***Non-governmental organizations* (NGOs) have become increasingly influential in world affairs. They often impact the social, economic and political activities of communities and the country as a whole. NGOs address a host of issues, Including, but not limited to, women’s rights, environmental protection, human rights, economic development, political rights, or health care. In numerous countries, NGOs have led the way in democratization, in battling diseases and illnesses, in promoting and enforcing human rights, and in increasing standards of living.**

*NGO Activities*

It is difficult to categorize NGOs by their specific activities; many NGOs perform a variety of activities and often shift the balance of the activities they pursue. However, in broader terms, most NGOs can be classified as operational or campaigning. Operational NGOs achieve small-scale change directly through projects while campaigning NGOs achieve large-scale change indirectly through influence on the political system.

***Operational v. Campaigning NGOs***

**Operational NGO's have to mobilize resources in the form of financial donations, materials, and volunteer labor in order to sustain their projects and programs. This is a complex process, and these NGOs usually possess a headquarters bureaucracy and field staff. Campaigning NGOs will carry out similar functions, but with a different balance between them. Fundraising is still necessary, but on a smaller scale and serves the symbolic function of strengthening the donors' identification with the cause. Persuading people to donate their time is more important; successful campaigning NGOs have the ability to mobilize large numbers of people for certain issues and events.**

**Both operational and campaigning NGOs need to engage in fundraising, mobilization of work by supporters, organizing special events, cultivating the media and administering a headquarters. Only the defining activities – implementing projects or holding demonstrations – serve to differentiate them. In reality, these distinctions are not clear. Operational NGOs often move into campaigning when the impact of the projects seems to be insufficient. Large development and environment operational NGOs run regular campaigns or at least support campaign networks. Similarly, campaigning NGOs often feel they cannot ignore the immediate practical problems in their policy domain. Human rights NGOs and women's rights NGOs have programs assisting the victims of discrimination and injustice.**

***Other Categories of NGOs***

**There are other types of NGOs that promote change by variants of these two primary functions. Research institutes have special forms of operational programs, in which the goal is to increase knowledge and understanding. They range across a spectrum from those promoting an academic, non-political issue to those collating and disseminating information for campaigning purposes.**

**There are also professional bodies, trade unions, recreational groups and associations of companies, which provide program activities for their members. Sometimes, these organizations also campaign to enhance their economic interests and status.**

***NGO Geography***

**Today, all countries have large numbers of NGOs at least at the local level. Even under the most authoritarian regimes or in the least developed countries there are self-help co-operative groups, community welfare associations, religious groups, professional and scientific associations, sports and recreational bodies, etc. The presence or absence of a democratic political culture is one of the major variables determining the number of NGOs, but the size of a country, its ethnic, religious and cultural diversity, the complexity of its economy and the quality of its communication infrastructure are also of crucial importance.**

**Many people are still trapped by the mental prejudice that organizations have to be situated in geographical space. It might be a practical necessity for an international NGO to have a headquarters office in a particular building, but the location of the office in a North American or a European city does not convert a global NGO into a "Northern Hemsphere" NGO. The proper criteria for assessing whether an organization is global are the location of its membership, the staffing of its headquarters, the sources of its funding and the content of its programs. An organization, such as Amnesty International, with 56 National Sections, groups in some 40 other countries, and an International Secretariat from over 50 countries is a global NGO, even if it started in Britain and has its headquarters in London. Due to the spread of democracy and the improvements in communications, many international NGOs that started in individual countries became global at the end of the twentieth century.**