

# UNCSD

Topic:

Empowerment of grassroots organizations

Directors:

Valeria Escudero - Mario Genit



## LETTER FROM DIRECTOR:

Welcome to the Commission on Social Development! My name is Valeria Escudero and I am excited to be your director at this CarMUN virtual edition, and to be co-director along with Mario!

About me, I graduated from Carmelitas back in 2015, the same year we organized the first edition of CarMUN, and since then I have participated every year as director. My MUN career began in 2014, with my first school conference and since then I have not stopped. In 2016 I joined Peruvian Debate Society and participated in Harvard conferences in both Lima and Boston, and currently, I am Chief Advisor for the HNMUN team. I am cursing my last year of university at Universidad de Lima studying Marketing, and currently working in Qroma (Corporación Peruana de Productos Químicos).

Throughout my MUN experience, I have never discussed a topic that has important relevance in the development of societies, such as grassroots organizations. And it is important to notice the high impact they have in Perú, being a principal factor in the working force of big corporations/sectors in the organization and formulation of strategies to find beneficial opportunities over some oppressions in communities. While I was reading about these organizations and their motivations to work, I found an interview video uploaded by the Barnard Center for Research on Women<sup>1</sup> to N'Tanya Lee about grassroots organizations (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cnz5Wmb-oUg>) that I personally think is a good way of having a first approach to the topic. I hope this guide helps you connect with the topic and that you find it as interesting as I do. So, if you have any questions, please feel free to reach me or Mario or any of our Assistant Directors. Prepare your best solutions, and don't forget to be ready to get out of your comfort zone! See you in October!

Best,

**Valeria E.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bcrw.barnard.edu/>



## LETTER FROM DIRECTOR:

Dear delegates,

On behalf of the Commission for Social Development, please allow me to send you our warmest regards and welcome you all to the committee! My name is Mario Genit and I will be your director alongside Valeria Escudero for the CSocD in this virtual edition of Carmelitas Model UN.

Foremost, I would like to introduce myself so that you know a bit more about me. Model UN had become an important part of my life since my first contact with it. Not much time has passed since then, but the experiences and joyful moments that had been lived are worth a lifetime. I began my Model UN journey surrounded by amazing people and each time I participated in a new conference I met incredible delegates that became invaluable friends who made me understand the real meaning of these worthwhile debates. Despite my short time with the delegation of Carmelitas, the effort given to each debate helped me develop abilities, participate at Harvard's Model UN conference (HMUN) and earn several delegation awards that motivated me in order to keep debating while at university. I'm currently studying law at Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú and I'm also a first-year delegate from Peruvian Debate Society.

Due to my enthusiasm for the humanitarian aspect of every topic I've debated, I find Grassroots Empowerment as a crucial and attractive topic that must be taken into consideration for the appropriate development of societies and particularly for the overriding social role that these organizations play by encouraging community members into taking actions for their society. Poverty, marginalization of vulnerable populations, and the lack of awareness from local governments on economic, cultural, and social matters, generates the "appropriate" political climate for grassroots organizations to rise and prosecute a fairer national order. Thus, the approach that must be given to the discussed topic must bear as a priority the social repercussions of grassroots movements, as well as the protection and empowerment of the individuals that take part in these organizations. Viable and structured proposals must be implemented to ensure the security and functionality of the movements. Furthermore, consider the regional variants, conditions, and focus of the organizations so that you build functional proposals and bring them into fruitful diplomatic debate. Can't wait to meet you all and hear your arguments and opinions on this topic.

Kind regards,

**Mario Genit**



**INTRODUCTION:**

*"Knowing that ordinary people have the power to come together, organize and change policies - this is what really engaged me" -Dolores Huerta, Co-Founder of United Farm Workers<sup>2</sup>*

Social movements that originate in the grassroots of society often contain the potential to shape history. Is in this sense that the role of grassroots political activity can only be understood in its historical context.

**But where do grassroots organizations (GROs) come from?** Grassroots organizations are founded on the need for a group of citizens from the same territory to question citizenship. This activity was first shaped by the experience of the authoritarian and military government and then changed by the transition to a democratic government (Smith, 1997). This context may reveal the true relationship of this political activity to the state and the nature of grassroots demand, especially of human rights.

It is clear that not only the style but also the focus of GROs have changed during the period of military or oligarchic rule, democratic transition, and neoliberal democracy. The early efforts of the 1960s focused on popular organization and education. The ones in the 1970s were more involved in the fight against poverty and the fight for citizenship rights. Those in the 1980s were more concerned with gender, survival strategies, and human rights. In recent years, the priority agenda is the environment and "micro-financing", such as community banks, rural cooperatives, and credit cooperatives, as well as local development projects and technical assistance (Van Til, Hegyesi, & Eschweiler, 2010). These initiatives have accumulated over the years and are present to a greater degree in today's societies.

**And, what about non-governmental organizations (NGOs)?** According to the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, some of the first NGOs took the form of research institutes staffed by social scientists who had been expelled from universities by military governments. They were funded by international agencies or foreign governments but soon began to seek funding for advisory work (Latvijas, 2011). Such income-generating activities became their most salient feature following the debt and fiscal crises of the early 1980s, as they began to connect grassroots movements to the international funding community, and broker financial support for ground-level development projects. In fact, Amnesty International<sup>3</sup> began as a GRO and then became

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<sup>2</sup> <https://ufw.org/es/>

<sup>3</sup> [www.amnesty.org/es/](http://www.amnesty.org/es/)



an NGO (Toepler, 2003). In chart 1, we have a summary of the differences between GROs and NGOs.

**Chart 1: Differences between grassroots organizations and nongovernmental organizations**

| GROs   | NGOs  |
|--|---|
| Grassroots organizations are assisted by larger organizations, which may be a political party, an NGO, or federations or confederations of organizations. When grassroots organizations manage and coordinate with each other, it would move to a regime of self-government and federalism, diametrically contrary to all forms of centralism. | Formed by ordinary citizens who share a common vision and mission, being able to obtain financing from the Government, other NGOs (such as foundations), individuals or private companies Some NGOs, in order to maintain management autonomy and impartiality, avoid official funding and work through volunteers. |

Note Own elaboration with information of Toepler (2003) & Van Til, Hegyesi, & Eschweiler (2010).

**HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEE:**

“Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all”<sup>4</sup>. Originally called The Social Commission, **The Commission for Social Development** (CSocD) was established by the Economic and Social Council’s resolution E/RES/10 (II)<sup>5</sup> of June 21st, 1946 as a functional commission and expert body to advise on social policy. Since then, both the Commission’s mandate and membership have been expanded to address a greater variety of issues, as well as it has also become a forum for high-level panels concerning development. The CSocD is a key actor in the United Nations (UN) system to review and advise on matters of people-centered sustainable development. Throughout time, the CSocD has acquired higher political and diplomatic visibility and prominence.

**Resolutions of the CSocD** to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, for adoption and other resolutions from the General Assembly, as well as the medium-term plan and the program budget, are mandates that establish the administrative ground of the work of the Division for Social Policy and Development. They keep alive important issues that may be ignored and

<sup>4</sup> Main goal of the Social Commission for Development (2020)

<sup>5</sup>[www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=E/RES/10\(II\)](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/RES/10(II))



neglected on the international social development agenda. The political visibility attached to sessions of the Commission and its diplomatic stature may be wisely used to deepen fundamental social development issues that are of the interest of most states and for which common efforts are required.

**Picture 1: Commission for Social Development meeting.**



Note Picture was taken from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Since the **1995 World Summit for Social Development**, the Commission has been tasked with monitoring the implementation of the *Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development* and *Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development*. These documents further defined social development and emphasized that, while intertwined with economic development and environmental protection, social development is about considering the needs of people as the core component of development. They highlighted poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion as key elements that must be addressed in social policy and development by the international community and the different organs of the United Nations.

**DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM:**

Grassroots organizations are self-managed, formed at the initiative of the inhabitants that seek to contribute to the integral development of the town, solve problems of a social, economic, and cultural nature, and improve the living conditions of its members.

Weak access to market mechanisms -due to poverty and political marginalization- leads to lower-income seek to guarantee by themselves an entire series of goods, services, and social support. The meaning of this has multiple implications for the issue of the social capital stock of the poor, how it is used today and how it could be translated or transformed into a force for development (Díaz-Albertini, 2001).



## History of Grassroots organizations

Throughout history and to accommodate a better social structure, society has created forms of organization that, like us, have evolved over time.

The first appearances of social organizations in our civilization appear from prehistory, where groups of nomadic people, called hordes<sup>6</sup>, divided their jobs and duties to find enough food for everyone, as well as satisfy all those group needs that arose, **but how do we know that they were the first social organizations?**

As soon as man became sedentary, the private property appears, becoming what we now define as a Tribe, and it is like that, then when the family appears, which is the fundamental basis of organizations and it is from here that we can find many more forms of family organization, such as matriarchy or patriarchy, or as what we now call a conventional family of our time. Among the functions of the family within the society we can find that it serves to perpetuate the species, it is the first to provide us with education, culture, and traditions, it seeks to satisfy the needs of its members, and it also seeks to instill in us beliefs, values, etc. As in any organization, we find that it is regulated by certain **rules** stipulated by society and some others that depend on each family.

Over the years, new needs begin to emerge that, worth the redundancy, need to be covered. Economic, political, recreational, educational, and religious needs that give rise to new organizations willing to maintain social balance. Slavery appears that seeks the predominance of private property and the exploitation of man, feudalism that seeks to develop large areas of the land and with it, a fairly marked social division, until giving way to what we now know as capitalism that seeks to commercialize to accumulate wealth and socialism that seeks to make the means of production collective property. The evolution of our society has led to the emergence of other needs that did not exist before, all of this occurred from the industrial revolution, a fundamental event in the history of grassroots organizations.

Now, we know that grassroots organizations have been present in our history, that we created them with the aim of having a better social structure and that over time they became necessary in our civilization and for its development and growth. Despite the fact that the interests of current organizations have changed and are obviously no longer the same as before, the idea and foundation of the concept of the organization remain the same, "a group of people united with a purpose in common".

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<sup>6</sup> Nomadic community that is distinguished from the tribe by the rudimentary nature of the social and spiritual ties that unite those who make it up.



### **Limitations of grassroots organizations**

A research made by Diana Mitlin shows that, while grassroots organizations can secure improvement to their neighborhoods, they bring about little fundamental change in situations characterized by extensive poverty, low state capacity, and relatively low levels of aspiration among lower-income groups. These organizations are not in a position to represent the interests of the urban poor and help them address their multiple needs but suffer problems of leadership and participation. These problems are linked to relations of patronage between state officials, politicians, and community leaders. Relationships between external groups and community leaders maintain and reinforce structures that serve their interests, and these are not challenged through strong accountable relationships between organizational leaders and their members. Mitlin concludes that institutions of civil society reflect the society and social processes in which they are embedded and, in this context, grassroots organizations are rarely able to play a transforming role (Mitlin, 2002).

### **GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY:**

#### **Grassroots protests**

Protests are often visualized as an act of disapproval from the population and have taken place, several times throughout history, in order to accomplish an objective. Thus, grassroots organizations (as civil organized movements) usually bear protests as an effective method to give national spotlight to a specific situation that harms or doesn't benefit individuals in order to make a change or demonstrate that a certain part of the population does not agree with a political decision that affects the goal of the organization. Various activist movements or protests had impacted the world in a variety of ways. One of the most recent and significant protests took place in the United States of America (Wamu, 2020), dozens of grassroots organizations collectively protested on four core demands: to get police out of D.C. schools; end qualified immunity; establish a new D.C. public safety department, and make election days a paid holiday in the District. The protest gathered more than a thousand activists and proves the effectiveness and power of the social movements

#### **Grasstops: the communication network**



Grassroots communication strategies become important for their development since the message you must get across to people must persuade other people to act. That is why Grassroots make their messages or campaigns reach the community through Grasstops. Grasstops are activists or members of an organization who have a high professional or public profile, who could attract public attention or influence decision-makers through established connections.

### **Oppression**

At the beginning of the rise of urban social movements, grassroots organizations and their movements have lost strength, because these massive urban social movements included every category of a wide of popular political initiatives, usually inspired by demands for public utilities, social services, or access to land and water, for example, in Latin America the precarious conditions of urban life, and the repressive policies of the state lead to urban social movements, such as the labor movement, women's movements, teachers' movements, student movements, but those movements generated demands in terms of rights and political parties started to occupy the center stage of political society. From that critical moment, their demands lost the quality of petition and began to reverberate with calls for change.

The constant political and institutional change meant that the movements had no realistic hope of defining the political agenda. At the same time, the state promise individual rights, and the question of citizenship moved to the constitutional sphere, and so it answered the demands of the right of many of the grassroots movements, in summary, grassroots movements were suppressed and "satisfy" by their governments, meaning that without recourse to the language of rights, their objectives lost focus, and their political energy began to dissipate (Foweraker, 2001).

### **GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:**

Grassroots organizations are primarily made up of civilians advocating a cause to spur change at local, national, or international levels. (Bettencourt, n.d.)

Grassroots initiatives are community-based approaches created to address localized problems. Projects backed by local organizations can quickly gain momentum on the local level because they are generally enacted by local actors. Moreover, larger organizations could benefit from local grassroots



initiatives that are directly connected to the issues and the people living in need. These groups are the first responders to the crises and critical witnesses to which solutions are a better fit to context. Partnerships can prove to be fruitful when people (grassroots organizations) and resources (IOs) come together to address a need and context. (Bettencourt, n.d.)

Grassroots organizations understand the multifaceted contexts and issues that could deter progress or stall innovative solutions, while also creating a sense of trust in a community by authenticating the potential benefits of innovation, as well as identifying flaws, and iterations required. (Bettencourt, n.d.)

Grassroots organizations are great drawing-board-allies for getting an idea from conception to implementation. Offices of Innovation or any venture team must be able to test and use their innovations to model improvements. (Bettencourt, n.d.)

### **PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:**

Grassroots Organizations normally have as their purpose some basic and specific public good and demand a lot of social energy for its effective implementation. This leads to an over-demand on their time and eventual weariness to donate their time and resources, and strong disillusionment with the value of participation. In this process, the participation closest to political empowerment goes to a second or third plane before instrumental participation, losing the possibility of greater citizenship education based on democratic values such as freedom of action, debate, and discussion about the public-universal. However, we note that many of the forms of popular participation are linked to the presence of **external agents** that in one way or another are building forms of social capital, understood as collective action that provides benefits to the entire community by being public goods.

This presence of external agents, which for the moment tends to restrict the potential of social capital by limiting them to specific actions, could generate very different results if it is oriented in another way and underpins other processes conducive to **empowerment**. Since there is already a certain linkage with the professional and technical sectors of society, this relationship could support popular organization in various ways, enriching the social capital of those who have less, so that their organizational effort produces more results and at a lower cost in their dedication of time and physical effort:



- Improving the management of organizations so that they can combine the specific concern with projections of greater encouragement. It is necessary not only to look at one type of organization but also at the network of organizations in a community (Diaz-Albertini, 2001).
- Support the design of participatory schemes that avoid overload, excessive and unfair demand on the time and resources.
- The design of clear rules, especially for the use, monitoring and maintenance of public and common goods is a central element in the sustainability of popular action. These rules must be the product of the deliberation of the users or beneficiaries themselves, often built on the basis of traditional practices. This facilitates collective action by creating more efficient mechanisms for complying with obligations and penalizing those who do not. It can also result in more effective conflict resolution mechanisms.

### **QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER (QARMA'S):**

1. Which kind of strategies and inclusion laws should be promoted by the international community to empower grassroots organizations globally?
2. What kind of measures should local governments implement in order to assure the preservation of grassroots movements?
3. What should be the relation that grassroots organizations should have with the governments of the countries in which they participate? Is it needed to create a regulator for these conversatories?
4. Until which extent should grassroots organizations work without the help of the local governments? How can we integrate a work between these two entities?
5. How can grassroots organizations design participatory schemes that avoid overload, excessive and unfair demand on the time and resources?

### **CASE STUDIES:**

#### **Kenya - The Kuruwitu Conservation and Welfare Association**

<https://kuruwitukenya.org/>



KCWA is a sustainable, multiple-use community managed marine conservation project on Kenya's north coast that supports environmental, socio-economic and cultural needs of all stakeholders.

When fishermen and local elders realized that nearby marine ecosystems were being destroyed by overfishing, pollution and climate change, they created the country's first Locally Managed Marine Area to ban fishing in a designated area. Since then, the ecosystem has returned strongly, with an increase in biodiversity. The now prosperous ecosystem has fostered a tourism sector, boosted catches for fishermen and women in nearby areas, and encouraged the national government to greatly expand the protected area.

### **Brazil - Associação Ashaninka do Rio Amônia Apiwtxa (Apiwtxa)**

<https://www.equatorinitiative.org/2017/06/28/associacao-ashaninka-do-rio-amonia-apiwtxa/>

The rights of indigenous peoples in Brazil are often ignored, according to National Geographic. For many groups living in the Amazon rainforest and experiencing deforestation and exploitation of resources, that often means that their ways of life are threatened.

The Ashaninka people of northwestern Brazil have taken an un innovative approach to defend their land and culture. To protect its 87,205 hectares of land, Apiwtxa uses 3D mapping technology to understand which areas are at risk and where resources should be deployed. The group also uses more outdated conservation methods. Educational centers throughout the region help promote respect for indigenous culture and land and instill a sense of activism in youth. The group has also developed a strong trade network for non-timber forest products to sustainably harvest the Amazon.

### **Mali — The Mali Elephant Project**

[www.wild.org › mali-elephants](http://www.wild.org/mali-elephants)

Mali's elephant population is at a perilous low. Poaching, which has driven elephant populations to historic lows around the world, is exacerbated by ethnic strife and fights over natural resources.

The Mali Elephant Project seeks to address all of the tangled issues that make poaching in Mali so bad. First, it offers sustainable economic opportunities to



people in the region. Youth are trained to be “eco-guardians” and women are encouraged to collect non-timber natural resources, giving people greater economic independence. Plus, all programs involve people from different ethnic groups in order to promote tolerance and community cohesion. Since forming in 2003, the group has “created rules for local use of natural resources, set aside forests for elephant use, formed pasture reserves, and designated seasonal water sources to be shared by people, livestock, and elephants.”

### **CLOSING REMARKS:**

Best of luck during your preparation and don't hesitate to send us an email if there are any questions! Remember you can contact us through the committee email [csocd.carmun@gmail.com](mailto:csocd.carmun@gmail.com).

Please send an email with your name and country to confirm you are participating in CarMUN 2020 to [csocd.carmun@gmail.com](mailto:csocd.carmun@gmail.com).

### **BLOG POSTS:**

In this year conference we will replace position papers for blog posts, delegates will receive one question per week, starting three weeks before CarMUN. The questions must be answered before the deadline, delegates will have the opportunity not only to answer the question, but to comment other delegates responses. For more information we encourage you to read the Delegates Handbook, published in our webpage, [www.carmunperu.org](http://www.carmunperu.org)

The first question will be posted on October the 2nd and must be answered before October 8th 11:59pm. The second question will be posted on October the 9th and must be answered before October 15th 11:59pm. The third and last question will be posted on October the 16th and must be answered before October 21st 11:59pm.

To access your committee's blog posts click in this link: <https://csocd-blogpost.blogspot.com/>.

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