9, 1998, 99–110.
[28] LD Brown and A Kalegaonkar A, Support Organizations and the Evolution of the NGO Sector. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 31(2), 2002, 239.

[29] A Abramson and R McCarthy, Infrastructure organizations. In L. Salamon (Ed.), The state of nonprofit America (pp. 423-458). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2002.
[30] LD Brown and A Kalegaonkar, Support Organizations
[31] *Ibid,* p. 235
[32] *Ibid*
[33] *Ibid*
[34] LD Brown and A Kalegaonkar, Support Organizations, p. 235
[35] MB Miles and AM Huberman, Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994.
[36] Chief Executive Officer, Interaction, personal communication, February 22, 2018.
[37] Executive Director, Global Washington, personal communication, May 11, 2018.
[38] Coordinator for Standards and Practice, INEE, personal communication, March 29, 2018
[39] Director of Policy Development and Analysis, Independent Sector, personal communication, March 6, 2018
[40] *Ibid*
[41] Director of Education, BoardSource, personal communication, March 19, 2018.
[42] Independent Sector
[43] Coordinator, Global PDX, personal communication, May 3, 2018.
[44] VP, Strategic Communications & Stakeholder Engagement, New York Council of Nonprofits, Inc., personal communication, February 23, 2018.
[45] Interaction
[46] Coordinator, Global PDX, personal communication, May 3, 2018.
[47] Statewide Membership Coordinator, Colorado Nonprofits Association, personal communication, March 2, 2018, Independent Sector, Posner Center, personal communication, February 27, 2018, Coordinator, Global PDX, Accord, personal communication April 3, 2018
[48] Colorado Nonprofits, Minnesota International NGO Network, CEO, SID-W, personal communication, August 24, 2018
[49] Executive Director, Boston Network for International Development, personal communication, June 27, 2018; Minnesota International NGO Network
[50] New York Council of Nonprofits, CEO, CalNonprofits personal communication, August 7, 2018
[51] Colorado Nonprofits
[52] Independent Sector
[53] New York Council of Nonprofits
[54] Minnesota International NGO Network
[55] INEE
[56] Director of Education, Forefront, personal communication, March 15, 2018
[57] Forefront
[58] BoardSource
[59] New York Council of Nonprofits
[60] Forefront
[61] Interaction
[62] BoardSource
[63] Global PDX
[64] INEE
[65] Co-chair of Research Association Accord, personal communication, April 3, 2018
[66] Posner; Independent Sector
[67] Global PDX
[68] INEE
[69] Independent Sector
[70] Posner Center
[71] Posner Center
[72] New York Council of Nonprofits Inc.; Minnesota International NGO Network
[73] Minnesota International NGO Network
[74] Global Washington
[75] Colorado Nonprofits, Posner, Forefront
[76] Accord
[77] Boston Network for International Development

[78] LD Brown and A Kalegaonkar, Support Organizations.
[79] Kinsbergen 2018
[80] GINGO founder, personal communication, 25 July 2017