

Watched by Many: How Legitimacy Concerns Drive HIV/AIDS Activist NGOs' Linkage Decisions

Viewed from a resource dependence perspective (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are assumed to strategically engage in relationships with other organizations that are conducive to their survival in a finite resource space. An international network of NGOs and governmental organizations (IGOs) is involved in battling the HIV/AIDS epidemics. Four HIV/AIDS organizational forms can be differentiated: Activist, service, membership, and research organizations (Shumate, Fulk, & Monge, 2005). While the first type of NGOs assumes a challenging position towards governmental bodies and legal institutions in its struggle for achieving human rights issues of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the latter three work within the existing political status quo. Thus, the needs for organizational legitimation differ between activist and non-activist NGOs. Expected to maintain their antagonistic status towards IGOs and avoid cooptation by government officials, activist NGOs incur high costs when they link with IGOs because such connections may be viewed as inappropriate behavior by their constituencies. This means that activist NGOs have to carefully balance potentially damaging effects of links to IGOs on their legitimacy with their advantages, which may come in the form of governmental funds and institutional support. It is argued that these specific legitimation concerns can be detected when the development of the whole network is examined. Based on a stochastic actor-oriented model, an analysis of the evolution of the HIV/AIDS network from 1995-2001 in SIENA provides insights into these linking decisions of activist NGOs.

References

- Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. R. (1978). *The external control of organizations: A resource dependence perspective*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Shumate, M., Fulk, J., & Monge, P. (2005). Predictors of the international HIV-AIDS INGO network over time. *Human Communication Research*, 31, 482-510.