

Online course on northern NGOs in international cooperation: a hands-on experience with internet tools by Olivier Berthoud

A brief presentation of the course

This entirely online, open and distance course is restricted to professionals with several years of experience in International Development Cooperation in NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations) or Governments, in the South or in the North. The two basic goals are (a) to provide better knowledge of what are the identity, role, challenges and potential of Northern NGOs, basically European, and (b) to afford a hands-on experience with some Internet tools.

In 1999 Northern NGO channeled around 7 billion dollars of foreign aid, which is far more than the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) or many bilateral Agencies. How is the growing dependency of NGOs on official aid affecting them? What weaknesses are challenging them? What are the principal trends and discussion issues among them? What will they be like in ten years? Through the course you will also get familiar with and be learning to use some internet tools, such as search tools and discussion forum. The course is given by Olivier Berthoud, SDC staff, who has a wide experience in teaching in different contexts, and has been working these last 19 years for and with NGO in Development Cooperation, 14 years in the field mostly in Latin America and 5 years in SDC's headquarters in Bern.

To participate in the course you need to have access to a computer with an Internet connection and a browser, and connect 2 to 5 hours a week in several sessions, at times of your convenience. The course is 7 weeks long, and it will demand you between 6 and 8 hours a week of work. The course admission fee is US\$ 200 and you have to add to that your local communication fees to access your Internet provider as well as the printing cost of some material you will wish to rather read offline. The course is organized by Edinter.net and supported by the [Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation](#) (SDC, Berne) and [the Swiss Coalition of Development Organizations](#), although these institutions cannot be held responsible in anyway for the form and content of this course. A participation certificate will be delivered to students satisfactorily responding to the evaluation criteria.

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Course pre-requisites:

1/ You are working in a Southern or Northern Country - where you come from does not matter -, and you have several years of experience in Development Cooperation within NGOs or Government. You will be admitted on the basis of your experience and not of your actual academic grades. You should have at least a passive understanding of English.

2/ You have access to the Internet with a browser (Netscape or Explorer 3 or higher, Mac or PC) and you are familiar with the basic functions of a browser (find a site, page back, work with several windows). That means that you are familiar with a Word Processor and e-mail as well. During the course, we will not be able to help you with problems related to these issues. Computer system requirements: IBM or compatible (486/33 CPU minimum) with Windows or MAC or compatible with 6.05 operating system or higher, 8 megabytes RAM, 20 megabytes free hard disc space, modem with a 9600 baud rate minimum.

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Expected student outcomes

1/ A better understanding of how the identity, goals and strategies of Northern NGO affect their relation with their partners in the Southern countries, their negotiating margins of maneuver and their real (open or hidden) agendas.

2/ A better knowledge of how to retrieve useful information from the Web without losing time and a practical and critical idea and feeling of some basic communication and learning tools available on Internet.

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Course methodology

The course is 7 weeks long, and it will demand you between 6 and 8 hours a week of work. The course will be mostly asynchronous, that means that you will have to connect to the course sites with Internet 3 or 4 times a week, but at times of your convenience, for a total connection time of 2 to 5 hours a week. You will not have to load on your computer any additional software for the course. You will have readings to do, some compulsory and others optional, and you are expected to actively take part in the online discussion forums. You will have some assignments to fulfill, mostly individual work on issues that you will choose, and some group work. A final assignment will be discussed among peers.

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Course general topics

The background, the role and the strategies of NGOs as actors in the Civil Society.

Some confusion exists on the specific role of NGOs. Are they Civil Society? What are their background, their role and their constituencies? Whom are they speaking for? What has been and should be their role in a changing world and in influencing change? Are they fit for acting locally in a global world? What are their strategies in the short and the long term?

The growing dependency of NGOs on official aid as an identity threat.

The growth in number as well as in resources of Development NGOs this last decade is mostly due to an increase in the official aid channeled through NGOs. What impact do these close relationships with governments have on NGOs identity, independence and sustainability? How are the major NGOs in the OECD countries addressing these issues?

Accountability and performance assessment as vital challenges.

Accountability is one of the major dilemmas of development cooperation. How can you do a good job with people from a different background (the poor) when paid by other people living far away? When your first motivation is to help (the poor) how do you accept that your performance should be measured? The impact of NGOs intervention has been strongly questioned these last years: what lessons can be learnt from these studies at an international level?

Scaling up and mainstreaming as weaknesses and potentials.

NGOs have built their reputation on small scale projects with participatory and innovative approaches. Few were able to scale up their local experience. What are the factors limiting or favoring the expansion or the multiplication of successful projects?

NGOs have been innovative in testing new solutions to old problems. What are the limitations to making these new solutions regional or national policies, and thereby expanding the impact of local experience?

Resources and tools for further information and learning

An introduction to the main databases, publications and Internet resources on NGOs and development cooperation as well as a hand-on experience with Internet tools will help you deepen and keep updated your knowledge after the course.

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Description of content

This course is offered online in 7 weekly sessions. Sessions start on Tuesday.

Before session 1: You should take the introductory tour to the Web platform that will be used during the course.

Session 1: An introduction to the course and resources, preview of the subjects to be covered. Personal work will include a pre-test and a brief biography.

Session 2: Northern NGOs. What are we talking about? An introduction to the history of these institutions. Their principal goals and strategies. Different ways of classifying them. humanitarian assistance and development aid. Personal work will include writing a brief paper.

Session 3: Identity and role of Northern NGO and their relation to the State. Common characteristics and variety in a diversity of national contexts. Transnational and multinational NGOs. Specialized and emerging NGOs. Personal work will include a role play in a live online chat.

Session 4: A case study: the Swiss NGO scene. Major and minor actors. Classification methods. Particularities of the Swiss Institutional set-up. Financial relations with the Government. Fund raising policies. Accounts and accountability. The image of themselves and of their partners in their campaigns. Personal work will include a sketch of your final work.

Session 5: What is the impact of NGOs? Evaluation, self-evaluation and planning methods. Meta-evaluations of NGO impact. Personal work will include a Internet search on an issue of your choice.

Session 6: What future for NGOs? Some basic challenges: accountability, scaling up, mainstreaming, global issues and local action. Within or outside of the system. Emergency Aid as a threat. True partnership with or dominant role over Southern NGOs. Relations to corporate world. Personal work will include writing your final paper.

Session 7: Students' work discussion and wrap up. Grades. Course evaluation.

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Course evaluation

The course evaluation will be based on: 30% of the grade for your participation in the discussion forum, 40% for the 4 partial assignments. 30% for your final assignment. The certificate will be given for a 80% grading.

Resources

All resources needed for the course will be made available on line at the beginning of the course. A CD-ROM with these resources will be shipped to students from developing countries with a slow or expensive internet connection.

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Your comments are welcome. Please mail them to Olivier Berthoud at:

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