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## The Role of the State and NGOs in Development

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### Abstract

The number of NGOs during the last two decades has grown enormously, both at the national and international level, as has their role and influence. The rising relevance, influence and public attention that the NGOs scene enjoys — not seldom encouraged by spectacular actions — raises a number of issues and questions that the paper attempts to address. These include, apart from the difficulties to define an NGO, their role and relationship vis-à-vis the State, their source of legitimacy, their efficiency and accountability. In relation to government institutions are NGOs better suited to work at grassroots level and in locally based development programs? Should governments instead address the macro policy and institutional framework issues? Who conveys legitimacy to NGOs and to whom are they accountable?

But NGO's influence today reaches far above the boundaries of individual states; they play an active and increasing role in shaping globalisation processes and global governance. Is this development reflecting a move away from the nation state to global decision-making processes as national governments are no longer sufficient to make decisions on transboundary issues, such as development, environment and gender? Can internationally acting NGOs take on mediating and coordinating functions?

The important role that NGOs play in national and international decision making suggests a need to create formal ways for their involvement in institutions of global governance, as for example in the WTO. This could benefit global governance institutions by mobilizing public support for their actions and raise NGOs legitimacy and responsibility.

**Keywords:** Global governance, legitimacy, grassroot level