

SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP THROUGH NGOS: THE MODEL OF SAINT JOSEPH UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability is becoming an issue of global concern. Decision makers in organizations started inverting time and energy on matter related to environment protection and resource preservation.

The Saint Joseph University Mentor Unit Model created between a University and Catholic Relief Services, an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) is aiming to develop in Lebanon a vibrant civil society that will effectively contribute to sustainable development and promote democracy.

The objective of the program is to select nascent NGOs and train them on financial and managerial systems. To turn them into solid NGOs that donors can trust and provide them funds. These NGOs will be able over time to contribute effectively to sustainable development in environment protection, youth enhancement, women empowerment and other issues.

Keywords: Sustainability, leadership, NGO, managerial know how, financial know how, strengthening, training, development, donors, nascent NGOs.

RÉSUMÉ

La durabilité est un facteur qui attire de plus en plus l'intérêt et l'attention des décideurs dans les entreprises. Ces derniers allouent plus de temps et d'énergie aux thèmes relatifs à la protection de l'environnement et à celle des ressources naturelles.

Le USJ (Université Saint-Joseph)-Mentor Unit est une entité opérationnelle créée en collaboration entre l'USJ et le CRS (Catholic Relief Services). Le CRS est une ONG qui œuvre pour promouvoir au Liban une société civile dynamique qui serait appelée à jouer un rôle effectif dans le développement durable et la promotion de la démocratie.

Le programme que le USJ-Mentor Unit se propose d'appliquer consiste à la sélection des ONG naissantes et donner à leurs membres des formations dans les domaines de la finance et du management. L'objectif étant de consolider ces ONG afin qu'elles puissent gagner la confiance des bailleurs de fonds. Ces ONG pourraient dans le long terme jouer un rôle actif dans le développement durable, la protection de l'environnement, le renforcement de la jeunesse, la responsabilisation et l'évolution du statut des femmes et bien d'autres domaines encore.

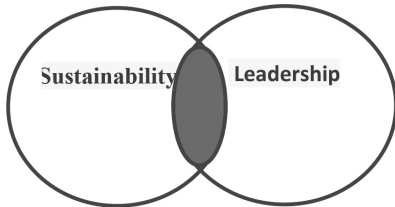
Mots-clés : Développement durable, leadership, ONG, savoir-faire managérial, savoir-faire financier, renforcement, formation, bailleurs de fonds, NGO naissantes.

Sustainability leadership through the Institutional Strengthening Program of NGOs: The Model of Saint Joseph University of Lebanon.

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainability leadership is a burgeoning field. It has emerged as a topic in its own right in recent years. One way of reading the concept is looking at it as a holistic concept. Sustainability leadership can be represented as the overlap between sustainability and leadership as shown in the following figure:



According to a survey of 766 United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) member CEOs (Accenture & UNGC 2010), 93% of CEOs see Sustainability as important to their community’s future success.

According to Knowles (2009) sustainability as understood and implemented by sustainable leaders means integrity and defending the principles of sustainable development. This means “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (Meadow, 1972).

In the turbulent environment of the 21st Century, our collective struggle as a society to tackle the world’s most pressing challenges points to a failure of individual leadership. When being exposed to international media and news of the world we are inclined to think that we have lacked the quality and quantity of bold leadership in business, government and civil society that would enable us to shift towards a more just and sustainable 21st century lifestyle.

The task of creating a more sustainable world is both a serious challenge and an enormous opportunity but the question remains whose role is this?

Without effective leadership – at a political, institutional and individual level – we will fail to resolve our most serious social and environmental crisis.

In this paper after a quick literature review highlighting various aspects of interest authors attach to the sustainability leadership concept, we will focus on the role of civil society in paving the road for active sustainability leadership in developing societies.

We will present the experience of providing “Institutional strengthening programs” to nascent NGOs in order to allow them to start playing the change agent role in their environment, in the absence of political and/or governmental instances.

The empirical part will be purely descriptive. It will expose the new experience of the Saint Joseph University of Beirut in providing the tools of sustainability leadership for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) in Lebanon. Capacity building is presented as one such tool of sustainability leadership. Given their non-profit status, NGOs’ activities are not hindered by financial objectives, accordingly they will be able to devote themselves to issues which occur across longer time horizons.

The selected nascent NGOs are active in areas that represent interesting axes of sustainability for developing societies such as women empowerment, youth support, and environment protection. Their efforts are planned to lead to sustainability through the strong professional networks that are being built among them and also through the power of their advocacy campaigns.

CORE SUBJECT

Although recent as a concept, the literature dealing directly with sustainability development is not older than three decades, but it has attracted the attention of authors in various disciplines. We will be exposing the contributions these authors brought to the business activities of “for profit organizations” and those for “not for profit” organizations such as the NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations).

We will look at each component of the expression: “sustainability leadership” separately as a start and through the paper we will make the link of both terms used together in the business field as well as in the activities of “not for profit organizations” that will be identified as NGOs

(Non-Governmental Organizations) or CSOs (Civil Society Organizations).

The Cambridge Institute for sustainability leadership research suggests the following seven key characteristic traits and styles as the most important in distinguishing the leadership approach taken by individuals tackling sustainability issues:

1. Systematic interdisciplinary understanding
2. Values orientation that shapes culture
3. Emotional Intelligence and caring attitude
4. An inclusive style that engenders trust
5. A strong vision for making a significant difference
6. A willingness to innovate and be radical
7. A long term perspective on impacts.

Digging into the abundant literature on leadership and disregarding the trait /style school of leadership (McCall & Lambardo, 1983; Tannenbaun & Schmidt, 1973), the situational/context school (Hersey & Branchard, 1999; Vroom & Yetton, 1973) and the Contingency/Interactionist school (Fiedler, 1971; De Vries, 2001) and given the framework of this paper, we would rather focus on the practical tenets of leadership as described by Goffee & Jones (2009). We believe their contribution best fits the leadership definition that will be used as guidelines of our research and narrows the gap with the Cambridge Institute for sustainability leadership research.

For Goffee & Jones (2009):

1. Leadership is relational, it needs followers – it is something done with people. It is a relationship that needs to be monitored and cultivated.
2. Leadership is non-hierarchical. Leaders can be found at all levels regardless of the title or authority.
3. Leadership is contextual

We can conclude that leadership “needs” people. Individuals who can think “different” and have the courage to push situations forward.

As for the “sustainability”, part of the “sustainability leadership” expression, there is also a rich literature that examines the relationship between different aspects of sustainability, and organizational performance. For example a striking number of articles and/or academic publications analyze the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Financial Performance. Many authors link sustainability to CSR. It is under this angle that we will expose the sustainability part of the expression.

Orlitzky et al (2003) conclude that CSR is positively correlated with Financial Performance.

In a recent systematic analysis, Pelloza (2009) finds also positive though small relationship between CSR and Financial Performance.

The conclusion of a study published on January 2011 in the Journal of Business Ethics provides evidence that being added on the DJSI (Dow Jones Sustainability World Index) results in sustained increase in a firm's share price.

Companies that are leaders with regard to sustainability may have incorporated organizing principles that are surprise avoiding (Frederick, 1995; King, 1995).

The challenge for companies becomes how to build a reputation for sustainability.

The desire for companies to credibly signal socially and environmentally responsible behavior and to benefit from a good reputation has contributed to the development of a whole new business sector. A sector that is charged with reviewing and reporting on the sustainability activities of companies. (Fowler & Hope (2007).

Inclusion in socially responsible invest (SRI) fund and indexes may be one way to build a reputation for being socially and environmentally responsible.

There is evidence that decision makers start to invest time and energy in sustainability issues.

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies can be spread over a continuum starting with an absence of response (do nothing) to a proactive response (do much) (Caroll, 1979, p. 501) to environmental factors and forces.

These two extremes may be an interpretation of the responsibility of the company, focusing mainly on the profitability of the activities. (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Between these two milestones companies can implement a wide range of strategies that find the best fit between company resources and environmental trends.

The new trends in our environment are definitely challenging our understanding of how best to manage issues such as human impacts on the general environment and how best to govern and make decisions. A sustainability leader is someone who inspires. He should try to accommodate:

- a- Rapid technological evolution that sometimes creates new hopes and sometimes new problems.
- b- Continuing uncertainties in ecological knowledge and understanding, requiring adaptive management approaches and the application of the precautionary principle.

Sustainability becomes an issue of global concern. The world knows no ecological boundaries and political and economic boundaries are fading. Implementing sustainability presents all sectors of society with similar questions, issues and challenges not only for organizations competing for market share but also for CSOs or NGOs who might become vested by a role to play in the absence of governmental contribution to social welfare.

NGOs may be considered as agents creating a "Civil Framework" for new business by making socially and environmentally responsible decision making a pre requisite for future commercial success (Jim Bendell, 2000).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played major role in pushing for sustainable development at the international level. With the absence of the State from a number of public function and regulatory activities in many countries and specifically in developing countries NGOs have begun to fix their sights on powerful corporations many of which can rival entire nations in terms of their resources and influence. NGOs have helped to focus attention on the social and environmental externalities of business activities.

For example Greenpeace remains unique and effective in bearing witness to environmental injustices and taking peaceful direct action to expose global environmental problems and bringing about solutions that ensure a green and peaceful future. Greenpeace with the support of thousands of activists demanded that Kimberly-Clark manufacturer of Kleenex stop using trees from the Boreal Forest in Canada to manufacture tissues. In a publication, March 2010, titled "Caught Red Handed" Greenpeace is condemning Nestlé's use of palm oil because of its devastating effect on rainforest, climate and orangutans.

The most pressing question of our time is now: how to couple rapidly expanding global markets, social concerns, where contrasts between economic rights and wealth creating capacity on one side and the neglect of other concerns are most striking and consequential.

NGOs may be considered as the watchdog of globalization. When businesses engage with NGOs, a learning process takes place, since this relationship presents high potential in redefining the roles and responsibilities of the private and public sector and is more and more accepted by decision makers and engaged citizens in developed economies.

The objective of the following paragraph is to define a setting for the role NGOs can play in the globalized environment. The focus will be on the NGOs who are finding an arena for their activities that will be shared, accepted and supported by organizations concerned about their image in the business community. When selecting a definition for the term NGO we will adopt the common understanding that NGOs “are groups whose declared objective is the promotion of environmental and / or social goals rather than the achievement of any form of power be it economic, political or other” (Bendell, 2000).

By narrowing more our focus we will look at the “second generation strategies of development oriented NGOs.” (Kurten, 1990) (cf appendix 2)

According to Kurten (1987, 1990) “the second generation strategies of development oriented NGOs” are focusing on promoting small scale, self-reliant community development, in order to develop the capacities, linkages and commitments required to address designated needs on a sustained basis.

However for NGOs to be able to play properly their roles in moving environments they need to be well organized, with a good managerial approach allowing them to find the best allocation of available but scarce resources starting from human resource, to financial, material resources and other.

The need to strengthen the ability of NGOs to fulfill multiple and increasingly complex roles has been identified time and again by NGOs themselves, by donor agencies and by governments. (ASPBAE and IFCB, 1999a, 1999b; Fowler, 2000; Kaplan, 1999).

As mentioned earlier in this paper, capacity building is presented as a tool for developing sustainability leadership.

Among the vast range of definitions given to the concept of capacity building we will rely on the definition adopted by the UNDP, (1997): “Capacity Development is the process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions and societies increase their abilities to:

- a- Perform functions, solve problems, define and achieve objectives.
- b- Understand and deal with their development needs in a broad context and in a sustainable manner.

As already explained ,“sustainability” becomes a concern for business decision makers who want their activities to get market attention and who engage in Corporate Social Responsibility (CRS).While sustainability for Civil Society Organizations (CSO) means to be given “from engaged citizens” or donors a role as active change agents in their environments.

We will be presenting in the next section a new Model created between a University and an NGO for providing institutional strengthening program for Nascent NGOs in order to enhance their sustainability and to allow them acting as change agents.

The approach is exploratory and descriptive, since it is aiming to investigate onto the guidelines necessary to provide to the CSOs the required resources for the implementation of their programs or projects.

Funds are the critical and basic resource needed by NGOs who want to be active and play a role in their environment.

While for donors, to provide resource, they need to believe in the sustainability of the NGOs. Capacity building for sustainability may be a means for bridging the gap between their need for funds and the donors' willingness to "provide funds".

The USJ (Saint Joseph University of Lebanon) Mentor (Middle East NGO Training and Organizational Development Response) Unit Model is aiming to bridge this gap.

The USJ Mentor Unit has been operating for the last two years in this field.

The model has two components. It is built on two strong academic pillars namely the Faculty of Business Administration and Management (FGM) and the Lebanese School of Social work (ELFS). It gets the support of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) operating as an NGO.

In the framework of this program USJ Mentor Unit offers:

- A participatory assessment of NGOs internal capacities
- General training sessions and workshops
- Ongoing mentoring and coaching
- Networking opportunities
- Donor fair to introduce NGO partners to potential donors.

Because the issue of capacity building for sustainability is so central to all stakeholders and specifically to donors. (ASPBAE and IFCB, 1999a, 1999b).

Until today donors funding is still overwhelmingly provided through project funding, but projects have a finite funding lifetime. The core questions remain:

- How will NGOs be able to survive?
- How will they be able to support administrative costs while looking for new sources of funding for new projects?

It is very difficult if not impossible, to obtain funding for administrative costs such as salaries, the cost of renting a building and other miscellaneous expenses.

The answer to this issue may be probably found in the sustainability and even in the concept of "sustainability leadership".

Among the values and principles of partnership, as stated in the project partnership agreement signed between the Catholic Relief Services and Saint Joseph University, we may quote:

"...to sustainably and safely strengthen the effectiveness and the credibility of nascent and renewed NGOs in Lebanon, while enhancing their respective capacities."

The aim is to develop a vibrant civil society in Lebanon that effectively contributes to sustainable development, and promotes participatory democracy.

The program was planned over two years period. It comprised a ten month intensive training program for round one and another ten month intensive training program for round two. The participating NGOs in each round are different but selected along similar criteria.

At the end of each round the partner NGOs were given small grants for the implementation of a project. This was aimed to be an exercise for networking and at the same time to be field experimentation for the acquired knowledge.

The selection criteria for the applicant NGOs are the following:

- 1- NGOs from all over Lebanon
- 2- Legally registered as a Lebanese NGO
- 3- Newly established (maximum 3 years) or resuming their activities (even if registered for more than 3 years)

- 4- Already engaged or willing to engage in advocacy and/or Public awareness
- 5- Working or willing to work in coalitions and networks
- 6- Demonstrating existence of/or possibility for an active and transparent administrative board
- 7- Having an identified location
- 8- Showing commitment for the whole program period of approximately 10 months
- 9- Having a minimum of two paid staff members and/or three board members willing to invest time and effort in the capacity building process and to pass on learning to other members and staff

32 NGOs have applied for the first round and 16 have been selected.

39 NGOs have applied for the second round and 15 have been selected. The second round is still going on to date (July 2015).

Aware of the broad range of concerns expressed in the relevant literature of capacity building, the USJ-Mentor program covers the financial as well as the managerial aspects of NGO development.

In line with the set of general characteristics that any capacity building initiative should have (PIANGO and UNITEC, 1999) the program is structured, yet flexible; long term and process oriented, based on shared values and built on strengths. It is context specific, enhanced by strong relationships and it is multi-faceted.

The training topics are:

- Basics in NGO legal management
- Strategic thinking
- Basics in financial management
- Advocacy
- Project cycle marketing and proposal writing
- Budgeting and cost allocation
- Fundraising
- Labor law and social security
- Social media for NGOs

At the start of the program a participatory assessment of internal capacities of selected NGOs is implemented. The assessment is both financial and managerial. It is a practical and participatory tool to determine the management and financial capacities of partner NGOs and to identify areas that need improvement and areas of strength that are to be maintained.

Areas covered for the managerial assessment are:

- Identity, governance and organizational structure
- Strategic planning
- General marketing
- Human resources
- Project development and management
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Fundraising and networking
- Advocacy

As mentioned earlier the managerial assessment is a practical and participatory tool to determine the marketing capacity of a partner CSO and to identify areas that need improvement and areas of strength to maintain.

The financial management capacity of the CSO, partner organization, is assessed through the evaluation of the following areas:

- Documentation and record keeping
- Cash and banks management
- Financial systems
- Budgeting
- Staff and Payroll
- Procurement, fixed and current assets

Everybody is involved in the assessment phases, board as well as staff members.

The general training sessions and workshops are tailored according to the salient common needs of the nascent NGOs.

Along with the regular training sessions, NGO partners are subject to personalized mentoring and coaching sessions. The mentoring and coaching session objectives is to help upgrade NGOs scores from High or Medium risk to Low risk on a list of financial and managerial factors.

For the purpose of this evaluation an attitude scale measurement questionnaire is used with a series of specific characteristics.

Mentoring and evaluation activities are implemented at the mid-point time of the round and at the end of the program in order to evaluate the progress and the growth in organizational capacities over time. Nascent NGOs are under resourced and they may find difficulties to meet the increasing demands being placed on them by donors, this is why the path of growth can be a determining element in having access to funds.

At the end of the first round (program ended November 2014) the following results were recorded:

- 100% of partner NGOs rated Low risk on identity and governance, on general management, in project management, fund raising and networking know how.
- General over all evaluation: 68% of NGOs ranked Low Risk and 32% of NGOs ranked Medium Risk with an initial evaluation of High Risk for around 80% of partner NGOs.
- More than 80% had written their internal comprehensive policies and procedures meaning that the NGO will be able to survive regardless of the persons involved either as board members or as employees or volunteers.
- At the managerial level, while the baseline results report 94% High risk NGOs, the final assessment results show that 87.5% of the NGOs are now at Low Risk and that only 12.5% of NGOs are at Medium risk.
- At the financial level, out of the 16 NGOs assessed 32% are now at Low Risk, 50% at Medium Level and 18% remained at High Risk. This brings the overall average of improvement related to all 16 NGOs at the organizational level to 51.09%. While 75% of the NGOs have demonstrated a progress above 40%, only 25% of them have a progress below 40%.
- 100% of them are using modern accounting software for their daily, regular operations. Respecting the requirement of the accounting processes.
- 12% have been granted funds by international donors.

The feedback from the NGO partner members is positive, as they highly value the experience with the Mentor Unit Model Program and they consider it as an important turning point in the life of their organization.

Some quotes from members of partner NGOs:

“We have gained a lot of knowledge and know how that helped us be more confident to undertake sustainable projects and programs.”

“Now the NGO has a clear way on how to create managerial and financial policies and become professional in regard to the government and the donors.”

“CRS’s generous support, in terms of offering the policies and procedures, is a very valuable resource for us. This will truly make us more credible and better established as a NGO.”

“The subjects are much targeted in both training and coaching sessions that are very necessary for the development of the NGO.”

At the end of round one, partner NGOs were asked to network together and to submit a project eligible for a grant.

Four projects have been written respecting the rules of international proposal writing for grant allocation and were submitted to the selection committee. All four were selected for grant allocation since they scored high on the evaluation criteria used by the Mentor Unit team with the collaboration of Catholic Relief Service representatives.

The areas of activity were related either to youth, or to create awareness, train school teachers on civic issues to be further transmitted to school students all over the Lebanese territory or to various environmental protection projects.

The experience of building the bridges between the academic world and the activities of NGOs engaged as active members in civil society has shown the importance of the collaboration. Both parties gained experience with mutual enrichment. The final step of the program is a donor fair with the ultimate objective of facilitating the interaction between the USJ-Mentor program, NGO partners and the international and local donors. The Nascent NGOs will be given the opportunity to show their know how in developing long term objectives , plans and their fund raising and advocacy skills.

The donors will be able to identify the areas in which these NGOs are active and they will have the chance to better evaluate their potential as future beneficiaries of funds. In recent years the term capacity building has become very widely used by governments, donor agencies, NGOs and civil society organizations.

Why the concept has attained such prominence is often answered by reference to the role NGOs and civil society organizations could play, should play and are playing in their various national and local contexts.

However the model still needs to identify the best criteria in impact measurement and to agree an international understanding of impact measurement.

CONCLUSION

As a concluding note we may mention that NGOs need funds to survive.

Donors are looking for NGOs they can trust i.e NGOs that have the ability to adopt systems and implement processes that will allow reaching the goals they set for their programs, overcoming the managerial and financial difficulties.

In other words donors tend to support partners that do not unduly deplete human or financial resources and that avoid exerting negative damage on the surrounding community. This is one form of sustainability leadership because it shows shared responsibility, because it matters, because it spreads and because it lasts.

And referring back to the leadership approach as presented by the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership research, the USJ-Mentor Model presents the characteristics of leadership suggested by the research.

The Model is the first experience in the Middle East between a University and an NGO contributing effectively to sustainable development and promoting participatory leadership democracy.

This ends up as “a strong vision for making a significant difference” and why not allowing for the future development of a regional strategy for capacity building driven by the NGOs themselves. This role played by the NGOs will be the result of the absence of regional or national authorities who leave the space vacant.

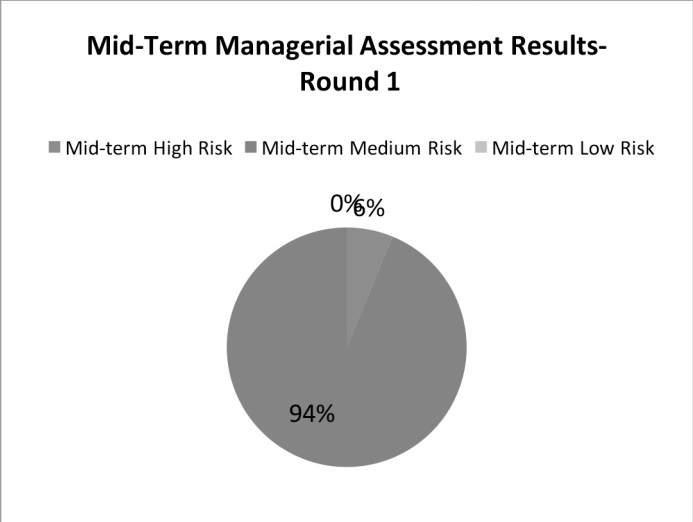
“A sustainability leader is someone who inspires and supports action towards a better world.”

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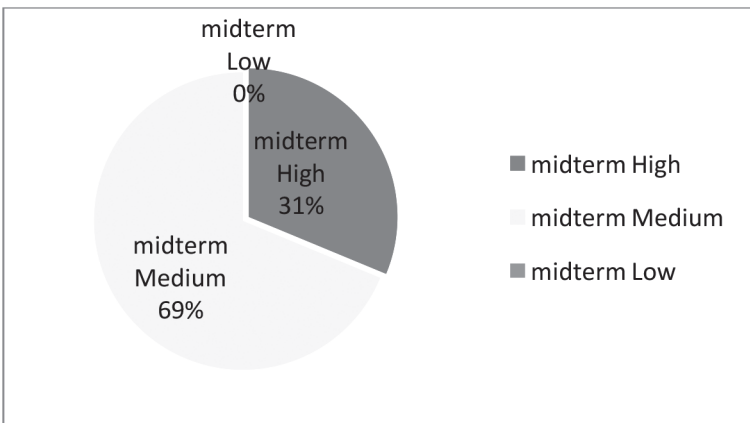
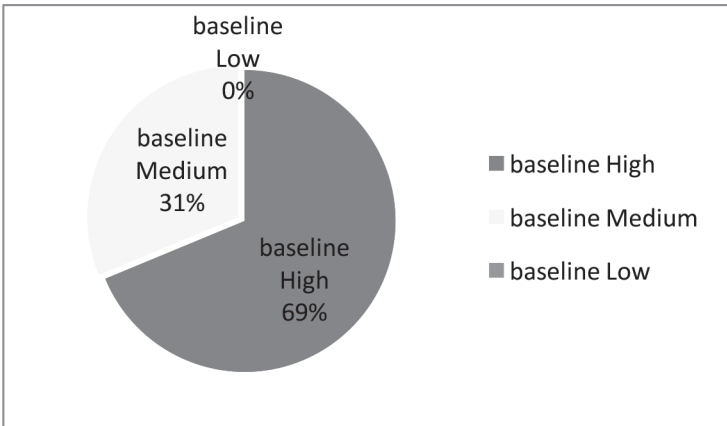
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APPENDIX I : Baseline managerial and Financial Assessment Results –Round I and Mid program Managerial and Financial assessment



Financial assessment results – project start and mid project evaluation



APPENDIX 2- Strategies of Development-oriented NGOs: Four Generations

Source: David C Kurten (1990): "Getting to the 21st Century – voluntary action and the global agenda."

	Generation			
	First	Second	Third	Fourth
	Relief and welfare	Community Development	Sustainable systems development	People's movements
Problem definition	shortage	Local inertia	Institutional and policy constraints	Inadequate mobilizing vision
Time frame	immediate	Project file	10 to 20 years	Indefinite future
Scope	Individual or family	Neighborhood or village	Region or nation	National or global
Chief actors	NGO	NGO + community	All relevant public and private institutions	Loosely defined networks of people and organizations
NGO role	doer	mobilizer	catalyst	Activist/educator
Management orientation	Logistics management	Project management	Strategic management	Coalescing and energizing self-managing networks
Development education	Starving children	Community self-help	Constraining policies and institutions	Spaceship earth

