

Public Goods and NGOs in a Globalizing World

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What are public goods in a globalizing world? It is not self-evident. In general, public goods are defined as non-rival and non-excludable goods. However, the concept of “public” itself is now being discussed. This is particularly true in the case of international relations. It depends on our values, and NGOs are influential in formulating social norms. Thus, NGOs are engaged in so-called norm entrepreneurship.

Why are NGOs allowed to participate in managing public goods in our international society? It is a question of legitimacy. Hall and Bierstecker focus on the emergence of private authority in global governance. They argue that NGOs have moral authority while business corporations have private authority; they are widely supported by citizens of civil society, and they are fair and neutral. NGOs are also professional in their activities. All of these contribute to the increase in the legitimacy of NGOs as actors in managing public goods.

Some public goods are inconsistent with others; for example, environmental protection and poverty alleviation may conflict with each other under certain circumstances. Global governance theory was proposed to discuss this sort of complex problem, and this makes a difference to international regime theory. In practice, many devices have been invented; for example, political conditionality linking economic assistance with human rights protection, etc. NGOs are active in observing these devices.