

Friends of the Earth International: Negotiating a North-South Identity

Award No.

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Period of Award: 01.01.06 to 30.12.08

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Report of Research Activities and Results

Background

FoEI is a 70 country federation of national environmental groups, each of which has equal power within the organisation. It differs from the two other large transnational environmental NGOs – WWF and Greenpeace in several ways: it has strong membership in Southern countries who have had a significant influence on its recent strategic development; it is decentralised and its key decisions are made by national groups in annual meetings rather than by an appointed board. New members have to demonstrate their prior history of campaigning on FoEI's mission before they can be accepted. In WWF and Greenpeace national groups are established as franchises of the international organization.

The sovereignty of national groups makes the agreement of policy and strategy more demanding for FoEI than for other large environmental NGOs, but also more promising as a case for investigating some important questions about transnational politics and collective action. The most central of these is the debate about whether there is a global environmental movement, or whether in fact national processes remain predominant. Those who see a global environmental movement developing include advocates of the normative significance of civil society, who see the spread of INGOs and evidence increase in transnational networking as a response to global processes and the global nature of many environmental issues (Anheier et al. 2002; 2005; Edwards and Gaventa 1001; Wapner 1996). Sceptics, however, say that there is too much difference in context, forms of mobilization and ideology between environmental groups in different parts of the globe and that this prevents common identity and action (Bob 2005; Rootes, 2004; Tarrow, 2005; Smith 2002). For the most part the existing evidence tends to support the sceptics. Large environmental NGOs such as Greenpeace and WWF are vulnerable to the criticism that they lack a popular base in Southern countries (van Rooy 2004) and there is little evidence of sustained common action by environmental groups from both North and South on global issues. This leaves FoEI as the most significant case where environmental groups from a large number of Northern and Southern countries work together on an equal basis. However, sceptics would want to know whether equal relationships are possible in practice or whether groups from the wealthier Northern countries end

up dominating decision-making. With these questions in mind we had the following research **objectives:**

- To gather evidence of network ties: collaboration, resource and information flows between member groups
- To explore the variety of ways in which environmentalism, social justice and social transformation are articulated within FoEI;
- To assess the degree of common ground between Northern and Southern nodes of the network
- To explain the boundaries of the collective action and identity of FoEI
- To examine the implications of findings on these areas for the prospects for global environmental movements

We describe in the results section how we have met these objectives.

Methods.

We were able to negotiate access with FoEI and its national groups because of our previous records as researchers with experience in working with environmental groups and we believe that without this common ground the project would have been impossible. Even then, access was not a simple process as we needed to gain the agreement of different parts of the federation each of which had an effective veto over the project.

Our research design combined a questionnaire (see appendix) with observation of major FoEI meetings, interviews and analysis of internal documents. We were able to triangulate between these sources to verify and check our findings and have given some examples of this in the results section.

Prior to beginning of the fieldwork in 2006, we carried out pilot work in which we gathered background information on FoEI and examined the literature on global civil society and North-South debates about environmental movements. One outcome of this was the ECPR workshop which we directed in 2005 and an edited book on environmental movements and transnational politics. We used this to develop the questionnaire, and then in turn used the results to inform our qualitative observation of key FoI meetings. The final stage of the research in 2008 was based on interviews, in which we were able to explore the hypotheses that we had developed from the previous findings.

We are very grateful to the staff of the International Secretariat of FoEI and to the staff of national organisations for the considerable time that they were willing to devote to assisting us, and hope that our results and analyses will be useful in their work.

Results

The project has produced a very rich set of quantitative and qualitative data, which we cannot do full justice to here, and so we have tried to identify highlights, concentrating here mainly on the empirical findings. We have not cited specific interviews in this document because we have

not yet had permission from interviewees to do this for publication, but we have drawn on the background knowledge from our qualitative work where appropriate in order to qualify or add depth to the quantitative findings. We examined the questionnaire data using a variety of dependent variables, including language, age of organisation, and organisational wealth. By far the most significant factors, however, were either North-South or region.¹

1. North-South and Regionalization

When it faced internal divisions after 2002 the process of examining the network's identity led to a strengthening of regional structures. This was partly to counter-balance the strength of the European region, which had been in existence since 1985. It also had a participatory rationale, to increase the number of occasions when groups could meet in addition to general meetings. There are four recognised regions: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin American and the Caribbean (ATALC), and Europe.² Members of ATALC and Africa were all classified by us as Southern and this is also the understanding within FoEI. Europe is regarded as Northern within FoEI, despite the presence of some poorer states and A-P is the most diverse region, with Northern and Southern membership.

Regionalisation has had the unintended consequence of strengthening internal divisions as regions have developed distinct political identities. The Latin Americans mostly advocate anti-neoliberal and postdevelopment politics (Escobar 1995) and the Europeans are mostly more reformist. An illustration of this is the different interpretations of the merger of three previous campaign areas of trade, corporates and international financial institutions into a new programme. The Europeans wanted this to be called Economic Justice, the Latin Americans wanted it to be called Resisting Neoliberalism and so it is known as Economic Justice – Resisting Neoliberalism (EJRN). Asia-Pacific groups tended not to use the term at all, which puzzled us as groups from this region had originally proposed it. Sam la Rocca's Practitioner Fellowship, linked to our project, investigated the low engagement of AP with the EJRN Programme through interviews with AP members (see the separate report on this submitted to the NGPA Programme) and found that most AP groups preferred to use the language of community rights rather than the more ideologically specific economic justice or resisting neoliberalism.

We were able to observe this and other fascinating ideological debates within FoEI about the meaning of democracy, justice and environmental transformation. These terms all had to be defined as FoEI developed its first strategic plan in the aftermath of the internal divisions that developed in 2002. Rather than developing a cosmopolitan singular environmentalism, FoEI has developed a structure and practice that recognises enduring differences between its national member groups. It shows that campaigns can still be pursued effectively, even when groups

1 Since North-South is a central category for this project, we need to explain how it was applied. We used the UN's Human Development Index to judge whether groups came from Northern or Southern countries. Countries with an HDI in 2006 below 0.8 were classed as Southern, unless they were either EU members or candidates for membership and had a HDI of over 7.5 (e.g. the Baltic states and Croatia). We were very aware of the politics of using North and South, and felt that we needed to use an external category, which did not rely on self-identification by FoEI groups. However, our classification matched those used informally within FoEI with only a few borderline cases. Three European groups – Georgia, Macedonia and Ukraine were categorised as Southern, and there is of course a major disparity between Argentina on the one hand and Sierra Leone on the other within the category of South. For this reason we also divided the Southern countries into two categories – middle income and 'low income'. Of the 51 of 70 groups that completed the questionnaire, 25 were Northern, 26 Southern (of which 13 were middle income and 13 low income).

2 This creates an anomaly in that the two North American countries are not members of a region and are effectively excluded from decisions taken on a regional basis. On occasions at general meetings they deliberate as a two country group, or they sometimes join with the European group.

differ in their ideological positions and their sense of accountability to key constituencies. Memberships and the general public are the predominant constituencies for Northern groups, while in the South these are also balanced by the aim of supporting local communities resisting development projects that are being imposed upon them. In this sense FoEI is not dissimilar from other groups within the global justice movement, (della Porta 2004; Wood 2005, Routledge 2008) but it is distinctive because its institutional structures give it continuity, and access to funding. Thus, we argue that FoEI's model of transnational solidarity has considerable significance in showing how diverse groups can work together in an agonistic transnational federation (Mouffe 2005, Olsesen 2005). Our analysis of this is developed further in the paper 'We are heavily in solidarity' included with this report.

In the section below we summarise some of the project's main empirical results, which underpin the overall assessment above:

2. Campaign priorities: which issues are seen as most important and do they differ between North and South?

FoEI has specific campaign programmes but the priority attached to them varies across North and South and by region. We asked FoE groups to choose the three most important from the following seven programmes in 2006: Corporates, Trade, IFIs, Mining, Climate Change, Forests, and GMOs.³

The most important campaign priority for FoEI overall was climate change, but there were significant North-South differences underlying this. Of Northern groups, 22 out of 25 (88%) chose it as a priority, but in the South 11 out of 26 (42%) organisations did not. There are no climate change deniers in FoEI, but some Southern groups feel that other issues are more urgent, because their impact is already apparent. Thus 70% of Southern groups but only 36% of Northern groups, chose forests as a priority. Looked at by region there were also interesting differences on some issues, with GMOs being chosen as a priority by 7 out of the 9 African groups.

3. Relations with other social movements and non-environmental campaign groups

Emphasis on alliances with other campaign groups is one of the features that distinguishes FoEI from Greenpeace, WWF and other major international environmental NGOs. But which groups are the most regular partners for FoEI and does the emphasis differ in different parts of the world? We asked about relations with human rights groups, trade unions, women's rights campaigners, peace groups, religious groups and community and grassroots groups. There were both North-South and regional differences in alliances, cutting across North and South. It is hard therefore for FoEI to define a global strategy towards particular kinds of social movements or campaign groups. Summarising a very complex set of results: we found that there were stronger ties with human rights and women's groups in the South than the North, stronger ties with development groups in the North and with trade unions in the North and in Latin America, stronger ties with peace groups in Asia-Pacific and links with religious groups were weakest in Europe and Latin America. In all regions, ties with community groups were strong, even though what community means was interpreted differently in the North and South.

3 The programmes have been reorganised since 2006 but the findings still provide useful indicators of the relative importance of issues.

In explaining this it may help to consider the possibility that some potential partner groups are really engaged in different domains of action in different regions. For instance, the stronger ties with humanitarian, aid, trade and development groups in the North could be because groups such as Oxfam or Christian Aid are mainly campaigners in the North sharing a critique of neo-liberalism and climate politics in their global justice campaigns. In the South they are more likely to be engaged in practical projects and less likely to be campaigning politically. In the case of human rights groups, the pattern is reversed. In the South, human rights groups are often actively siding with victims of violence and publicly opposing the authorities, whereas in the North they mainly concentrate on fundraising, research and a moral and universal critique of violence, which tends to offer less opportunity for joint campaigns with other groups. Thus it is not simply FoE groups that differ but also that they are responding to different forms of action by potential partners in different contexts.

4. Relations with government, business, political parties and the media

Relations with government differed less than we expected in the survey results. Since in only 5 (of 51) cases were groups repressed or ignored by government, the relationship with national government, while mainly contingent (varying by issue and ministry), is open enough for campaigning directed towards government to be worthwhile. The meaning of contingent relations with government needs more investigation, particularly by looking at how much can be achieved, but it suggests more potential for common ground for strategy across the network than internal debates sometimes suggest. FoEI is not generally a network that is only based in civil society with no interest in targeting governments. Many illustrations of this came out of interviews, with FoEI groups in the South often seen as a significant player in national political debates (eg in Indonesia, El Salvador and Nigeria), because they were more politically engaged than some of the larger conservation groups. Related to this, is the relationship with political parties – which was weak or absent in FoEI groups in the the low income countries, particularly in Africa, where 6 of 8 groups had no ties with them, compared to only two out of 25 in the North. Interestingly, relations with the media were strong in Africa, and since political parties have little legitimacy in political debates relations with the media assumed greater significance. There was, however, significantly greater amounts of press work being done in Northern than in Southern FoE groups (see figure 1 below). Relations with businesses were generally distant, even in the North.

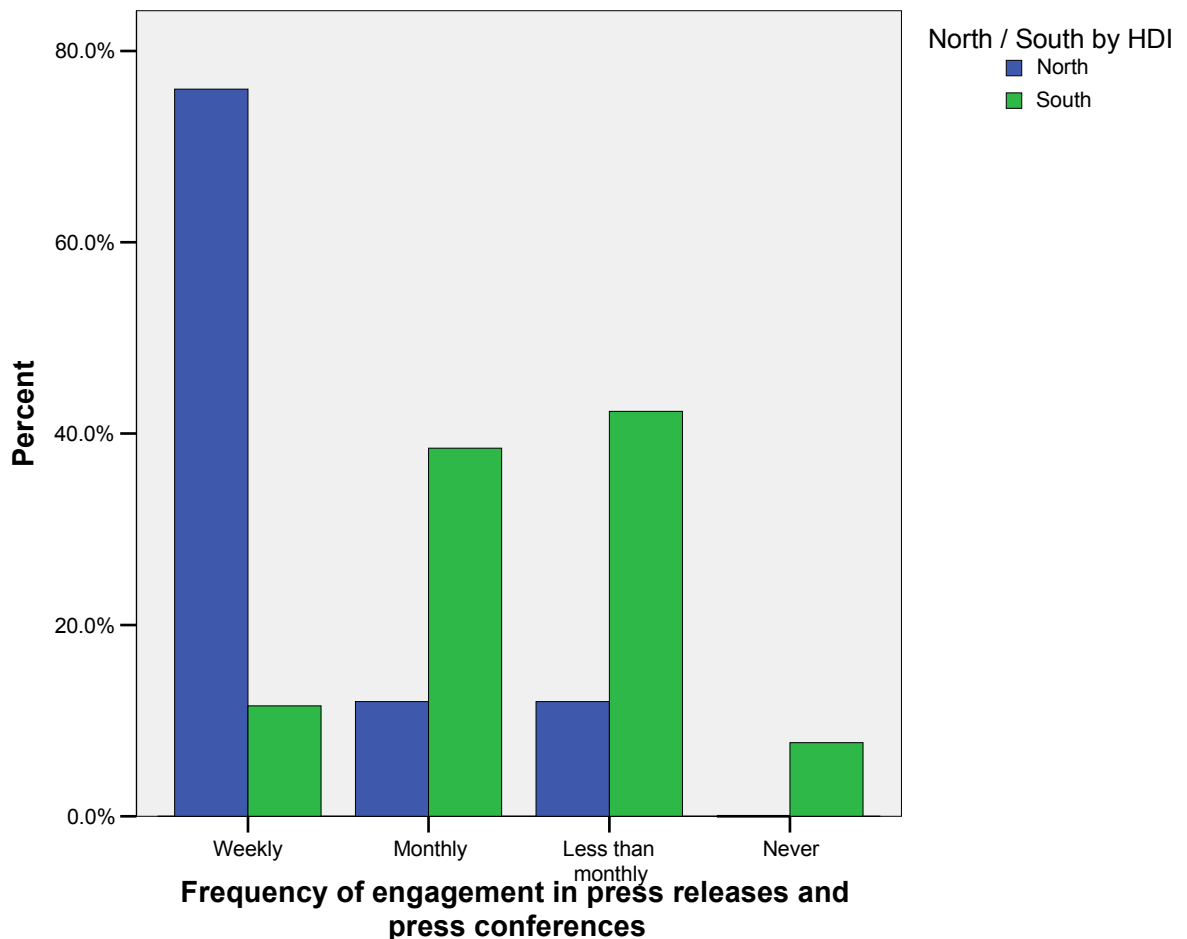


Figure 1

5. Tactics and forms of action: what do FOEI groups do?

Within FoEI there is a view that groups in the North are engaged principally in lobbying and those in the South are more oriented towards a politics of resistance, but there was no systematic evidence on the kinds of actions taken by different national groups. We asked about a standard range of forms of political action, including lobbying, press work, demonstrations and more disruptive forms of action. As might be expected lobbying was more frequent in Northern countries, yet, while the perceived usefulness of lobbying varies, it is surely significant that nearly all FoE groups engage in it on occasion (see figure 2). At the same time we found little evidence that FoEI is engaged in frequent demonstrations and direct action in the South. Most groups in both North and South never engage in direct action themselves, but groups in the South do provide support for groups who are engaged in direct action on occasion.

The findings on the amount of press work are interesting when considered alongside those cited above on relations with the media. There is much more North-South difference on this question than there was in the question on general relations with the media. Three quarters of Northern groups, compared to only 3 out of 26 in the South issue press releases or hold press conferences at least once every week (see figure 1). This does not because Northern groups have more staff, since many Southern groups have similarly-sized professional staffs but is more likely to be a reflection of the balance of priorities in work, with Northern

organisations concentrating more on exerting influence on national government through public opinion and southern groups seeking to combine this with legal and campaigns support for local communities. It is in this sense that a general difference between the contexts of Northern and Southern groups affects the balance of their work.

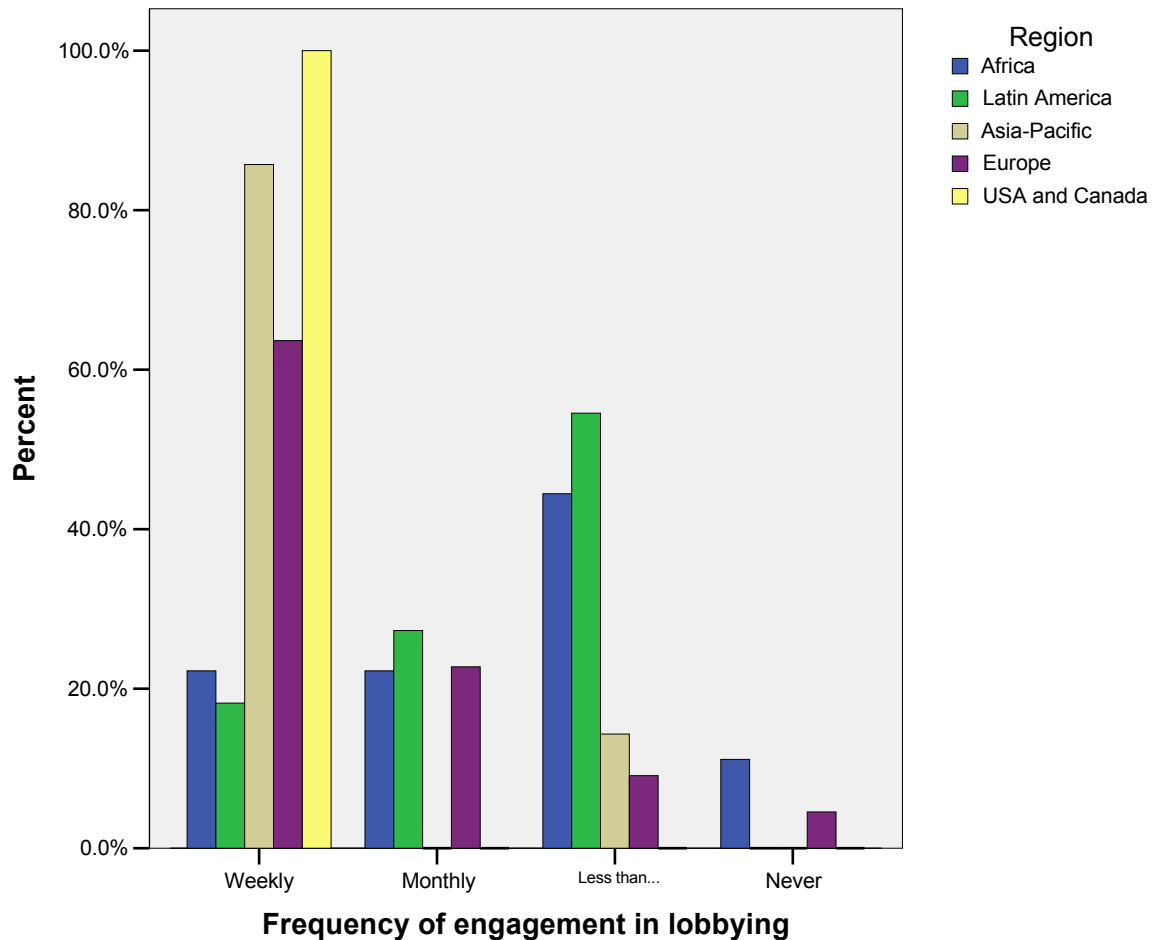


Figure 2

6. Internal networks

In general there is considerable trans-national networking, including North-South ties. The first map (figure 3) shows links between countries that had collaborated on at least one campaign in the previous 12 months. Although there is a concentration in North or South, there is also considerable North-South interaction. This is particularly important given that there is no central institution enforcing collaboration and so all joint campaigns are mutually developed. The software arranges the countries closest to those with which they have the most ties and the density of the ties on this and other maps on the first question is positive evidence of the strength of FoEI as a trans-national network. However, there are regional differences, in the amount of collaboration. We examined the extent to which FoE groups collaborated with others from their own regions in campaigns in 2006.⁴

⁴ We corrected for chance expectations dependent on the size of their regions and excluded North America because this was impossible to do for a 2 country region.

The answers to the networks questions allowed us to identify the most networked group, an intermediate group and a peripheral group of countries (see table one). Other data supports this classification. As table 2 shows, it was those that our data had identified as the most networked that also co-ordinated most of the campaigns. It was also representatives from these countries that made up the FoEI Executive committee and the last three Chairs of the network (El Salvador (2000-4; Malaysia 2004-8; Nigeria 2008-12). Importantly, the core group includes countries from both North and South. There were more groups in the South (11) than the North (7) who had coordinated at least one FoE campaign. but relatively few groups from either North or South overall as a proportion of the whole network (18 out of the 51 responses).

Participation and leadership within FoEI includes Southern and Northern countries, but there are also countries from both the South and the North who are only peripherally involved with international work in FoEI.

7. Resources and Commitment to International Work

FoEI is not a wealthy organization. In 2004, it had an income of 1.7m Eu (compared to 39m Eu for Greenpeace International). The national organisations of FoEI had a collective income of 57m Eu of which 68% was restricted income (from donors for specific projects). Groups are expected to contribute only 1% of their unrestricted income to FoEI and while most do, some some do not. This provides a clear indication of low priority attached to FoEI and international work by some of its member groups.

Individuals from national FoE groups seeking to work transnationally can face resistance from their national colleagues, who want to preserve their organization's national autonomy. There are groups in both North and South that are limited in the level of their commitment to FoEI, but arguably the greater impact of this non-commitment is from richer FoE groups in the North, who hold back from participating fully in FoEI activity. The lack of support for FoEI initiatives from some of the larger Northern organisations (while partly offset by commitment from others, particularly from the UK and the Netherlands) shows the limited commitment to global environmentalism and limited sense of movement solidarity and cosmopolitan citizenship in many groups.

Overall Conclusions

FOEI does not in itself constitute a global environmental organisation, and in many ways its practices provide evidence of the vitality of national differences. North-South structural global inequalities are reproduced in the network, even while in other aspects of its work, it challenges them. For these reasons, despite its inevitable over-generalisation, the divide between North and South is evident in differences in how environmental groups work within FoEI. In other ways, however, FoEI's transnational solidarity does show how it is possible for groups with major political differences and different constituencies to work together. FoEI may also be unique as a major transnational network which is politically engaged, and dependent on Northern source of finance (charitable foundations and government development aid) but in which there is evidence of strong Southern political voice and leadership shared between Northern and Southern organisations.

<i>Most networked</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>Least Networked</i>
England, Wales and NI (EWNI) Netherlands Nigeria and Indonesia Uruguay Germany, South Africa USA France, Malaysia Argentina, Colombia Austria, Costa Rica, Philippines Paraguay Ghana El Salvador PNG Croatia Australia Switzerland	Hungary, Togo Peru Spain Brazil, Czech R. and Cameroon Japan Guatemala Finland, Slovakia Italy Sweden Scotland Estonia, Mauritius Flanders Haiti Norway Bolivia Korea, Swaziland, Tunisia	<i>Nicaragua (left FoEI)</i> Denmark Palestine Belgique, Honduras Canada, Ireland, Mali Lithuania, Malta Curacao Grenada Chile New Zealand Ukraine Bangladesh, Sierra L. Nepal Georgia Bulgaria, Latvia, Luxb, Cyprus FYR Macedonia, Poland <i>Sri Lanka (left FoEI)</i>

Table 1; Most, intermediate and least involved national groups within FoEI.

Most, inter, least * Number of FoEI campaigns coordinated Crosstabulation

			Number of FoEI campaigns coordinated			Total
			None	Only one	Two or more	
Most, inter, least	Most networked	Count	5	8	6	19
		% within Most, inter, least	26.3%	42.1%	31.6%	100.0%
	Intermediate	Count	15	2	1	18
		% within Most, inter, least	83.3%	11.1%	5.6%	100.0%
	Least networked	Count	13	1	0	14
		% within Most, inter, least	92.9%	7.1%	.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	33	11	7	51
		% within Most, inter, least	64.7%	21.6%	13.7%	100.0%

Table 2 Co-ordination of campaigns by most, intermediate and least networked groups.

Activities

Papers for academics and user groups

1. Brian Doherty Friends of the Earth International: Negotiating a Trans-National Identity, NGPA Small Projects Conference, LSE, 8 March 2005
2. Brian Doherty Friends of the Earth International: Negotiating a Trans-National Identity, NGPA Conference on The Ethics of Research on NGPA, Goodenough College, March 2006.
3. Brian Doherty 'Personalism and Public Spheres in Friends of the Earth International,' Democracy Seminar, Politics Department, University of Leeds, February 2007.
4. Timothy Doyle, Clare Saunders and Brian Doherty, 'Friends of the Earth International,' NGPA Annual Conference. Goodenough College, London, March 2007
5. Clare Saunders 'Exploring relational and positional approaches to network analysis: Interorganisational networking within Friends of the Earth International' SPIRE Seminar, Keele University, May 2007.
6. Brian Doherty Transnational Networks: Results from a Survey of Friends of the Earth International, Global Processes and Non Governmental Public Action, PhD Summer School CEU Budapest 16-20 July 2007
7. Brian Doherty and Timothy Doyle, Embedded Cosmopolitans? Friends of the Earth International', NGPA Theory Conference May 7-8th Goodenough College, London 2008
8. Brian Doherty (Keele University): 'Compromises, limitations and imperfections in research with activist groups.
Sam La Rocca (The Change Agency): 'Activist research: the challenge'.
Panel, Academic Research and Activism: The Challenges
Researching non governmental public action: methodologies and principles, ESRC NGPA Seminar, Bradford University May 15th 2008.
9. Brian Doherty 'Friends of the Earth International: Global Cosmopolitanism?' in 'Collaboration without borders: what can UK organisations learn about collaboration from international NGOs?' National Council for Voluntary Organisations/NGPA Seminar, London June 4th 2008.
10. Brian Doherty 'Friends of the Earth International,' ECPR Summer School on Environmental Politics and Policy, July 10th, 2008
11. Timothy Doyle and Brian Doherty 'Methodologies for Social Movement Organisations: Research Access in Multi-Nodal Structures of Power, De-Territorialization and Post-Colonialism' ESRC Research Methods Festival, University of Oxford 3rd July 2008.
12. Brian Doherty, Timothy Doyle and Clare Saunders 'Friends of the Earth International' – Seminar for staff of FoE England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Underwood St., London, October 6th 2008.
13. Brian Doherty, FoEI: Common Ground and Differences between North and South, SSPSR Seminar, University of Kent, November 2008.
14. Timothy Doyle, 'Trans-National Third Sector Management: the case of Friends of the Earth

International' ESRC Programme on conference on Engagement between Academe and the Third Sector, St Andrews 20th November 2008.

15. Timothy Doyle, Doyle, T. (2008) 'Transnational NGOs and Environmental and Energy Security for the Indian Ocean Region', Paper for International Seminar on 'Critical Areas of Ensuring Energy Security', 5th - 6th December, St Francis College for Women, and St Mary's College, Hyderabad, India

16. Brian Doherty, 'Identity and Strategy in a Transnational NGO,' Centre for the Study of Civil Society Seminar, LSE December 11th 2008.

17. Brian Doherty 'North Meets South: Friends of the Earth International' NGPA Final Conference, One George St., London, 14-15 January 2009.

18. Brian Doherty 'Democratic Practices in Friends of the Earth International', Cities Seminar, University of the West of England, 11th March 2009.

19. Brian Doherty and Timothy Doyle 'We are heavily in solidarity in this room', European Consortium for Political Research, 14-19 April 2009 Lisbon.

20. Doyle, T. (2009) 'Climate Security in the Global South', International Political Studies Association Conference, Santiago, Chile, July 12-19.

Outputs

1. **B. Doherty and T. Doyle, *Beyond Borders Environmental Movements and Transnational Politics***, London: Routledge, 2008. This book was a result of the ECPR workshop planned in the grant application and was initially published as a refereed special issue of the journal *Environmental Politics*. Three chapters drew on our project a) Doherty, B. and Doyle, T. 'Beyond Borders: Transnational Politics, Social Movements and Modern Environmentalisms,' pp.1-17; b) Doherty, B. 'Friends of the Earth International: Negotiating a North-South Identity,' pp.164—184 and c) Doyle, T. and Doherty, B. 'Green Public Spheres and the Green Governance State: the Politics of Emancipation and Ecological Conditionality,' pp.185-196.

2. Clare Saunders 'Comparing Relational and Positional Approaches to Social Network Analysis: Networking in Friends of the Earth International', under review with *International Journal of Social Research Methods*.

3. A **book proposal** by Doherty and Doyle titled *North Meets South: the Politics of Friends of the Earth International* is under review as part of the NGPA Series for Palgrave.

4. **Dataset** – the quantitative dataset from the questionnaire has been offered to the Data Archive.

5. **Report for FoEI**: Draft version submitted to FoEI Secretariat; a final version will be distributed once the text has been agreed with the IS.

Impacts

As noted, we have had extensive contacts with different parts of the FoEI network and expect that

this will continue as we develop our analysis of the research findings.

The NCVO published a paper on 'Researching Non Governmental Public Action: Methodologies And Principles, summarising the panel in the NCVO/NGPA where we presented our research (see activities) in June 2008.

We have also discussed our findings with Richard Bennett, who until recently was Director of BOND (British Overseas NGOs for Development), and who now works as a consultant on civil society, coalitions and networks (richardbennet9@googlemail.com) and with Clare Leigh, Strategy Advisor, Directorate for Strategy and Policy Planning, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Future Research Priorities

Beyond the international-national relationships that were the core of our research there is a further challenge: FoEI bases its strategy and its claims for legitimacy on its ties to local communities engaged in environmental struggles, but the linkage between these local struggles and the small number of people from national groups who carry out FoEI's international work is very attenuated. FoEI itself is aware of the importance of linking its work with local communities to the international level and we aim to work with them to examine this in a future project.

The other fruitful line of research would be a comparison with another large NGO. Ideally this might be Greenpeace International or WWF, if access could be negotiated (we had begun to explore this in our ARC application) but if not, it might also be useful to compare FoEI with a non-environmental international NGO, particularly with regard to North-South differences.

1.7 Ethics

The research raised many ethical questions, some we anticipated in advance and others that we did not. All interviews were based on the recorded informed consent of those interviewed, and while most interviewees were prepared to be cited, they wanted the opportunity to approve any citation of them by name in a publication, which we are happy to do. We have offered the quantitative dataset to the Data Archive, and since it was made clear to the respondents that this was the intention, we are sure that this is not problematic. We have decided not to offer interviews or fieldnotes, even though this had been part of our original plan. This was because the nature of the permissions that we negotiated varied on this question and there were too few to form a useful dataset where permission was clear. Further, since most participants wanted to check the use of their interviews before publication we felt that it was not appropriate to make them generally available.

The IS was concerned about potential negative impacts on FoEI from anything that we might publish and we have agreed to submit publications to them for prior approval. This was an essential condition of gaining access during the research. While this poses some risks for us as researchers, we are also confident that this will not amount to censorship by FoEI. Even in its own publicly available documents FoEI is willing to acknowledge its differences and it is a robust network, committed to openness. The understandable caution at the beginning of our project on the part of the IS described in the EOA form was principally a result of the tensions of preceding years. It is important that we do not cause harm to FoEI inadvertently, and this can be avoided by submitting

planned publications to them. We also believe that by continuing to work with FoEI we will be able to produce better-informed publications.

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