

The Bible on Nongovernmental Organizations?

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Building the Next Ark: How NGOs Work to Protect Biodiversity. By Michael M. Gunter, Jr. Hanover: Dartmouth College Press/University Press of New England, 2004. 276 pp., \$26.00 (ISBN: 1-58465-383-3).

Michael Gunter's *Building the Next Ark: How NGOs Work to Protect Biodiversity* is a well-presented volume that represents a substantial and timely contribution to the literatures on international organizations, political sociology, and environmental studies. Given the quality of the critical thinking exercise undertaken by Gunter, *Building the Next Ark* will be useful in many ways to a variety of readers. For example, regardless of their issue area, the managers and staff of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) will find it particularly worthwhile to reflect upon Gunter's analyses of the tactics, operations, and effectiveness of the 11 US-based environmental groups on which he focuses: Biodiversity Action Network; Conservation International, Defenders of Wildlife; Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund (formerly the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund); Earthwatch Institute; Environmental Defense (formerly Environmental Defense Fund); The Nature Conservancy; The Ocean Conservancy (formerly the Center for Marine Conservation); Sierra Club; World Resources Institute; and World Wildlife Fund. Policymakers, in turn, will get a glimpse at the inner workings of these NGOs and will be able to reflect upon their own responses to them. Students, teachers, and scholars interested in NGOs and civil society will find emerging theoretical frameworks that are developed in a clear, concise, if admittedly sometimes idiosyncratic, manner. Thus, *Building the Next Ark* even merits consideration as a textbook in these subject areas. In an international organization course, for instance, it might complement such basic texts as those by Archer (2001) and Pease (2003). In an environmental studies syllabus, it could work well alongside such texts as the one by Porter, Brown, and Chasek (2000) and such case studies as those by Barbara Bramble and Porter (1992) and Christopher Rootes (2004). Finally, donors wishing to assess the worthiness of NGOs as recipients of funding will find that Gunter's framework of analysis provides an additional valuable tool. All readers are likely to find *Building the Next Ark* well organized and easy to read. The text is complemented by helpful tables and photos, solid documentation, an extensive bibliography, and a list of contact addresses for the organizations studied.

Being from the United States, knowing the US scene best, and asserting that positive change in the area of biodiversity protection is more likely to be achieved with US support, Gunter makes no apology for his US focus. Moreover, even though Gunter might be accused of "methodological nationalism" (Anheier 2001:225), the biblical overtones of the book's title can, perhaps, be excused. *Building the Next Ark* is not part of the current rise of Christian fundamentalism in the United States.

Gunter is, however, on a mission. His goal is to go beyond a study of structure and role to explore the effectiveness of the organizations he studies. Gunter assesses effectiveness by answering questions about the organization's definition of issues, mobilization of support, articulation of policy proposals, and participation in program implementation. This approach responds to recent calls for efforts to clarify the term "civil society," to improve its analytical utility, and to enhance its explanatory power (Taylor 2004). Acknowledging considerable overlap, Gunter's analysis

is also informed throughout by the consideration of three sets of linkages that he suggests must be made: domestic–international (Rosenau 1997), ecological–economic, and short term–long term.

One of the most attractive features of *Building the Next Ark* is the three-pronged approach through which Gunter looks at how these NGOs work with the existing system of environmental policymaking, with other people, and within themselves. Gunter identifies two mainstream strategies that these NGOs use when working within the system: taking political action (lobbying and litigation) and being data-oriented (research, property acquisition and maintenance, and monitoring). He also conceptualizes two participatory strategies that are used for working with the public: grassroots networking and community education. His main finding with respect to the mainstream strategies is that significant gaps can be found in the ability of these organizations to make all three of the linkages he emphasizes. The domestic–international and short term–long term links suffer the most. The latter is the most underemphasized by the NGOs examined because policymaking itself tends to focus on the short term, and NGO activities reflect the preferences of the policymakers with whom they deal. This circumstance is unhealthy and is to be guarded against, notwithstanding the successes in gaining access to and implementing programs at the local level. The definition of issues and mobilization of support are still major challenges. There remains much to be done on the domestic–international front as well, especially in the areas of definition, mobility, and implementation. The most successful to date has been found in making the ecological–economic link, although the ambiguity of definitions again continues to frustrate efforts.

Turning to the participatory strategies of nongovernmental organizations, Gunter finds that, when working with other people, the combination of grassroots networking and community education improves national and transnational success because it fosters communication, enables organizations to better define issues, enhances political viability within the civil society, facilitates the mobilization of members, staff, and the public, and allows greater access to decision makers. The downside of participatory approaches is that they can be expensive and time consuming. They can also lead to a loss of focus as more and more interests come to be represented within the organization. A balance between the benefits and costs of participatory democracy must thus be sought by these organizations. When it comes to the three sets of linkages that Gunter stresses, he again finds advantages and disadvantages arising from the use of participatory strategies.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Gunter concludes that both mainstream and participatory strategies must be implemented to enhance NGO effectiveness. The two sets of strategies complement each other, and the organizations that are most successful in making the linkages he views as critical to effectiveness routinely use both, either on their own or in cooperation with other organizations. Moreover, being open to such partnerships and realizing what other groups are doing is important. But so is being willing to review and upgrade the group's own organizational structure on an ongoing basis. By looking at the organizational characteristics of NGOs (in particular, internal demographics, decision-making style, partnerships, targeted constituency, and strategic concentration), Gunter hopes to provide a way to identify the organizational supports and constraints that determine effectiveness. An understanding of these operational aspects will help NGOs find their strategic niche within the broader environmental community and help them contribute more effectively to the building of the next ark, which is what inspires Gunter's work.

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