

Moving from Loose Global Associations to Linked Geographic Networks

How can NGO networks grow, build coherence, and, at the same time, strengthen their grass roots?

November 11, 2009

It started with a question from Sesame Workshop

How do global NGOs decentralize while retaining coherence?

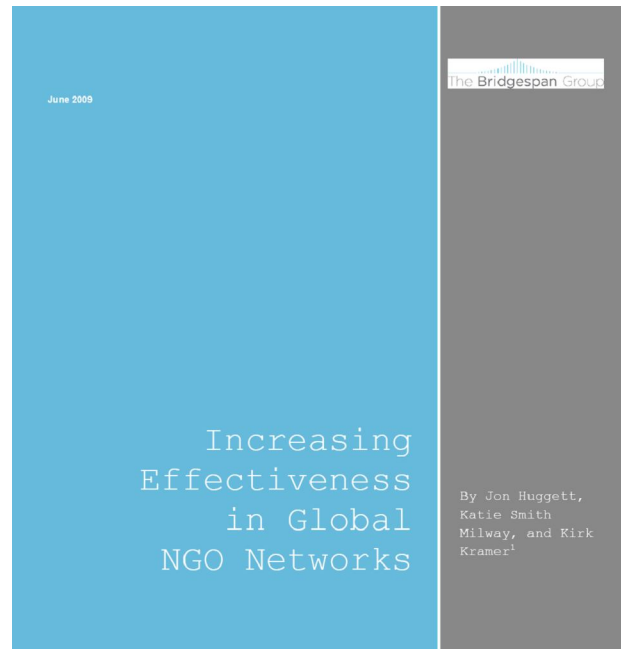
Spring 2008

How do coherent global networks emerge from loose associations?

2nd half 2008

How can NGO networks build global coherence while strengthening their grass roots?

2009



Have interviewed variety of global NGOs

Absolute Return for Kids
ACCION
Action Contre La Faim
(Action Against Hunger)
African Medical and Research Foundation
Americares
Asia Society
Big Brothers Big Sisters Int'l
CARE
ChildFund International
Children's Investment Fund Foundation
Clinton HIV/AIDS Initiative
Covenant House International
Earthwatch
Engender Health
Girl Guides
Greenpeace
Habitat for Humanity
Human Rights Watch
Inspire Foundation
Int'l Planned Parenthood Fed.
Int'l Reading Association
Juvenile Diabetes Research Fund

Khulisa
Leaders' Quest
Medecins Sans Frontieres
(Doctors without Borders)
Mercy Corps
National Geographic
Open Society Institute
(including ECFR, SEDF)
Opportunity International
Oxfam
PACT
PATH
Plan International
Population Council
Save the Children
Sesame Workshop
Teach for All
The Hunger Project
UN Foundation
United Religions Int'l
United Way
World Vision
World Wildlife Fund

Global NGOs are trying to globalize, localize and decentralize, all at the same time

How do global NGOs decentralize while retaining coherence?

How do coherent global networks emerge from loose associations?

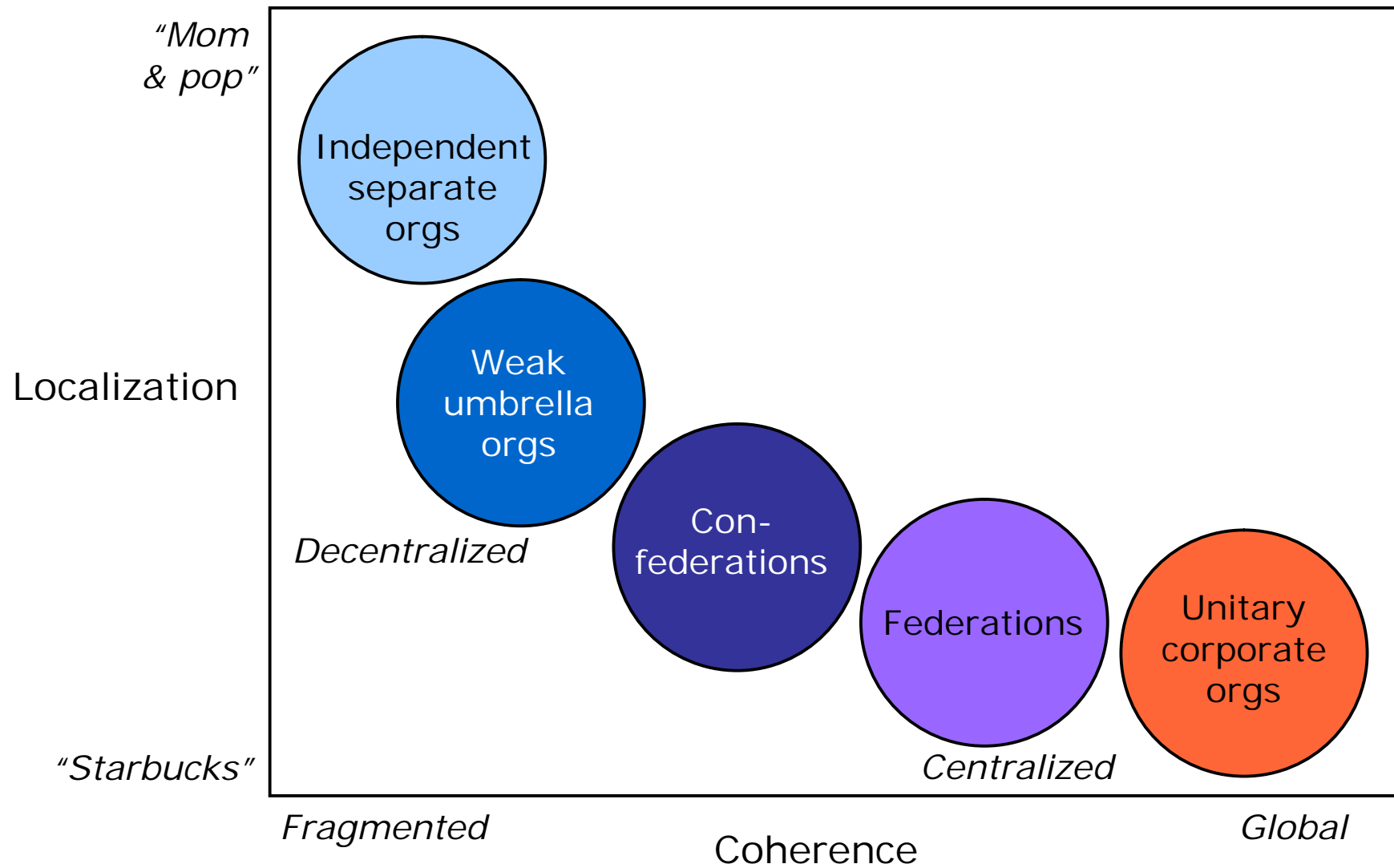


Building local legitimacy

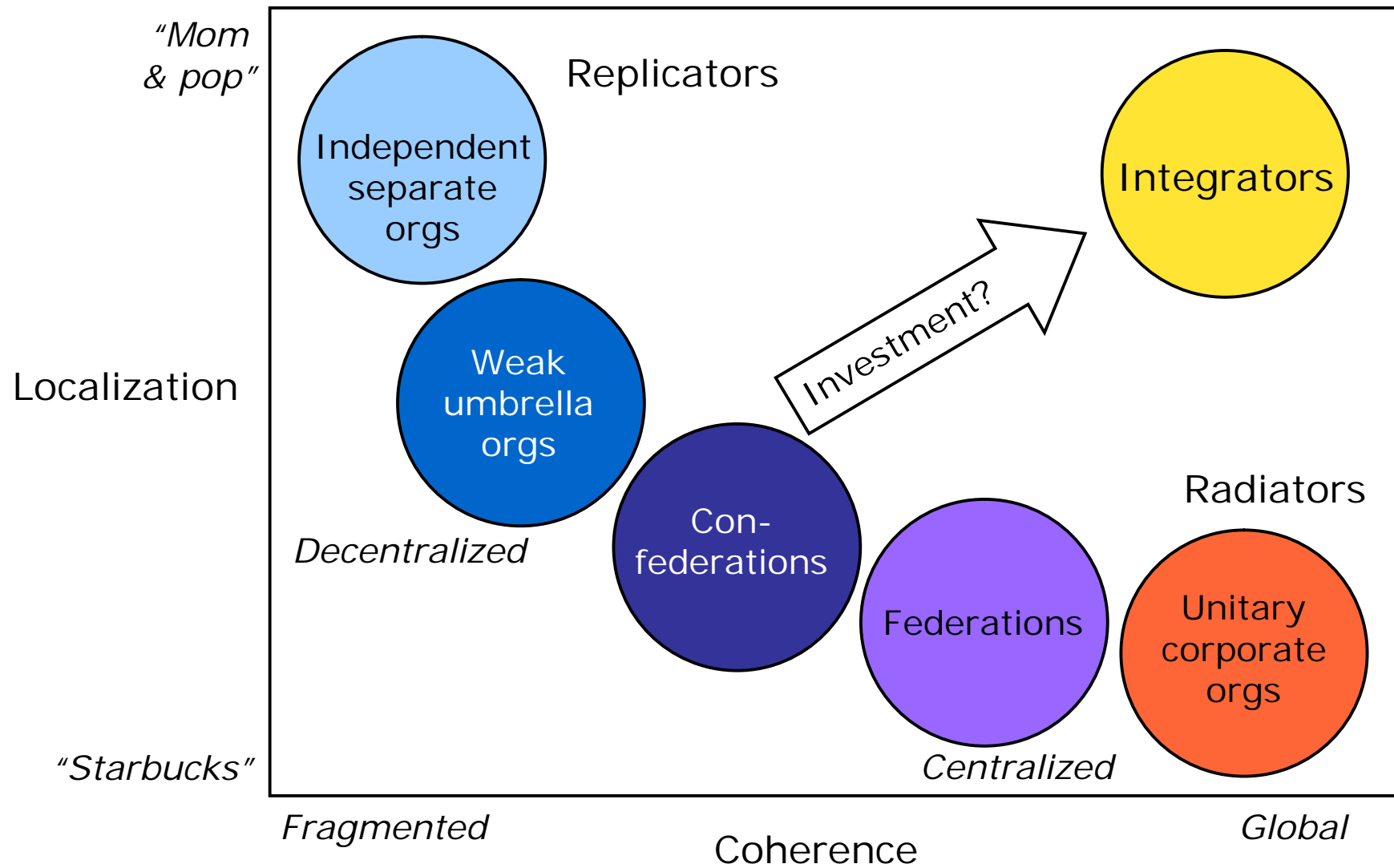
Building global coherence



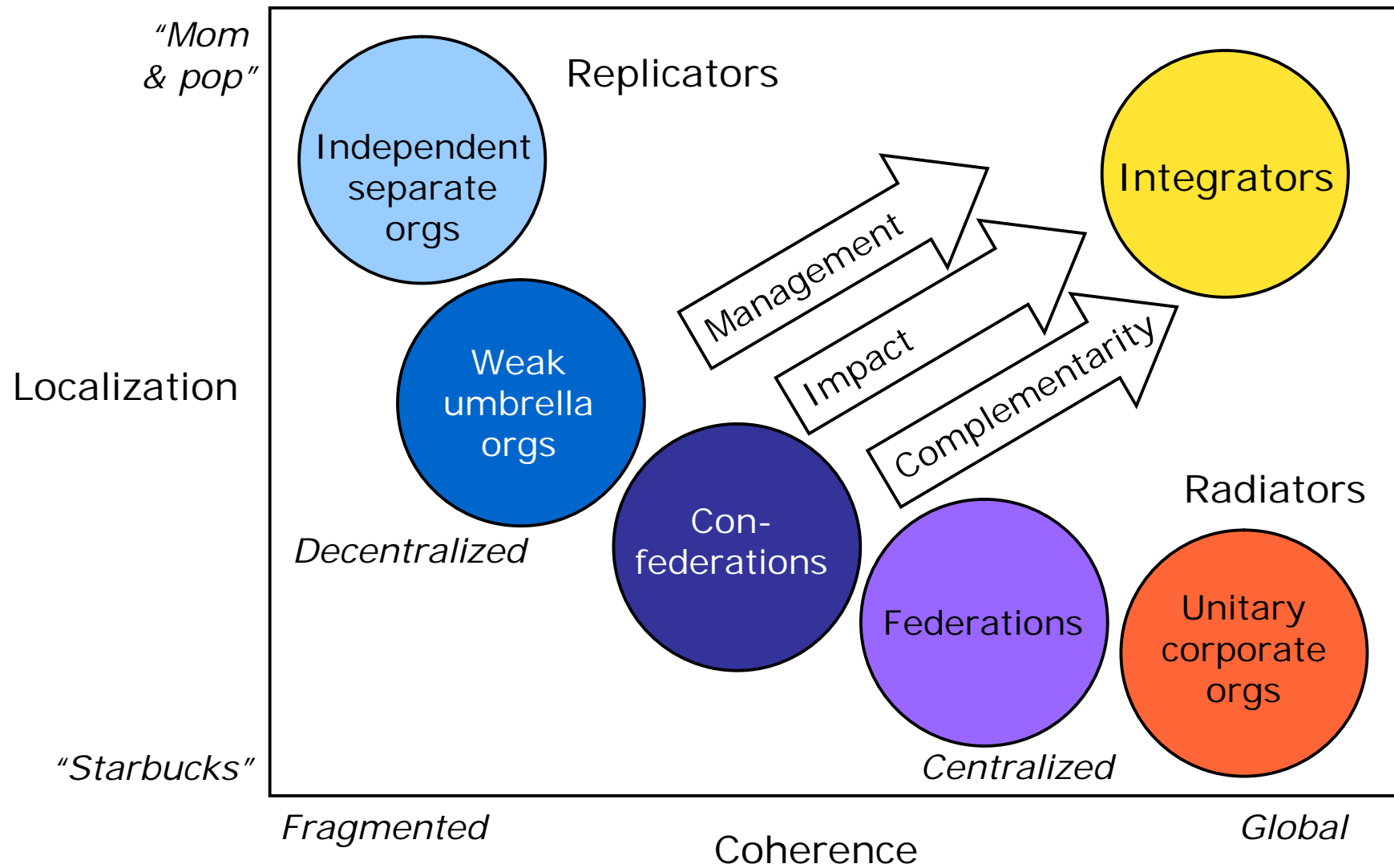
Traditional view was of a tradeoff between centralization and decentralization



"Integrators" invest to break traditional tradeoff



"Integrators" show three key patterns of change

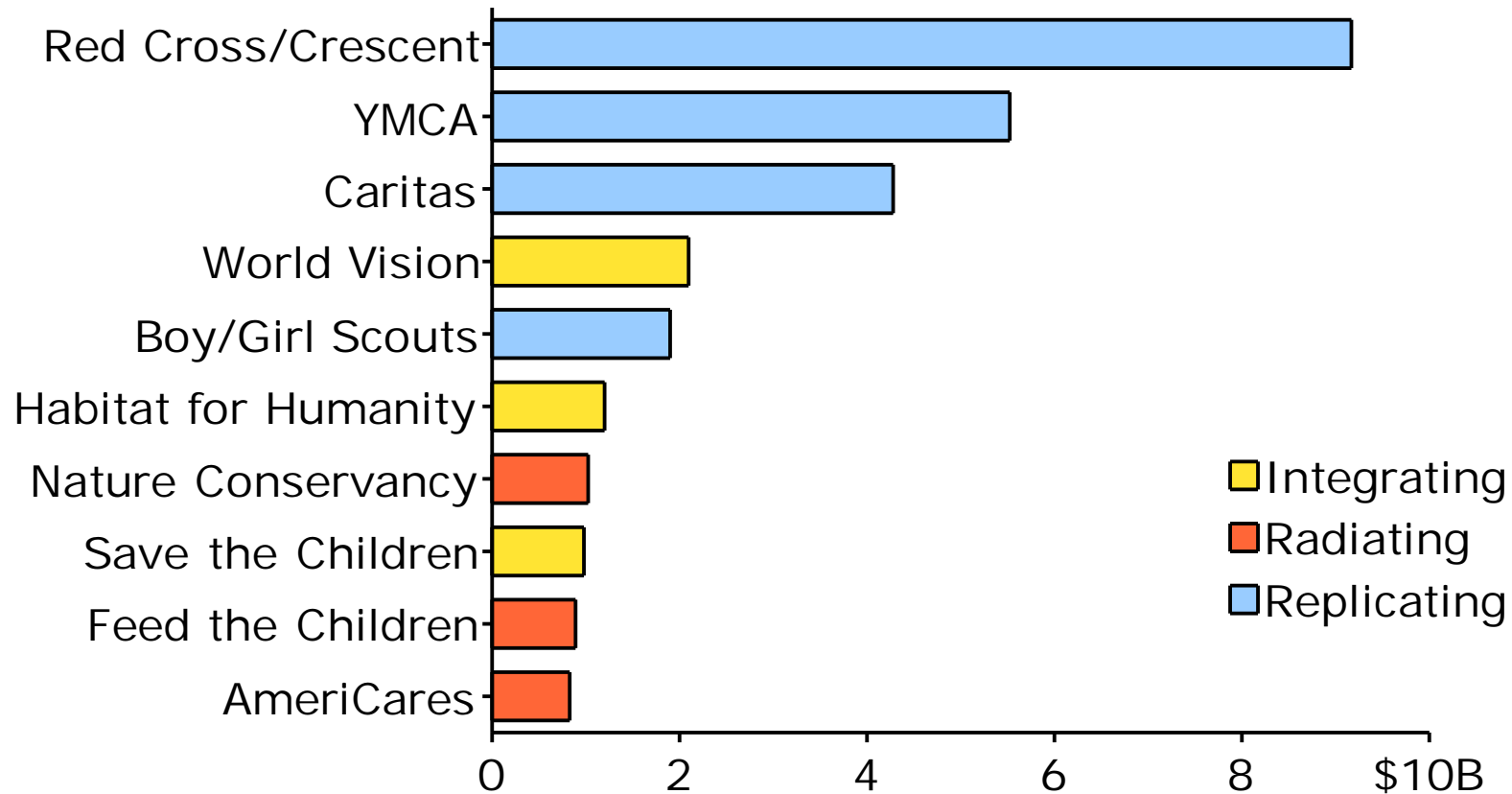


Integrators try for best of radiating and replicating

	Centrally controlled NGOs with sites in different countries	Associations or partnerships around a founding NGO	Networks of NGOs sharing strategy, brand and resources
<i>Growth pattern</i>	<i>"Radiating"</i>	<i>"Replicating"</i>	<i>"Integrating"</i>
Pros	+ Coherence + Ease of control	+ "Multi-local" – easier to raise funds, create programs, advocate in each country	+ Coherence + "Multi-local"
Cons	—Can be harder to raise money, advocate, and create programs beyond home country	—Association or loose partnership can become incoherent beyond replication	—Hard to implement: investment of time and resources may not pay back
<i>e.g.:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Americares</i> • <i>Feed the Children</i> • <i>Nature Conservancy</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Red + / Red Crescent</i> • <i>Scouts</i> • <i>YMCA</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Habitat for Humanity</i> • <i>Save the Children</i> • <i>WorldVision</i>
NB.:	➤ Largest examples are all American	➤ Largest examples all over 100 years old	➤ Some examples have sustained growth

Largest global NGOs have replicated

Best estimate of revenue in 2006-2007



But replicators have struggled with coherence in the connected world ... some key flashpoints:

Duplicate field programs

- Misuse of resources through unnecessary duplication
- Programs operating at cross-purposes in the same geography
- Missed opportunities to reap economies of scale, skill and scope

Inconsistent advocacy

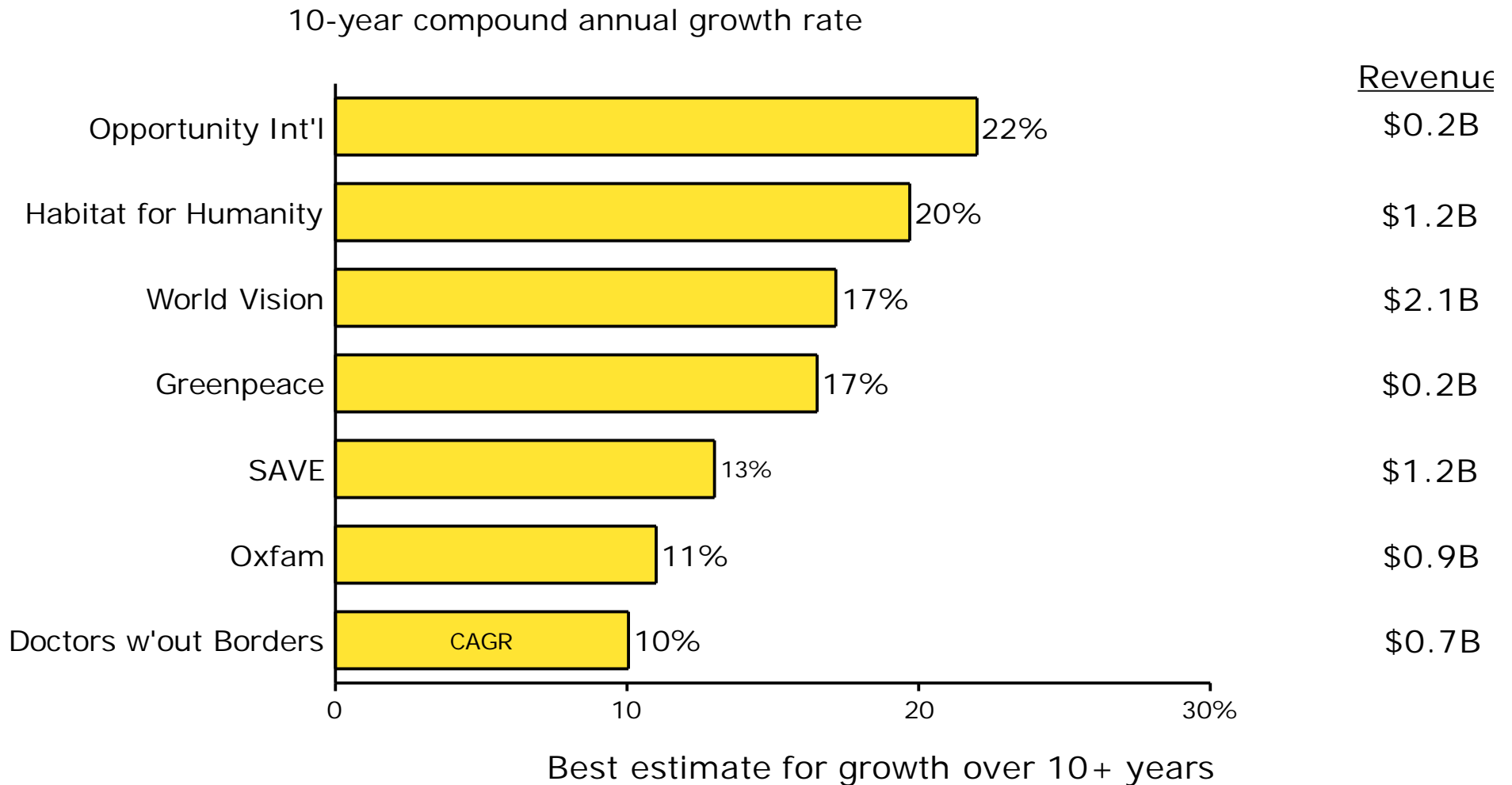
- Different messages in different countries conflict and confuse
- Bad reputation in one country can spread quickly to network
- Inconsistent use of brand can blunt credibility and advocacy

Competing for resources

- Funds not directed to where potential for impact greatest
- Less credibility with donors
- Uncoordinated or conflicting approaches to major donors

A common theme heard in the interviews was that replication and then differentiation worked in a less connected world, but now people can get to a disaster faster, advocacy in one country now is on the web and in other countries, and funders are worldwide and everywhere networks need to integrate. What happens in Sumatra no longer stays in Sumatra – it is everywhere

Tightening networks can show sustained growth



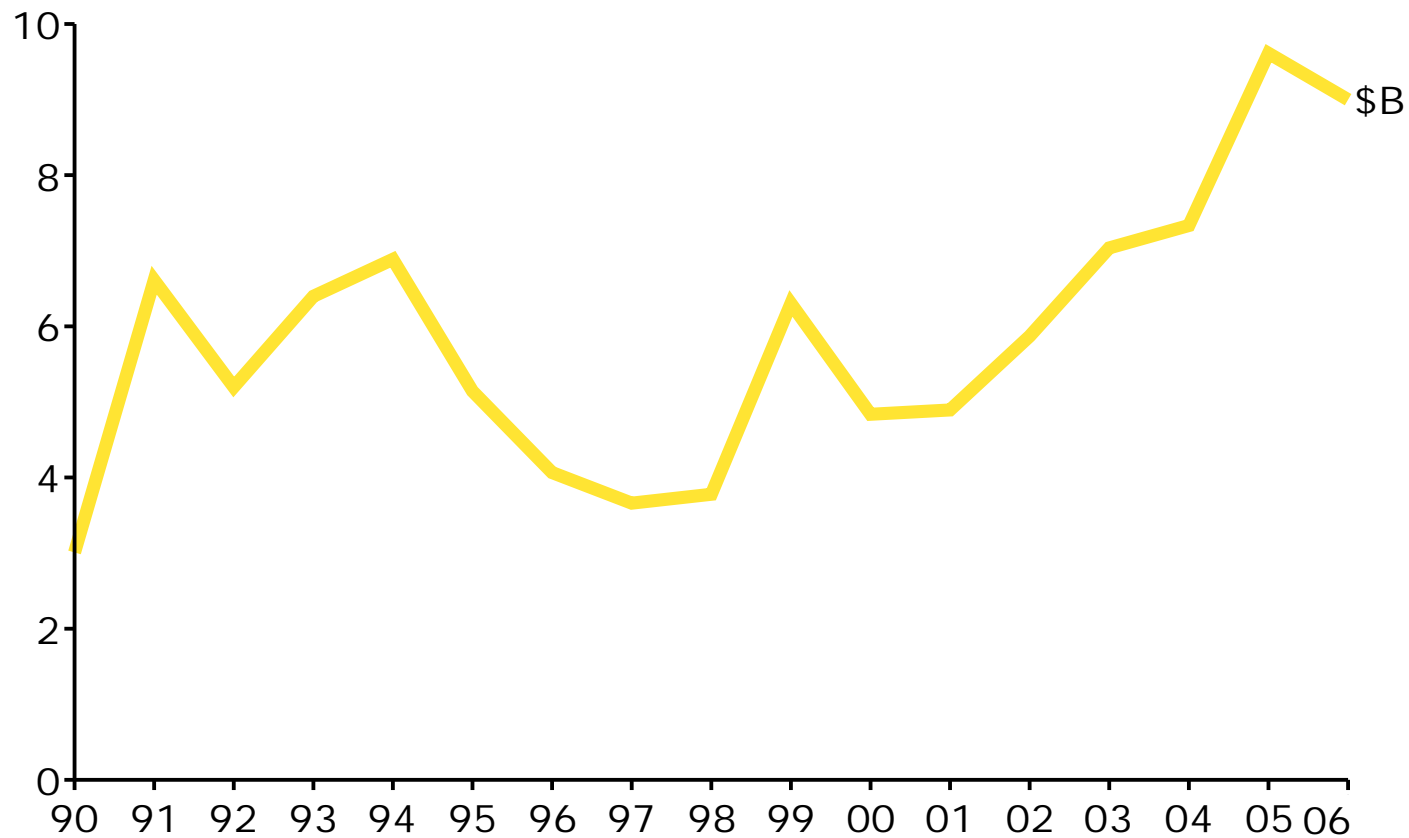
Note: Long-term growth rates based on revenue or best available proxy when revenue numbers not available: DWB - Growth in volunteer staff size; H4H - Number of affiliates

Sources: Organization annual reports, websites, staff; HBS case studies; DWB- [A Hope from Hell](#)

Partly reflecting humanitarian assistance growth

Total official humanitarian assistance in constant \$

2006US\$B



“Integrators” show three key patterns of change

Beyond leadership to management

- From “social entrepreneurs” to “managerial” leaders
- Clear, agreed processes for different decisions
- Management as a “decision-making service”
- Leaders distributed geographically
- Core team has complementary experience (e.g. geographic)
- Standard admin systems allow staff to focus on impact

Beyond mission to impact

- Mission is necessary but not sufficient for network to tighten: loose associations share a mission
- Focus on impact in the field
- Agreed impact goals
- Goals useful for decision making
- Practical impact measures
- Employees recognized, rewarded, and accountable for contribution to impact

Beyond structure to complementary relationships

- Webs of relationships among staff and organizations
- Specialized roles within the network for “virtual scale”
- Specialized roles to strengthen interdependency
- Informal networks nurtured among members for innovation and to ease decision making
- Variety of different structural and legal paths with no one model yet in front