

Why it hurts – Save the Children Norway and the Dilemmas of ‘Going Global’

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Abstract

In March 2017, Save the Children International complied with the reinstated Mexico City Policy, banning US funding to foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that inform about, advocate for, or provide abortion services. Several of its member organizations, among them Save the Children Norway, strongly opposed this decision, arguing that reproductive health is not solely about health but also concerns rights. This article explores how Save the Children’s pragmatic choice of going global and becoming an international NGO creates various ideological dilemmas for Save the Children Norway, challenging its identity as a civil society actor. It draws on fieldwork conducted within Save the Children Norway 2014–2017, to identify some internal and ideological dilemmas faced by Save the Children Norway and staff as they try to preserve their autonomy and identity while being part of a one of the world’s largest NGOs – Save the Children International.

Keywords: NGOs; globalization; going global; identity; Mexico City Policy

Introduction

In March 2017, Save the Children International (SCI), one of the world’s largest child rights organizations, signed the reinstated Mexico City Policy (MCP) – referred to by its critics as ‘the gag rule’. The policy, reinstated by US President Trump on 23 January 2017, bans US funds from going to foreign NGOs ‘that provide abortion services, counselling, or referrals, or advocate for liberalisation of their country’s abortion laws – even if they use non-US government funds for these activities’ (Starrs, 2017: 485). SCI’s decision to comply with the policy affected its member organizations directly, because of the massive restructuring process of unifying Save the Children into one international NGO (INGO) starting in 2009.

Previously, Save the Children had been a loose alliance of 29 autonomous member NGOs collaborating through the Save the Children Alliance.

In an effort to explain the situation to its members, Save the Children Norway (Save Norway) published a blogpost stating that SCI had, ‘after a lengthy and difficult process’ (Redd Barna, 2017b) reluctantly signed the newly reinstated MCP. Save Norway emphasized SCI’s argument that complying with the policy would allow SCI to reach more children than by opposing MCP’s conditionality. Save Norway reassured its members that, as a Norwegian civil society organization, it would seek to compensate by strengthening its own focus on women and children, and that, together with like-minded member organizations, it had lobbied for a different solution (Redd Barna, 2017b). Further, it would continue to work for reproductive health and rights and seek to prevent vulnerable women and girls from suffering as a consequence of MCP.

Save Norway’s blogpost clearly illustrates the changing landscape of NGOs and NGO practices that have emerged in recent decades. Today the NGO landscape is characterized by a managerial discourse emphasizing value for money and efficiency (Gardner and Lewis, 2015). The blogpost also shows how NGOs manage conflicting identities by trying to ‘defend the values-based approach of a social movement inside a framework that drives the organization further into the marketplace’ (Edwards, 1999: 34). Scholars have described and analysed this changing landscape and role of NGOs (e.g. Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015; Bebbington, Hickey, & Mitlin, 2008; Lewis and Kanji, 2009; Wallace, Porter, & Ralph-Bowman, 2013; Watkins, Swidler, & Hannan, 2012). There has been less emphasis on how this affects NGO staff. SCI’s decision to comply with the MCP exemplifies some of the differences between the global and the national branches within an organization. As McNeill and St. Clair (2009) argue, people working within international development, whether INGOs, international organizations or multilaterals, are often ideologically motivated, aiming to contribute to social transformation. This applies equally to national NGOs.

This situation therefore has general relevance beyond the MCP, exemplifying core dilemmas within NGO aid. On the one hand, Save Norway derives its legitimacy from its members and perceives itself as a political actor driven by normative expectations. On the other hand, SCI derives its legitimacy from the number of children reached, and adhering to managerial requirements of effectiveness and measurability. This challenges Save Norway’s understanding of whom it represents, its core values and its identity as a civil society actor. A pragmatic decision to grow and go global created an unforeseen ideological challenge for a SCI member. Although the merger brought several challenges to the surface, like the

partnership policy which has been heavily debated within the INGO, this article focuses on the consequences of SCI's MCP decision for Save Norway, torn between core values and identity.

The article draws primarily on text and document analysis of media coverage, the organization's web page, correspondence with donors accessed through the Electronic Public Records, and informal conversations and observations within Save the Children Norway, April 2014–December 2017, supplemented by in-depth interviews with selected former and current Save Norway employees. Access to Save Norway was gained as part of a four-year research project on the changing role of NGOs as intermediaries in negotiating maternal and reproductive health policy ideas at national and global levels. During my fieldwork I observed how SCI's signing the MCP became a game-changer in Save Norway, bringing several of the issues debated and feared regarding the merger to the fore. Interviewees questioned the role of the NGO and their own motivation to stay. Through documents and texts, conversations, observations and interviews, I explore Save Norway's dilemmas in remaining a Norwegian NGO situated within the specificities of Norwegian civil society while also being part of the global INGO Save the Children International. A former Save Norway employee described this as 'a wicked problem' – how to join forces and become one global organization with greater impact and more funding while also preserving one's own autonomy as a national civil society organization. In what follows, I explore the scholarly literature on the changing role and landscape of NGOs, and then further explore the impact of these changes in Save the Children.

The changing role of NGOs

This article is a contribution to the ongoing scholarly debate on the changing role and forms of development NGOs witnessed since the explosive growth of such organizations in the 1980s. I examine how one Norwegian NGO and its staff deal with the changing landscape of donors, actors and development discourses.

Recent decades have witnessed a shift in development agencies' approach from an interest in human and social aspects of development towards seeing development as a technical and managerial process (Gulrajani, 2011; Wallace, et al., 2013). Donors have become increasingly demanding with regard to efficiency, measurability and what issues to fund, influenced by a prevailing 'audit culture' (Strathern, 2000). In response, several northern NGOs have 'gone global' (Lindenberg and Bryant, 2001; Walton, Davies,

Thrandardottir, & Keating, 2016) – conducting extensive restructuring processes to achieve greater impact, become more competitive and secure donor funding (Banks, et al., 2015; Wallace, et al., 2013). Facing heightened competition over funding, NGOs have begun aligning their strategies with donor priorities and interests; critical scholars see the tendency to let external actors determine local agendas as a critical ‘shift in the nature of NGOs’ (Banks, et al., 2015: 710). Although some hold that global NGOs have become more representative (Hauser Centre for Nonprofit Organizations, 2010; Walton, et al., 2016), others argue that NGOs are becoming ‘de-politicised, over-professionalised and less autonomous’ (Walton, et al., 2016: 2769), and in danger of losing contact with their original values, identities and approach (Lewis and Kanji, 2009: 212). Moreover, ‘going global’ can result in (national) NGOs becoming distanced from their national roots, losing their grassroots orientation and in turn resulting in a crisis of legitimacy (Walton, et al., 2016). Other critical scholars hold that NGOs are shifting from being civil society actors (Banks, et al., 2015; Wallace, et al., 2013), political and transformative actors advocating social change, and becoming more commercial or corporate-like operating within what Dichter labels the ‘global marketplace of altruism’ (1999: 55). This development brings into play different and competing identities for national and international NGOs – both as civil society actors contributing to social change, and as market-based actors (Edwards, 1999; Vestergaard, 2010: 168).

However, NGOs are a diversified group often defined by what they are not. Banks and colleagues (2015) make a useful distinction between intermediary NGOs and membership-based civil society organizations in trying to explain ‘the limited progress that development NGOs have made in the arena of social change’ (2015: 708). However, my empirical evidence indicates that this distinction, although helpful, is not so clear-cut. Save Norway is both a membership-based civil society organization within the Norwegian context and part of the INGO SCI, an international intermediary NGO liaising between international donors and partner organizations in over 100 countries in the Global South. Save Norway derives its identity and legitimacy from its national members, ordinary citizens, and the specific values embedded in the national political structure and ideology, like rights. Importantly, there is no membership-base in the developing countries where SCI runs programmes: the INGO derives its legitimacy from the number of children reached, in addition to global norms. Hence, the two branches, the national and the international, have different sources of legitimacy and adhere to different principles and values. Such differences in values and sources of legitimacy underlay the dilemmas Save Norway employees faced with the signing of the MCP.

McNeill and St. Clair (2009) emphasize that organizations, be they NGOs or not, have distinctive cultures – practices, values and identity – developed over years in response to internal and external pressure. An NGO’s national context may be central here, resulting in national similarities between NGOs (Stroup, 2012). Moreover, each national context has a set of regulations, resources, and patterns in relating to government and government officials and a unique social network of NGOs. This influences NGO identities, marking them as, e.g., political, right-based, non-political, or contractors (Stroup, 2012; Stroup and Murdie, 2012). Some NGO scholars (Stroup, 2012; Stroup and Murdie, 2012) characterize the US tradition as being more ‘business-like’ and the British as more pragmatic than other, more rights-based, northern European traditions.

Particularities of the Norwegian civil society context

With Save Norway, this distinctive culture has developed within the specificities of Norwegian society. Here, NGOs hold a role in civil society not only within development, but also within state and democracy-building, fostering critical debate and knowledge production for its members and wider society. This role as a democratic force has also been a crucial part of their role within Norwegian development aid, seen as holding an advantage over government in its proximity to the people (Norad, 2017b). According to Banks and colleagues, NGOs’ ability to promote democracy ‘is dependent on processes that begin with and gain strength from grassroots mobilization and associationalization’, processes which ‘hinge on participation from, and accountability to, members’ (2015: 711). Hence, Save Norway’s (and SCI’s) ability to have this function is fundamentally different in Norway and in developing countries where they have no members. Furthermore, Banks and colleagues (2015) argue that a narrow focus on results and the pressure to be ‘non-political’ make it difficult for development NGOs to realize their ‘civil society function’. These obstacles concern their alignment with donors rather than the grassroots or membership-base.

Save the Children’s decision to ‘go global’ in 2009 and become a unified global actor was driven by the belief that, ‘in order to achieve their vision and mission of being the “world’s leading independent organization for children”’ they needed greater integration to achieve ‘increased impact, effectiveness and consistency’ (Hauser Centre for Nonprofit Organizations, 2010: 5). A further driving force was the wish to ensure greater effectiveness in country programmes. Today, the organization is one of the world’s biggest INGOs – with a common global strategy, values, vision and mission, and centralized headquarters in London

in charge of implementing programmes and projects in over 120 countries¹ (See also Gnaerig and MacCormack, 1999; Hauser Centre for Nonprofit Organizations, 2010; Jayawickrama, 2012; Stroup and Wong, 2013). The MCP became a challenge for both SCI and Save Norway – an organization embedded in Norway’s tradition of valuing women’s rights. On the one hand, accepting the policy would secure approximately 430 million USD in funding – making it possible to reach more children. On the other hand, it would mean weakening the organization’s work on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and potentially compromising its core principle – children’s rights.

If crisis in an institution arises when a situation touches upon its core issues, then one need to examine what underlay Save Norway’s reaction and opposition to SCI’s decision, and the ensuing dilemmas. In what follows, I explore why the MCP represents such a challenge for Save Norway, first examining the national context and the role of NGOs as membership-based organizations, and then turning to the changing landscape and the resultant merger.

Why ‘the gag rule’ hurts for Save Norway

The strong emphasis on the number of children reached is, according to a Save Norway employee, at the core of ‘the Atlantic divide’ in which Save the Children is situated. This is an intellectual and policy divide grounded in differing values and ideology between Europe and the USA (Lee, Buse, & Fustukian, 2002), evident in fields ranging from global health and development to security policy (e.g. Cohen, 2007; Lee, et al., 2002; Metzler, 2010). Taking health services as an example, Lee and colleagues (2002: 113-4) argue that the European side of the divide is grounded in a focus on equity, with health services viewed as a social good, whereas the US tradition sees healthcare more as private affair, with financing an individual responsibility. The divide entails a fundamental difference in the role of the state in welfare provision, evident in the different role of private and public actors, and exemplifies the underlying values and principles between the two sides. The transatlantic divide and the differences and challenges entailed were clear to Save the Children before the merger (see for instance Gnaerig and MacCormack, 1999). For Save Norway staff, it entails the following

¹ The new strategy brought a new global operating model for delivering international programmes and advocacy for children. The 29 member organizations agreed to transfer management of all international development and emergency operations (and the related funding) to SCI’s International Programmes Unit. **SCI now has** operational management of all country offices in 120 countries previously run by member organizations (Jayawickrama, 2012).

dilemmas: politics versus pragmatism; representing or reaching children; being a civil society actor or global contractor.

The transatlantic divide is also seen in civil society traditions, with the US side characterized by ‘non-political’ charities and being more ‘business-like’, and the British as more pragmatic (Stroup, 2012). In discussing these differences, Save Norway staff emphasized ‘the Nordic countries as more right-based than the USA’, adding that the Nordic tradition sees local NGOs as equal partners, not as contractors. Within this divide is Save the Children, trying to encompass both. Several staff members noted how difficult this had been for the organization – according to one employee, ‘the integration [of different traditions] was not equal, it happened on Washington’s terms’. Merging these different organizational cultures can be argued to have required SCI to be rather pragmatic, or what one Save Norway staff called ‘strategic or political, but in a different way’. According to that employee, it is the context that determines how the NGO operates: ‘In the USA for instance, being on the barricades isn’t so smart, it doesn’t help you win in the long run’, adding that the organization can still be political ‘but in a different way’. The ‘gag rule’ brings the transatlantic divide to the surface – as one Save Norway employee put it, ‘if you add abortion in the USA on top of that [the different traditions] then you have it’, noting how the USA is known to be more conservative than the Nordic countries regarding abortion.

After SCI signed the MCP, the Norwegian development-oriented media ran several articles on how Save Norway found itself forced to comply, e.g. ‘SCI must bow to Trump’s gag rule’ (Bull Jørgensen, 2017). Here, Norwegian civil society actors, among them Plan and Forum for Women and Development, interviewed about SCI’s decision, characterized it as ‘highly regrettable’. They emphasize that while the funding can help SCI reach or help millions of women and children, it will also deprive the very same women and children of life-saving information – ‘a fine line to walk’. Also Save Norway’s main donor, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), objected to the SCI decision and expressed concern over Save Norway’s ability to fulfil its role as a Norwegian civil society actor.

The same civil society actors that called SCI’s decision regrettable were also active in lobbying the Norwegian government to support the Dutch-led SheDecides initiative, an initiative aimed at bridging the MCP funding shortfall (SheDecides, 2017). Prior to the SCI decision, Save Norway acted as a political organization lobbying its government to curb the effect of the MCP (e.g. Olsen et al., 2017). Moreover, several Norwegian NGOs argued that Norwegian government must ‘join the war’ on behalf of women’s SRHR (Zachrisen, 2017),

placing themselves and Norad on the side of the women and girls affected by President Trump's decision – a clearly political statement.

That the decision to sign the MCP became so challenging for Save Norway must therefore be seen as connected to the organization's identity as a political and vocal NGO. The MCP decision showed employees that their involvement in a political and rights-based organization could be questioned. As will be shown, Save Norway staff found it hard to translate what the MCP represents into the moral purpose justifying the existence of their organization – the focus on rights. According to one staff member, signing the MCP was easier for other members, as in the USA, 'since they, as an organization, do not have a political history featuring women's right [to abortion]'. Another staff member expressed frustration at not being recognized as a political actor standing up for the women and girls whose rights are being jeopardized: 'First and foremost, we represent women and girls'; 'you are not a right-based organization if you do not stand up for your principles when they are at stake'.

As shown below, Save Norway had no option but to oppose the decision of its international organization. While choosing to secure funding that can make it possible to help the most children and women can also be seen as a decision of principle, some Save Norway staff saw it as pragmatic and non-political. This is not to say that various Save the Children members and SCI are either pragmatic or rights-based: they are both – or as another Save Norway interviewee put it, 'for the INGO it is about being strategic, achieving the good compromises'.

In line with the national context

With the reinstatement of the MCP, abortion has become an ever more controversial issue than before. The MCP, or the 'gag rule', is part of a deeply politicized and polarized global landscape, and has provoked strong reactions on both sides (Starrs, 2017; Storeng, Palmer, Daire, & Kloster, 2018). Also in Norway, the right to abortion is a cause that mobilize. Civil society has historically been significant in the political mobilization of women and women's rights in Norway (Østerud et al., 2003) and in securing abortion on demand in 1978 (Danielsen, 2015). In 2013, the newly elected government's proposal to modify the abortion law and allow doctors to reserve themselves against referring women for abortion resulted in one of the biggest public demonstrations since the 1970s.

Save Norway, founded in 1946, has developed a firm identity as a child-rights organization, ‘the rights of children are the fundamental starting point for all we do’, explained one employee. In line with other European Save the Children organizations, the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) became the underlying philosophy and value-base for Save Norway (Redd Barna, 2017a). Over the years, Save Norway has developed its portfolio in line with global policies to include adolescent reproductive health and rights, running programmes on sexual education, working to prevent child marriage and to reduce teenage pregnancies – all making access to safe abortion relevant for the organization. Additionally, one Save Norway staff explained it as ‘including the period around maternal death or the whole new-born period’. To position itself as the main actor on child rights within Norwegian civil society, and, according to former Save Norway staff, ‘increase its credibility as a rights organization’, Save Norway established its domestic programme in the late 1980s. This programme, the interviewee explained, also led to a ‘greater focus on children’s rights in Norway’. Save Norway became a vocal actor in the public debate, advocating for child rights as an integral part of Norwegian policies. For many, the concept of children’s rights has become associated with Save Norway. Further, it has attracted staff who seek, through their work, to challenge global structures violating children’s rights and hence contribute to social change. The organization has established itself as one of the five biggest NGOs in Norway (Swedish Development Advisere, 2015). To protect its credibility, reputation and position as a trusted partner to the government and the leading child-rights organization in Norway, Save Norway needs to manage its own brand.

The close partnership between government and NGOs in Norway has raised debate about NGO independence (cf. Tvedt, 2009). Although many Norwegian NGOs receive a significant financial support from the government, a mutual understanding exists between the two as to the independence of the former, showing a somewhat pragmatic approach to the principle of civil society independence. By contrast, to safeguard its independence, Amnesty International does not accept government funding. NGOs are not only seen as implementing the government’s foreign- and development policy: they are also trusted and strategic partners in knowledge production while serving as watchdogs of government policy and practice (Norad, 2017b). According to one Save Norway employee, ‘in SCI we are the odd ones, receiving 200 million from Norad and yet free to criticize those who control where the money comes from’. To secure some degree of independence, Norad requires NGOs to self-finance 10 per cent of their budget. This is important in the Norwegian context: derived from

membership fees and private donations, the 10 per cent helps legitimize NGOs as civil society organizations, not contractors.

As rights are central to Norwegian civil society, so are membership and voluntarism. According to the Norwegian Statistics Bureau, nearly 80 per cent of Norwegians belong to a civil society or voluntary organization, though not all as active members (Statistics Norway, 2015). Active members are often part of a local branch of an NGO, and many NGOs also have their own youth organization. Hence, members are the NGO's constituency to which they are accountable, serving as an important source of legitimacy for the NGO (Banks, et al., 2015). This is also the case for Save Norway. Its highest authority is the national congress, where members, ordinary citizens, meet biannually. Through a democratic process, members are elected as representatives to the organization's boards with an active role in deciding policy, by-laws and positions. One Save Norway staff noted that, in the aftermath of the 'gag-rule crisis', some '[of our] members challenged us to leave the INGO', and 'we had to discuss whether we achieve more as part of SCI ... and I believe we do.'

The effort to unify a set of organizations with differing national roots, values and organizational structures has not been easy for Save the Children. According to one Save Norway employee, 'SCI is more like the World Bank than the UN in terms of representation; we are not 29 members with equal power. Our decision-making power is based partially on how much money we bring to the table', a point to which I now will turn.

Local or global identities: Challenged by the move to go global

The USA is the world's largest source of global health funding (Singh and Karim, 2017). The decision to reinstate the MCP will in turn influence who gets funding and what kind of global health programmes can be implemented. Within SCI, Save US has been the biggest contributor in terms of funding. Through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Save US contributes 30–35 per cent of SCI's overall budget (Save the Children International, 2016b). Since 2000, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has been a generous donor to Save US, especially through the organization's Saving Newborn Lives programme, which 'seeks to reduce global neonatal mortality by working in partnership to develop packages of effective, evidence-based newborn care interventions' (Save the Children US, 2017b).

Within the global health and development arena today, money has become the most important source of power and authority (McNeill, Andersen, & Sandberg, 2013: 62). Here

Bill Gates has become a major player, ‘not merely in providing massive funding but also in emphasizing the importance of performance, measured by concrete results’ (McNeill, et al., 2013: 64). The Gates Foundation has changed the game, shifting the field in a neoliberal or managerial direction, a claim supported by the literature on philanthrocapitalism (cf. Bishop and Green, 2008; McGoey, 2015). This shift further depoliticizes the field.

For NGOs, a major issue in the transatlantic divide is the concept of charity, or what Banks and colleagues (2015) describe as non-political contractors in contrast to a civil society orientation. Traditionally, the European and especially Nordic member organizations have emphasized rights, seeing the Convention on the Rights of the Child as their core guideline. By contrast, as a former Save Norway staff put it, Save US has ‘a strong identity as a charity’, aiming to be a leading non-profit children’s development and relief organization – focusing on changing the world, ‘one child’s life at a time’ (Save the Children US, 2017a). As this interviewee explained, ‘Save US has always been hesitant towards a rights-based approach’, adding that this was not surprising, as ‘the US has not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child’² and in addition has a donor, USAID, which has clearer strings attached to its funding than either Save UK and Save Norway, especially regarding abortion.

USAID is known for ‘assessing its aid effectiveness, measuring and evaluating program performance...and using this information to “manage for results”’ (OECD DAC, 1998: 13 in Stroup, 2012: 38). Although many may argue that Norad is becoming increasingly results-based, it has always underlined the importance of civil society organizations in development, and has allowed NGOs to work rather freely, deciding for themselves how to spend their funding, within the focal areas of Norwegian development assistance – women and reproductive health, the environment, and human rights (Ruud and Kjerland, 2003). This donor flexibility is, according to the Save Norway respondent, among the reasons why Save Norway has become ‘one of the more influential Save the Children organizations in line with Sweden, US, and UK’. Although both Save Norway and Save Sweden have gained influence due to their flexible donor policies, Save UK and Save US are the biggest Save the Children chapters in terms of employees, programmes and funding.

While the partnership with Gates Foundation has strengthened SCI’s focus on tangible results and cost-effectiveness, internal factors also helped shape the organization in a more managerial direction. According to a former Save Norway employee,

² The USA has signed the Convention, but remains the only UN member-country that is not party to it.

Save US and UK have not always been in the drivers' seat. Earlier, UK was more progressive than US and there was a constant power struggle between the two. This made it possible for the Nordic countries to have influence, which was a good thing. But something changed mid-2000. Save UK's new leader understood that if US and UK collaborated they will dominated the organization, and they joined forces

The reference here is to Jasmine Whitebread, who took over as Save UK's CEO in 2005, later becoming CEO of SCI. This shift brought a business approach into the organization, shifting the focus to emphasize efficiency and results, and with children's lives, not rights, as the bottom line of the organization (Rawstone, 2015). That the two most influential chapters agreed on certain principles influenced the merger and, according to the same respondent, led to the structure and values prevailing within the organization today. This also brings one of the dilemmas facing Save Norway to the surface – pragmatism versus politics. When SCI was established, the organization divided its portfolio into core global themes: child protection, child rights governance, health and nutrition, education, and child poverty. Through a networked leadership model, one member leads an initiative on behalf of the others – based on expertise and domestic fund-raising potential Save US became head of the health and nutrition portfolio; Save Norway, of the education portfolio (Swedish Development Advisere, 2015). Interestingly, child rights governance became a separate global theme under Save Denmark's leadership – not a cross-cutting theme underpinning all SCI work.

To reduce the differences between member organizations, and allow for a range of different structures and value bases within the global organization, a set of common values and mission was decided upon with the creation of SCI in 2009. The shared ambition became a world 'in which all children survive, learn and are protected' (Save the Children International, 2016a). The global mission is to 'inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children, and to achieve immediate and lasting changes in their lives' (Save the Children International, 2009). One staff member emphasized that 'there is no mention of rights there'. When explaining what binds them together as an INGO, another Save Norway employee said that 'it [the principle of children's rights] has not necessarily been at the core globally', emphasizing that 'for us that is the main point; for others being a charity, an effective relief organization, is central'. This emphasis on a charity reaching children also highlights another dilemma for the NGO – should they be a charity, or represent children? According to an interviewee working for Save Norway at that time, these values and vision were 'formulated vaguely enough for everyone to agree', and to preserve the members' (sense

of) autonomy and identity. However, in 2018 the declaration from the international Members' Meeting reinforced the commitment to child rights.

When explaining the puzzle of being both national and international, one NGO worker compared it to the UN: '[as a] national NGO you have a principled position as a starting point. However, in negotiations you need to find the good compromises – everyone must move away from their principled positions'. What is strategic for a national NGO does not necessarily follow for an INGO. This is, according to another NGO worker, one reason why the organization finds itself split between a child rights-focus and a more market pragmatic focus on reaching children. This development also illustrates a de-politicization of the INGO, illustrating the third dilemma facing Save Norway – its identity as an independent civil society organization versus a global contractor. These three dilemmas – politics versus pragmatism, charity versus representation, and civil society actor versus global contractor – all indicate the challenges and difficulties of seeking to overcome the transatlantic divide within one global organization – SCI.

The internal dynamics and dilemmas

Situated in the context of a vocal civil society and a strong belief in human rights and gender equality as core values of Norwegian development assistance (Ruud and Kjerland, 2003), Save Norway found its identity and core values challenged by SCI's decision to sign the MCP. As shown above, the transatlantic divide brings some dilemmas or ideological challenges to the surface. In what follows, I will further explore how this played out in a particular Norwegian context.

Politics versus pragmatism

Central to SCI's decision to sign the policy was how many women and children could be saved, or reached, by complying with the Mexico City Policy. As shown below, this focus on the *number* of children reached contrasts with Save Norway's traditional emphasis on *rights* in its work.

In its blogpost, Save Norway explained that it had advised SCI not to comply with the MCP, emphasizing that it is as 'a matter of principle' – specifically, 'women and girls' rights to health, their right to information and health services provided within the scope of the law' (Redd Barna, 2017b). Save Norway employees stressed that this is about reproductive rights

and not solely health. As one staff member put it: ‘if you focus on rights, you can never sign the gag-rule’. Despite advocating for a different decision, Save Norway describes this as an ‘impossible decision’ for SCI and one of the most challenging decisions in the history of the newly established INGO. To explain why SCI made the decision, Save Norway refers to the former’s statement that the money will help them provide life-saving assistance to 14 million children and 6 million mothers in 37 countries (Redd Barna, 2017b). What makes this challenging for Save Norway is that the MCP decision ‘leaves 47 000 women in danger of dying every year due to unsafe abortion’ (Redd Barna, 2017b). Or, ‘putting some women over others’, as a former staff put it.

For Save Norway, as not only a Norwegian civil society organization but also working on preventing teenage pregnancies and strengthening sexualiyt education, safe abortion is an important issue, also to Norwegian donors, and in line with the core value – rights. ‘You cannot use the Convention [on the Rights of the Child] and a rights-based language only when it’s convenient!’, as one Norwegian policy adviser exclaimed. Several Save Norway employees expressed similar frustration over the tendency in SCI and in some member organizations to use children’s rights only ‘when it served a purpose’ and less ‘as a guiding principle’. Even though the Convention on the Rights of the Child is incorporated in the global organization’s steering principles, it is ‘a qualified truth’ that they comply with it, according to a former Save Norway employee. For this respondent, not putting rights first became an expression of pragmatism. That rights have a different position in other Save organizations was evident, several staff members emphasized that other Save chapters not necessarily understand the rights-based approach’. There is confusion within the organization to what degree pragmatism is a strategic measure for ensuring new funding, or if it is, as other staff put it ‘adhering to different principles’.

The prevailing pragmatism within SCI is not only about political tradition, a Save Norway employee said, ‘but as much about this burning desire within SCI, Save US and UK to grow, grow, grow’. The same respondent explained that this desire to grow lies at the heart of the decision to comply with the MCP. ‘SCI justifies this growth principle by saying it increases their ability to reach more children’. Hence, it places children’s lives and not rights as the organization’s bottom line, or principle. This shift towards numbers and away from rights is evident not only in the MCP decision: within global health, it is increasingly the number of lives saved that counts. This can be seen as a shift away from what Fassin (Fassin, 2007, 2012) has called the ‘politics of life’. Fassin (2012: 112) argues that this shift within global health indicates a ‘profound change in the recognition of value of life, which has

shifted from the political to the biological'. It marks a shift in how the world views development: it is no longer about the quality of life lived, but the quantity of lives saved. What SCI *reaches* children *with* is not emphasized.

Being pragmatic can also be 'convenient when the aim is to increase the donor base and expand the organization... It is easier if you have fewer red lines when dealing with those in power and in charge of the funding', according to a Save Norway employee. That such pragmatism can be seen as wise is also challenging for some Norwegian aid workers.

According to one Save Norway staff:

if you want to expand and increase your budgets and 'save more children' – then being pragmatic can be seen as wise in many cases, and that is a challenge ... By raising more money, you make sure that more children get a better life ... if you don't think about it as a political struggle where structural conditions for children and important principles have to be attended to for rights to be implemented as we believe, then it is logical in a way.

Thus, diverging from the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the organization's core principle in a Nordic setting, is argued to be acceptable in the case of MCP since it leads to increased results – reaching more children. However, when this pragmatism, described by staff as 'valuing increased impact over rights', works its way downward in the organization it becomes difficult for some employees who find themselves torn between their personal values, motivation and convictions, and the organization's leadership. This perceived ideological split between pragmatism and rights/politics is so important to some that they felt the need to resign, or question if it is worth staying. One Save Norway staff said, '20 years ago I would have handed in my resignation immediately', adding 'I don't know how long I'll stay'. This also illustrates how one NGO, or staff within the same NGO, can be both political and pragmatic. Furthermore, it leaves unanswered the question of *where* in an organization its values reside – with the leadership, its political platform – or its employees. How far can practices diverge from core values before staff feel out of place?

Standing by principles is important for Save Norway employees, as was evident in their comments about how other Norwegian NGOs have dealt with the MCP. Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), another development NGO, took a clear stand opposing the policy and used it as an opportunity to declare its firm belief in a woman's right to choose. Like Save Norway, NCA is a member-based organization – but its members are congregations within the Church of Norway. Thus, NCA risked losing support from the conservative wing of this Lutheran church and other congregations, its members and hence value base. One staff-

member expressed frustration at Save Norway not being an organization of principle – ‘I really admire NCA for taking a clear stand. They risked losing funding, and they did, but they gained so much’. Save Norway’s leadership acknowledged this dilemma and tried to balance out the freedom of speech and action that is still within their domestic programme with the limitations emplaced on their international projects. As a result of the merger, the power and control of the various Save the Children organizations over their former international operations decreased, but they retained control of their domestic programmes. In Norway, some employees see the domestic division and the international division of the organization as floating apart. As one staff-member said, ‘the domestic program is still based on children’s rights – I am really proud of their work’, while expressing frustration at the international division’s limited influence over their programmes. Hence, Save Norway finds itself split when trying to be both national and global. Rooted in a political civil society environment that values children’s rights (which the domestic programme can emphasize in its projects), the international department is bound by policies determined by the international board, which conflict with Save Norway’s national context.

‘We hate to be a charity’ – charity versus representation

Basic to the transatlantic divide is the focus on charity, as opposed to solidarity and a right-based approach for civil society actors. For one Save Norway employee, the strong emphasis on the number of children reached is at the core of ‘the Atlantic divide’, and illustrates differing perceptions or understandings about whom they, as an organization, represent.

Save Norway has a history of making children’s rights and child participation central to all its decisions: a history of representing children. This is in opposition to what one NGO worker labelled a charity that aims at ‘reaching children, not representing them’, and shows a de-politicization of the NGO’s operations. This employee sees the MCP as bringing these differences to the surface, with expanding the donor base becoming more important for the INGO than speaking up about rights and the violation of rights. Focusing on reach, or being what several Save Norway employees labelled being ‘pragmatic’, does not, in their view, take the structural causes into consideration when aiming to help the children. One employee explained how ‘the Scandinavian model’ has traditionally had ‘child participation and children’s interests and needs as a starting point’, so representing children and their needs follows. However, this has not been at the heart of the British/US model, which, the employee stressed, has been ‘about helping children when in dialogue with different actors’. This NGO

worker explained: ‘representation means speaking on behalf of the grassroots in donor meetings. Not representing the donor when implementing projects. That is acting like a contractor’. According to another Save Norway employee, ‘the idea of representation, of building a bottom–up approach, because you’re supposed to represent your constituency – those children and their concerns – is seen as a bit strange in other NGO traditions ...it is very Scandinavian – a Scandinavian ideal’.

Although the principle of representing children is also evident in other Save the Children traditions, it is often combined with what several NGO workers called ‘a charity rhetoric’, or as one put it: ‘they use *reach* all the time’. For instance, SCI states on its webpage that they ‘reached 56 million children in 2016’ (Save the Children International, 2016a). Several Save Norway staff-members expressed concern at this growing ‘charity rhetoric’ as a consequence of the recent merger. One of them explained it to me ‘like a monster’:

We need to reach the marginalized – imagine that monster with sticky fingers trying to reach the children, right? We have even started to use the term here, and we do not understand that it has nothing to do with rights! It is *charity rhetoric*.

According to the same respondent, this emphasis on *reach* stands in contrast to the Norwegian and Scandinavian understanding. This Save Norway employee went on to say, ‘instead of reaching you should sit down with the marginalized and try to understand their interests and concerns, and then you should take their concerns and fight for them’. Even though complying with the MCP enables SCI to save more children, it makes it more difficult for them to represent them as regards to reproductive health and rights, and abortion in particular. One staff member explained that some members, to be able to really represent children, want SCI ‘to become a global children’s rights movement, which is something different from an INGO ... like the women’s movement or the civil right movement – *that* is the ultimate way’.

Representation, both regarding own members and in representing vulnerable and marginalized children, lies at the core of Save Norway’s identity. As shown below, its identity as an independent civil society organization is challenged with the SCI decision to comply with the MCP.

Civil society organization versus global contractor

Besides struggling with a pragmatic approach emphasizing growth and the prevailing ‘charity

rhetoric' within SCI, Save Norway faced a third dilemma when SCI signed the MCP – how to preserve its identity as a vocal civil society organization?

This third dilemma is in many ways directly linked with the MCP's colloquial name – 'the gag rule' – since it 'gags' or prohibits recipient organizations from informing about or advocating for abortion rights. This concerns the role or understanding of civil society as independent and vocal actors holding governments and other powerful actors to account and lobbying and advocating for rights. The dilemma is not limited to this specific policy alone, but illustrates a growing global trend, where the space for civil society is limited, even shrinking (CIVICUS, 2016). Also Norad, Save Norway's main donor, has voiced concern about how the decision to comply with the policy will affect Save Norway and SCI's staff and partner organizations in the countries where they run programmes. As part of the merger, all international programmes and projects are now channelled through and run by SCI, not by specific member organizations like Save Norway. In a letter to Save Norway, Norad expressed concern over how their funding will be spent, emphasizing that SRHR is an important part of the Norwegian development portfolio, and that Norad recognizes access to safe abortion to be 'important for women's and young girls' health and life' (Norad, 2017a). They also question the limited space for SCI's country office staff and partner organizations and their right, as civil society organizations, to participate in the public debate in their home country. Here they refer to one of Norad's focus countries, Malawi, which is currently reviewing its strict abortion law (Daire, Kloster, & Storeng, 2018). In the same letter, Norad (2017a) stresses that they 'are of the opinion that it is important that SCI staff at country offices can participate in public debates and advocacy work regarding safe abortion on a professional basis'. Thus, they also make clear the importance of securing freedom of expression for staff – a crucial element in the role of civil society in Norway.

Norad was not the only actor to express concern over Save Norway's ability to fulfil its role as a civil society organization – several employees also questioned their own organization. According to one, 'complying with MCP challenges core principles. The organization's freedom and independence – we are not to adhere to a foreign government. As an organization that exists to strengthen other civil society actors, we cannot do something that weaken their voice'. Another staff member focused more on the watchdog role: 'we're having a donor [Norad] that's more in line with our principles than we are', in terms of being political and rights-based. Nevertheless, in their response to Norad, Save Norway stressed that it, as a Norwegian civil society organization, 'will never support a policy that legitimizes a shrinking space for civil society' (Redd Barna, 2017b) – as its global counterpart was seen as

doing. According to a Save Norway employee ‘SCI and its staff cannot [due to the signing of the MCP] use any resources on abortion advocacy – money, human resources and even the SCI logo’. Further explaining that Save Norway staff are free to do so and to use Save Norway’s logo. However, as another Save Norway staff put it ‘the proof is in the pudding...it’s at country-office level we’ll see how this policy plays out in reality’.

However, to limit the negative consequences, an alliance of like-minded Save the Children chapters, Save Norway included, is currently exploring the possibilities of channelling SRHR funding outside of SCI to secure programme continuity. According to one staff member, ‘Save Sweden is already doing this, but they’ve been really clear and determined’. Although Norad opposed SCI’s decision to comply with the MCP, they proved not to be so tough as Sida, the Swedish equivalent. Sida’s response to the reinstatement of the MCP was, based on an assessment, to consider phasing out funding for NGOs that complied with the policy (SIDA, 2017).

While some informants emphasized the role of civil society as watchdogs, others expressed concern over the effect on, or changing role of, civil society organizations in countries where SCI implements projects and programmes. Reflecting over why SCI signed the policy, one former Save Norway employee said:

I don’t know if it is only about pragmatism, there may be something more fundamental, the neoliberal ideology in contrast to rights. It’s all about what civil society is. We should strengthen civil society in the countries where we work, not turn them into contractors.

This respondent further questioned the motivation for expansion: ‘What’s the point of expanding and gaining influence at the global level if we don’t use it? And what kind of influence are we then talking about?’ The employee further emphasized the need to reflect on how expansion may even weaken local civil society if international actors treat the former as contractors, and the negative effects this can have on children’s rights. While this does not directly relate to the MCP, it reflects a trend within SCI in relating to national NGOs as contractors and not as civil society (Swedish Development Advisere, 2015). This was corroborated by another Save Norway staff: ‘we are starting to do stuff UNICEF could do, we act as international consultants and implement [donor projects]’. This development and the tendency to see local and national NGOs as contractors opposes or calls into question the civil society partnership ideal that ‘has been prevalent within the Scandinavian tradition’. Save Norway has played a significant role in developing SCI’s partnership policy, and is known

within SCI for generally adhering to these principles and aiming for long-term partnership not treating local partners as contractors, although the degree to which other SCI members follow these principles varies (Swedish Development Advisere, 2015). According to a former Save Norway staff-member, Save US and UK have become

more pragmatic since they work with service provision. Not service delivery in addition to advocacy, but on a contract, on behalf of a donor. They do not have the same idea of structural change as us. Do we work as partners or as contractors?

A Save Norway employee noted the changing identity of NGOs when talking about SCI's emphasis on growth and expansion:

There's a tendency to become more pragmatic when your project portfolio increases – you get other interests to protect. If you become more interested in expanding the organization, either for selfish reasons or based on the argument that you reach or help more children, the problem is the same: your voice becomes vague or indistinct, and in the end, there is no need for your voice.

Several Save Norway staff-members stressed that the organization's voice was weakening not only because of the MCP, but had been underway for some time. However, for them, the MCP became the straw that broke the camel's back, bringing everything they feared to the front. Here they noted the SCI tendency to enter into partnerships with business in general, 'big pharma' in particular: 'If we can be in partnership with them, what are we then? If we agree with them, whom do we disagree with?' as one NGO worker put it. Here, the respondent was referring to the 'strategic' and 'innovative partnership' formed between SCI and the pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline in 2013 (Save the Children International, 2017).

The dilemmas presented in this article reflect ongoing debates within Save Norway. One former employee also reflected upon the broader consequences of complying with the MCP, questioning whether Norad will continue to support Save Norway's SRHR programmes. This respondent doubted that Norad would choose Save Norway for their increased funding to SRHR unless Save Norway could manage to be 'a clear voice within SCI opposing the charity approach, and implementing programmes in line with Norad's SRHR and civil society principles' – adding that other donors might follow Sida's example.

Conclusions

The three dilemmas faced by Save Norway when its global organization, SCI, decided to comply with the MCP show that there are limits to how much NGOs can change, or how far they can move from their core values before staff feel out of place. I hold that the limits for Save Norway became evident through the three dilemmas discussed. First, when the ability or right to speak up on behalf of others, seen as crucial to their civil society identity, was curbed. Secondly, when their core values and ideas of being a right-based and political organization no longer appeared central; and lastly, now that they no longer see themselves as representing children worldwide, but as having become a contractor complying with donor conditionality. The decision to unify Save the Children into a global INGO brought the transatlantic divide to the fore. It is as part of this divide that the dilemmas faced by Save Norway staff must be understood, and hence the fears of being co-opted by other civil society traditions, by other core values and principles.

The role and form of NGOs have changed in recent decades due to a shift in the dominant development discourse (e.g. Banks, et al., 2015; Gardner and Lewis, 2015). In turn, NGOs have begun aligning their strategies with donor priorities focused on efficiency and results, rather than being political civil society actors (Banks, et al., 2015: 710), making it difficult for these NGOs to serve their civil society function. Scholars have argued that membership-based organizations, as opposed to intermediary NGOs or contractors, are better at realizing this specific function due to their grassroots orientation (Banks et al., 2015). However, this article suggests that the distinction between membership-based organizations and intermediary NGOs is not so clear-cut. The case of Save Norway as part of SCI indicates that some NGOs may be both. For Save Norway, its members are of importance both as source of legitimacy and as crucial to its identity as civil society actor. These particularities are embedded in what one informant described as ‘the Scandinavian civil society model’. SCI’s decision to comply with the MCP represents a different set of values or principles, challenging the very same identity and legitimacy Save Norway’s national context provides. Hence, aiming to be both a national membership-based NGO and part of a global INGO brings these dilemmas to the fore for Save Norway and its staff.

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