



## Mission Over Money: Can Peer Pressure Help INGOs Stay Mission Focused?

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The complex operating environment of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) is observed to have two types of adverse pressures that influence leaders' decision-making: high competition in the funding landscape (**economic constraints**) and adversarial relationships with public institutions, risking restrictive policies (**political opportunity constraints**). The authors aim to understand if these constraints bring friendly competition for INGOs to do their best work or if it leads to a “**resource-security-orientation strategy**” by re-allocating staff capacity and funds away from their mission towards activities aimed at improving their relationship with key stakeholders in order to alleviate these constraints.

According to **constructivist theory**, organisations engage in peer regulation in order to learn how to most effectively achieve their strategic goals. However, **resource dependence theory** posit that peer regulation activities mostly serve to secure more resources: by signalling to their funders and regulatory authorities that they engage in responsible behaviour.

The authors explore if INGOs engaged in **peer regulation** activities perceive an increase in organisational learning and use these learnings in order to advance their mission.

[#ResourceScarcity](#) [#MissionOrientation](#) [#PeerRegulation](#) [#INGOs](#)

### Background

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### Context



- What does Peer Regulation mean? Concrete examples:
  - Adopting **sectorial standards** to bring evidence into practice (e.g. adhering to the Core Humanitarian Standards);
  - Participating in **peer learning** with other INGOs (e.g. Peer Advice Groups of Accountable Now);
  - Exchanging knowledge** with peers to drive organizational learning;
  - Coordination with peers to **enhance collective action**.
- Data gathered represents a wide range of INGO leaders:
  - Leaders from **201 INGOs** (out of the 808 registered in Switzerland) representing operations in **120 countries**.
  - This is one of the **largest samples of INGOs**; previous studies focused mainly on U.S.-based organizations.

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## Take aways & Learnings



- Major finding: peer regulation acts as a positive mediator: while economic and political pressures push INGOs to direct funds and capacity away from their mission, **peer regulation**—especially when it fosters learning—**helps redirect focus back to the mission**.
- Five hypotheses (H) were studied and confirmed by the results:
  - H1: INGOs facing high economic and political constraints are more likely to adopt a resource-security orientation;
  - H2: Under these constraints, INGOs are less likely to maintain mission orientation;
  - H3: Greater constraints lead to increased peer regulation;
  - H4: Peer regulation improves perceived mission orientation;
  - H5: Mission orientation improves further when peer regulation leads to organizational learning.
- The research provides initial evidence of the role peer regulation can play in **strengthening learning processes as a means to increase mission orientation**. The authors recommend further research be conducted regarding how constructivist theory could be applied to understanding how organisational behaviour could influence mission orientation.
- Engaging in peer regulation behaviour is not a guarantee given economic and political constraints, this study brings to light the **importance of investing in greater peer regulation activities**, particularly the development and refinement of **peer regulation standards that connect INGOs to organisational learning processes**.

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