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When 'civics' go 'governance': on the role and relevance of civic organisations in the policy arena in Sub-Saharan Africa

Ria Brouwers

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About

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The main aim of the Knowledge Programme is to better understand and improve the contribution of CSB efforts to facilitate changes in the unequal balance of power in favour of vulnerable and marginalised groups. The three specific objectives of the Programme are the following:

1. To foster new and innovative research on CSB in the academic and development sectors.
2. To intensify the links between practitioners and researchers in order to stimulate dialogue and debate on CSB.
3. To contribute to improving policy and programmes aimed at strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations.

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Foreword

The studies synthesized in this paper were conducted as part of the ISS-Hivos Knowledge Programme on Civil Society Building. The basic tenet of the Knowledge Programme is an intensification of links between practitioners and academics to stimulate dialogue and debate. In countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, the overarching theme for our research was “Civic action for a responsive government”, focusing on the relatively new role of civic organisations to lobby and demand their governments for democratic rights and a fair distribution of resources and services.

Academics and activists were invited to conduct studies of their own interest, within the framework of the three basic questions for the Knowledge Programme on CSB: i) what are the dynamics of civil society formation and the role of local actors, ii) how do external actors contribute to this process, and iii) how has civil society building contributed to structural changes in unequal power distribution in society. The researchers were students in development studies at ISS who, for their MA thesis researched a particular case in their own country (Banda 2007, Andama 2009, Mungai 2009) or in a country of their interest (Engel 2006). All studies deal with the political role played by civic organisations and seek to better understand what happens when ‘civics go governance’¹. By bringing together the findings of the studies, this paper analyses the lobby and advocacy work of four civil society organisations in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

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¹ In the title ‘civics’ is understood in the semantic meaning of Webster’s Dictionary as relating to citizens or citizenship; ‘governance’ is understood as playing the role of government. See note 26 for a more formal definition of governance.

INTRODUCTION

‘Good governance’ and ‘citizen participation’ conquered the international development debate at the end of the twentieth century. After a period of cautious references to politics in developing countries the international aid community started to openly blame the malfunctioning of political systems as a major cause of the stagnant process of development in the global South. An improvement in the performance of governments, combined with an involvement of citizens in decision making were to offer solutions to the widespread policy failures.

Two publications boosted the ideas. The first one was the Dollar report in 1998², which asserted that there is a direct link between good governance and economic development. The second was the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) presented in early 1999 by World Bank president James Wolfensohn, who proposed a set of new principles for international aid: i) ownership of the development agenda by countries in the South, ii) partnership between governments, donors, civil society, and the private sector and iii) citizen participation.³ Principles like these have set the scene for international development in the next decade.

Explosive growth of NGOs

One of the aspects of the scene, and the focus of this paper, is what Rick James (2002) has called “a seismic shift in the perceived role of civil society”, what David Sogge (2004) termed as a “meteoric career” for civil society and Julie Hearn (2007) gave the label of “magic bullet”, the “panacea to failed top-down development”. Non-governmental organisations have become ever more involved in aid programs funded by official donors, as the preferred channel for service delivery to the poor in many countries around the world.⁴ Instead of governments, NGOs became responsible for a large part of health and education services.⁵

The hausse in NGO formation has been analyzed, reflected upon and criticized ever since it started. I draw upon the wealth of writings to sketch how the process took place. Clearly, external factors were decisive for the mushrooming of non-state actors in the developing South; the NGO-sector itself grasped the openings offered by the global dynamics, resulting in an unprecedented expansion in number of NGOs and in claims about the blessings of the efforts of non-state actors. The first chapter deals with the history of the NGO-boom and with the critiques and doubts about the expectations and aspirations of civic organisations. They provide the setting against which the four studies about the advocacy and lobby work of civic organisations will be analyzed. Chapter 2 addresses the question if

² Dollar et al. (1998)

³ The Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF), initiated early 1999 by the World Bank president Wolfensohn, has provided the conceptual underpinning of the (Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), launched 8 months later, the Millennium Development Goals (adopted by world leaders in 2000) and the Monterrey Consensus (2002)

⁴ In 2001 fiscal year, civil society participation in World Bank projects in Africa was registered for more than one half of the projects approved (Chaplowe & Bamela Engo-Tega 2007: 258).

⁵ Riddell (2007: 259) states that in 2004 they ran more projects and programs than official aid agencies, the total value of NGO aid-funded activities in that year reported to be almost \$ 24 billion.

non-state actors figuring in the four case studies have been able to play an effective governance role. The final chapter is for conclusions and ideas about future knowledge development and policy.

But before all that, I continue this introduction with a discussion of the terms ‘Non-Governmental Organisation’ and ‘civil society’, and in between make a brief historical link between the two.

Defining non-governmental organisations

The term Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) covers many different organisations, big and small, formal and informal, local, national and international. The organisations may bring together people of different categories, like in women’s or youth organisations. They may promote different interests, like in consumers’ and patients’ organisation, or in workers’ organisations and trade unions. They may coordinate people of various professions as teachers, nurses and doctors, or be established around issues such as faith, peace, emancipation, and environment. Organisations with a purely political or economic purpose, political parties and corporations, are usually not labelled as an NGO. When engaged in development work NGOs may also be called NGDOs: Non-Governmental Development Organisations. Sarah Michael gives a practical definition of NGOs in the development sector: NGOs are “independent development actors existing apart from governments and corporations, operating on a non-profit basis with an emphasis on voluntarism and pursuing a mandate of providing development services, undertaking communal development work or advocating on development issues.” (2004:3)

From missionary work to NGOs to civil society

One track of the history of the work of NGOs in development begins when missionaries set up schools and health centres as part of their efforts to spread Christianity. While this happened since the start of the colonial period in the 17th century, the growth and maturation of the catholic and protestant mission took place in the 19th century. Both changed character in the 20th century. On the protestant side, the ecumenical movement with its starting point in the World Mission Conference in Edinburgh in 1910⁶, and the self-consciousness of the newly established churches led to radical changes in ownership and orientation of the work, with the Southern Churches taking on more direct responsibility. On the catholic side, the traditional focus of church workers on the human fulfilment in afterlife, underwent a modernist change after the Second Vatican Council from 1962-1965. The subsequent Papal Encyclical of 1967 called *Populorum Progressio* (On the Progress of the Peoples), put the people and the here and now centre stage. The radical nature of the Second Vatican Council shifted the approach of the missionaries towards the secular and, as Hinfelaar argues, this can be seen as the start of “the trend of ngo-ization or the transition from a Christian to a secular eschatology”. (Hinfelaar 2010).⁷

⁶ The ecumenical movement was caused by a desire for more unity between churches and missionary agencies worldwide and led to the establishment of the World Missionary Council, which was integrated into the World Council of Churches in 1961.

⁷ Manji & O’Coill (2002) present the work of NGOs as a continuity of the work of missionaries and voluntary organisations active during the colonial period.

The other track of the history of development organisations starts with the evolution of local organisations before and during the colonial period. Michael (2004) refers to secret societies, early movements for independence and hometown community development associations which came up with the growing urbanisation at the beginning of the twentieth century. The organisations performed social and welfare work, they connected with the church and missionary organisations. Seeking little power for themselves, these NGOs conducted their service-oriented work largely unhindered by the government. “This allowed many local NGOs and civil society organisations to play significant roles in national independence movements” (Michael 2004:9). Yet, as Michael continues to explain, in the post-independence period the rise of African socialism in much of the continent concentrated power in the hands of the state, societal organisations were never very influential. She speaks of “the encroachment of a strong and often bloated centralized government into civil society, and the resultant weakening and marginalization of civil society” (Michael 2004:10).

Defining civil society organisations

Since the early 1990s NGOs have become categorized as part of what is termed ‘civil society’. Riddell provides the following definition: “At its most general level, civil society refers to all people, activities, relationships, and formal and informal groups that are not part of the process of government” (Riddell 2007:260). It is a “slippery concept” as he continues to explain, for which there is no definitional agreement. “However, broadly speaking civil society is understood as the arena (-) in which people come together (-) to promote their shared interests, either alone or through interaction with others. NGOs are part of the wider civil society.” (ibid, 362) Hearn considers the categorization of NGOs under the rubric of civil society as part of the broadening and politicization of the sector. NGOs were no longer gap fillers in the area of social welfare, but important members of civil society. “The focus on civil society shifted attention away from international NGOs to national NGOs.” (Hearn 2004:1101)

As the definition indicates, NGOs for development work are part of a country’s civil society. In this paper, the acronyms NGO and CSO are used indifferently, referring to non-state actors active in the field of development. The term NGO will always be used in case of an international non-state actor.

1 PEAKING NGOS

How the NGO-formation began in the 1960s was memorized above, but why did NGOs break out in such big numbers that the 1980s were labelled the ‘decade of the NGOs’? (Hearn 2007:1095, Bebbington et al. 2007). A brief outline of the past may be useful to understand the case studies in their historical context. Ironically, global economic and political developments far beyond the NGOs’ orbit, triggered their growth and popularity: the debt crisis and the structural development programmes, the collapse of the Soviet Union ending the Cold War, and the spread of the neo-liberal philosophy. Calls for a more effective conduct of development aid further increased the number of NGOs and led to a diversification of their roles.

Global factors promoting NGOs

The international debt crisis

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, foreign aid and development lending had brought huge sums of money to countries in the South. Governments were receiving or borrowing large amounts to invest in their economies or to spend on prestigious projects. The commodity boom in the West had generated plenty of money, making the banks eager to give credits, and the borrowing parties equally keen to get access to financial means for the promotion of their interests. A large part of the money came from commercial banks, often set out against floating interest rates. Everybody seemed to benefit, the sky being the limit.

Then came the oil crises, first in 1973 and again in 1979, which fundamentally upset the system. Rising prices, followed by a tighter monetary policy plus jumping interest rates, and a lower demand for the export products from developing countries, raised the debts far beyond the carrying capacity of many.⁸ The events led to the debt crisis and brought the international financial world in disarray. Would debtor countries be allowed to default their loans, global financial stability would be threatened, it might even lead to a collapse of international financial structures. IMF and World Bank stepped in with drastic measures to restructure the debts so that debtor countries would repay and the international system would be saved.⁹ Developing nations had to provide for Structural Adjustment Programmes to get their economy in order, SAPs which included macro-economic measures, ranging from trade liberalisation to drastic cuts in government spending through reduced government services. Less government money for education, health and sanitation, housing and other provisions created a gap in services, for NGOs to fill. An opportunity they were taking in large numbers.

Fowler has characterized the growing activities of NGOs in Africa as a renewed ‘scramble for Africa’. He compared the competition among Western NGOs for development activities in African countries with the run at the end of the 19th century by European powers for colonization of the continent, culminating in the cutting up of Africa at the Berlin Conference in 1884. (1991:1, op cit Hearn 2004:1100). Fowler observed two groups of ‘scrambling’ actors: the non-governmental development organisations looking for African partners, and the official aid agencies searching for NGOs to implement projects they wanted to finance.

Initially *Western* NGOs undertook the relief and development activities throughout the global South, but they were gradually replaced or paralleled by *national* NGOs, a dynamic process of ever changing roles and relationships. The dramatic growth of NGOs in Africa can be illustrated by some examples: in 1990 Tanzania had 41 registered NGOs, in 2000 the counter stood at 10.000. (Rueben 2002, op cit. Hearn 2007). According to the records

⁸ In 1982 Mexico informed its creditors that it was no longer able to repay the debts it had built up over the preceding decades. It was the first but not the only country making its problems known, many neighbouring states soon issued similar announcements and in Africa eleven countries were unable to meet their debt obligations (Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Ivory Coast, Gabon, The Gambia, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia).

⁹ Note the similarity with measures taken in the aftermath of the 2008 international financial crisis, with the international community putting large sums of money in the banking system and in countries at the verge of collapsing, in order to rescue the international financial system.

of the Registrar of Societies 2004, Zambia had 11.096 CSOs, 13.924 religious organisations and 41 trade unions.(Saasa & Simutanyi 2007:22)

The collapse of the Soviet Union, democratisation and free markets

Another catalyst for the expansion of NGOs was the change in the international configuration after 1989 when the Soviet bloc collapsed and the Cold War ended. It opened the door for Western countries to pursue an all-out effort to promote their democratic and market system. The demise of the Soviet influence in developing countries also levelled the barriers for Western governments to stop protecting regimes in the South long known to be dictatorial and corrupt. In his book on the history of fifty years of independence in Africa, Martin Meredith writes: “Western governments no longer had strategic interests in propping up repressive regimes merely because they were friendly to the West. Along with the World Bank they concluded that one party regimes lacking popular participation constituted a serious hindrance to economic development and placed new emphasis on the need for democratic reform.” (Meredith 2005:387) Criticism that had not been politically correct until then, became openly voiced. This public loss of faith in governments in the South, was accompanied by a search by international donors for other avenues to channel their development money. NGOs were believed to be closer to the people than the majority of the governments and thus better in understanding the needs, and able to combat corruption and inefficiency.

At the time, the ideas of neo-liberalism gained firm ground around the world, favouring a more limited role of the state. Free-market ideology among Western governments and international financial institutions entered former public domains such as the energy and health sector. Soon, the privatisation wave also hit the development sector. NGO's seemed perfectly placed to step into the service gaps left by the governments¹⁰, be it as a result of austerity measures under the SAPs or in the name of neo-liberalism.

Changing aid architecture

In hindsight, the growth in NGOs in the 1980s was only the beginning. Along with the changes in the international political economy and the more open debates about the handling of aid money in developing countries, bilateral and multilateral donors developed a new discourse on aid complementing it with a new aid architecture. Ownership, good governance, pro-poor policy and participation became key terms in the 21st century aid language, essentially meaning that governments in the South were to i) take their own responsibility for the spending of aid, ii) handle the money in a more proper manner with priority to fighting poverty and iii) operate internally in a more democratic manner involving their citizens in the process of needs assessment and decision-making. The flows of aid were channelled differently, project support fell out of favour and aid money was to go directly to policy sectors (education, health, energy, etc.) or to the overall state budget. Aid was to become a more integrated part of state programmes and it was to be more effectively dealt with.

¹⁰ Evelina Dagnino (2008) has described how this worked out within one particular country, Brazil, where civil society participation became part of the neo-liberal project, to supply state and market with information on social demands, as well as to implement public policy for the satisfaction of these demands. In the process, the perception on civil society narrowed down to those organizations that were able to perform these functions in a for the government satisfactory way.

In spite of the new frameworks and the progressive language most donors were not confident about the government's performance and called upon NGOs to carry out projects within the aided sectors, e.g. implementing parts of the government's social programmes in housing, health, etc., running education programmes in schools or promoting the participation of parents through parent-teacher-associations. In parallel, donors requested governments to interact with the people on public policy and implementation of programmes. The principles of citizens' participation, laid down in the 1999 Comprehensive Development Framework and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, were reiterated in new international agreements like the Millennium Development Goals adopted by world leaders in 2000, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of 2005 and its successor the Accra Agenda for Action of 2008. Leaders from North and South acknowledged the need for collaboration between governments of developing states and its civil society in a spirit of national ownership of development.¹¹

High hopes and aspirations, the discussions within the NGO sector

While the changing world order created new spaces for non-governmental organisations and the confidence of bilateral and multilateral donors boosted their numbers, internal dynamics propelled the sector in the same direction of growth and changing roles.

A shift of views about the causes of poverty had added new dimensions to the work of NGOs. Since the 1970s it was widely recognized that poverty is caused and perpetuated by structures, institutions, and policies that hinder the development of the poor. Many NGOs took the position that a lasting solution to poverty requires changes in such structures. Poor people were not to be served with charity and hand-outs, they should be supported to demand for better services and to deal with the malpractices they suffer from. In addition to the traditional focus on service delivery through projects, NGOs initiated two new sets of activities. The first is *advocacy, lobbying and campaigning*, in an effort to address the causes of poverty and deprivation, through activities that give power and voice to the poor. The second concerns *reviewing and monitoring the activities of other agents of development* to make sure that the poor have access to affordable and good quality services, or more in general, that pro-poor policy is realized, through monitoring of Poverty Reduction Strategies, budget tracking, and policy dialogue. (Riddell (2007:261-264)

Hivos policy on the new role for NGOs

Hivos introduced the new perspectives on the role of NGOs in its policy document "Access to power" in 1988. It called into question the performance of the state and the bureaucratic government structures for improving the lives of the poor. The document noted that state forms were imported by the West, these "accumulate power and wealth in

¹¹ In the Paris Declaration it is agreed that developing countries commit to "take the lead in coordinating aid at all levels in conjunction with other development resources in dialogue with donors and encouraging the participation of civil society and the private sector" (Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness paragraph 14) Three years later, the Accra Agenda for Action not only re-affirms this intention but participants commit themselves to accelerate progress (paragraph 8). The AAA contains a special paragraph on deepening the engagement with civil society organisations. CSOs are called "independent actors in their own right whose efforts complement those of governments and the private sector. We [signatories] share an interest in ensuring that CSO contributions reach their full potential". (paragraph 20).

the hands of a small elite at the cost of the majority of the population”. In the Hivos philosophy, the core problem of the marginalized is their lack of access to power. The poor were to be supported to organize themselves, and civic organisations were expected to play a crucial role in the democratic development of society.¹² Hivos became a front runner among donor NGOs propagating civil society building as a new strategy in the process of development. Advocacy, lobbying and campaigning were seen as major roles for civic organisations, to address the causes of poverty and deprivation and to give voice to the poor as part of a long-term process of poverty eradication. Awareness raising, empowerment, and strengthening the capacity of poor communities became catch-words of the new strategy.

With its 1988 policy document, Hivos was well ahead of the bilateral and multilateral donors, whose views about ineffective governments and the need for more citizens’ involvement emerged later in the 1990s. The doubts among the donors about a proper performance of national governments went hand in hand with a growing confidence in civil society organisations. In the ‘good governance’ agenda the views and interests of NGOs and international donors came together.

Self-confidence among NGOs

With so many opportunities to diversify activities, to grow in numbers and to adopt new roles, and with so much money available from various sides, the NGO sector got wings, its self-confidence increased tremendously. For long, NGOs had been praised for their ability to reach the poor better than governments, to be closer to the people, to give voice to the marginalized, but towards the end of the 20th century civil society organisations also came to be seen as champions of democracy, watchdogs for corrupt governments, and a countervailing power of the state, believed to be more representative of the population than their government.

Out of this grew a universal assumption about the work of non-governmental and civil society organisations worldwide. Innovative, alternative and able to fundamentally change political and economic systems, became the NGO label. “NGOs are only NGOs in any politically meaningful sense of the term if they are offering alternatives to dominant models, practices and ideas about development.” (Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin 2007).¹³ Over the years, the idea of NGOs being an alternative has been cherished carefully by the sector itself. Addressing the causes of poverty through advocacy work and institutional development became popular in the non-governmental development sector as the most cost effective and least costly form of scaling up (Edwards 2008:39).

Notwithstanding the preference for advocacy, until today, the bulk of the work of development NGOs is to help poor communities with schools, clinics, houses, water and sanitation facilities, and income generating work. It is not uncommon for NGOs to be the main providers of social services.¹⁴ Because of their size and strategic position the larger

¹² Frans Bieckmann & Ellen Lammers 2008: 124, 125.

¹³ With this sentence Bebbington et al. (2007) state the conviction underlying their book *Can NGOs make a difference? The challenge of development alternatives*.

¹⁴ In Bangladesh the health and nutrition programme of one single NGO reaches out to over 30 million people (Michael 2004: 7), and in Ghana or Kenya over 40% of the country’s health care is in the hands of NGOs, often faith-based NGOs (Riddell 2007, Michael 2004).

organisations are usually an influential force in their country, others may use part of their money to lobby their government for a more structural approach to poverty (Namara 2009:50). The majority of the NGOs though, are addressing day-to-day problems and helping the needy in the classical way.

Cracks in the belief

The high expectations and aspirations surrounding the new strategic roles of NGOs have not gone unquestioned. There are fundamental doubts about the approach by the international aid organisations to civil society in the global South on the basis of a concept that had emerged historically and contextually in the West. There are doubts about the prospect and claims of people's participation in development. Questions also arose about the logic of collective action for the poor, the legitimacy of organisations to speak and act on behalf of the poor and their ability to do this effectively. (Mamdani 1996, Van Rooy 1998, Chabal & Daloz 1999, Maina 1998, Sogge 2004, Lund 2006, Biekart & Fowler 2008, Namara 2009, De Wit & Berner 2009, Berenschot 2010)). Underneath, I will zoom in on the critiques about the assumptions regarding civil society in the global South, assumptions which have formed the basis of many programmes for civil society building.

Civil society versus the state?

In the development sector, civil society is frequently portrayed in opposition to the official public authorities, which is largely based on the history of the discourse on civil society in Europe since the 18th century. By the year 2000, civil society in Europe had been constructed in contrast to the state, the law, nature, morality, capitalism and socialism (Van Rooy 1998:11). This construction was strongly influenced by Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), Italian philosopher and politician, who argued that culture was a key factors in the political struggle. The capitalist system, according to Gramsci, was dominant not only through economic, political and military superiority, but through a cultural hegemony that promotes certain social patterns. He stressed that to win the revolution the proletariat had to obtain civil, intellectual and moral leadership. Gramsci's ideas about hegemony triggered the perception of civil society as the antidote to the state, embraced by the non-governmental development organisations at the end of the 20th century. In that frame, civil society and the state are frequently "pinned at opposite ends of the good guy and the bad guy spectrum" (ibid:24) and the promotion of civil society has come to mean limiting the sphere of influence of the state.

On a less radical note, but in a similar vein is the construction of civil society by bilateral donors and international organisations like the World Bank and the UN agencies. They also perceive civil society as a counterpart to the state, a countervailing power necessary for a balanced and correct government, for good governance. The liberal western understanding of civil society is of a set of organisations in which citizens conduct voluntary activities and debate in public spheres in an orderly fashion and an overall harmonious way, as the conscience of the state and to keep government on track (Howell & Pearce 2002, Frederiksen, 2010). The civil society concept in the minds of the donors, including the NGOs, differs from the broad definition discussed in the beginning of this paper. It has strong normative traits and carries the expectation that CSOs are i) opposite to and separate from the state, ii) a harmonious and homogenous set of actors calling the state to duty, iii) providing alter-

natives for failing state performance, and iv) an unselfish group of citizens who prioritize the public good.

For Van Rooy and many others the good guy-bad guy construction is a misconception, not supported by any previous literature on civil society, and more a product of the western (especially American) loss of faith in the state. This anti-statism has put the door wide open for a special role for civil society, because it implies that democracy will be impossible without the countervailing powers.¹⁵ For Van Rooy the big interest of the development sector in civil society is “in large part because it is placed as the antithesis to the state” (ibid). This is also the view of Wachira Maina after researching Civil Society Organisations in Kenya. He argues that donors do not support civic organisations because they believe in their potential as such. “Rather, donor support for civil society was meant to confront the state (-) giving them money and resources so that they could lobby for positive change and check its more egregious excesses.” (Maina in Van Rooy 1998: 156) For him the theoretical jump from “the state is not viable” to “civil society is the key to Africa’s success” is invalid. Civil society has arisen historically and relationally (ibid).

... an ideological export item from the West

A major criticism on the perceived dichotomy between state and society has come from Chabal & Daloz (1999) who repudiated the unquestioning use of a concept with Western roots and biases for the African situation, where state and society are not separated like in Western countries. “The state in Sub-Saharan Africa has not been institutionalized – in that it has not become structurally different from society” (ibid: 2). The political realm in Africa, they say, is more of an informal, personalized nature, structured in a patrimonial model where personal relations matter most. African societies are organised along vertical lines of families and ethnic groups. The vertical division is more significant than a horizontal division with functional ties of solidarity between people who are similarly employed or professionally linked. This makes the development of associations that defend the common good in the public sphere highly problematic in Africa. There is no dichotomy between state and society, there is no institutional separation between a well-organized civil society and a relatively autonomous bureaucratic state. The state never emancipated from society. “The current assumption about the emergence of (-) a recognizable civil society in Africa is thus eminently misleading and derives more from wishful thinking or ideological bias than from a careful analysis of present conditions” (ibid: 18).

Equally critical is Lund (2006) who finds the notion of civil society to be “the finest ideological export item that the West can offer the rest of the world, in particular in the light of the disillusionment with a centralized state.” (Lund 2006:677) For Lund the state-society distinction is one of the great dichotomies of Western thought. In the popular political discourse the civil society concept encompasses a “group of institutions characterized by their movement in and out of a capacity to exercise public authority. They operate in the twilight between state and society, between public and private” (Lund 2006:678)

¹⁵ In her book, Van Rooy singles out the Dutch aid programme as being premised on just that notion: “... for a pluralist and civic society, the development of intermediaries between the citizen and State is of great importance. Dutch NGOs operating in developing countries have actively supported the strengthening It leads her to the observation that the current interest in civil society is “in large part because it is placed as the antithesis to the State” (Van Rooy 1998: 24).

The message conveyed by the critiques is that the international aid community has projected roles and strategies on Southern civil society organisations, which may be unrealistic, modelled after an ideal, with insufficient attention for the indigenous, vernacular associative life and the prevailing structures of authority, formal and informal. In that perspective, the civil society sector in the South suffers from the same “imported from the West” syndrome as Hivos in its 1988 policy document ascribed to the state forms, which “accumulate power and wealth in the hands of a small elite at the cost of the majority of the population”.

2 PLAYING THE GOVERNANCE ROLE

The historical development of NGOs and civil society organisations, the context of their new roles and the critical debates on expectations and aspirations, discussed in the previous chapters, form the décor for the presentation of the studies in Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya and Uganda. All four researched the role of NGOs and civil society organisations, as intermediary between the poor and the government, helping the poor to organize and to raise their voice so that the government will better respond to their needs. In this role, civic organisations aspire to contribute to development, via a stronger poverty-oriented policy and better social services, as well as to democracy through enriched citizenship. The main question running through this paper is if and how they are playing this role successfully. The analysis of the findings of the four studies concentrates on two assumptions behind the governance role: i) the assumptions that citizens organisations build a countervailing power and promote democracy, and ii) the expectation that participation by citizens in governance matters will trigger social change for the benefit of the poor. For testing the first assumption I will primarily make use of the studies about the Policy Forum in Tanzania and Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) in Zambia, and secondarily draw on findings from the studies in Uganda and Kenya. In the examination of the second assumption it will be the other way around.

Countervailing power and democracy

Coalition building for pro-poor policy

The two networks of civil society organisations researched in Tanzania and Zambia have much in common. Both were established in the early 2000's to make government policy more poverty oriented and to bring the people's views and needs into the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Both are coalitions of a large number of civil society organisations (50-100), who formed an umbrella to facilitate the dialogue with the national government. Initially, the two coalitions were successful, able to include their priorities in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers with which Tanzania and Zambia became eligible for debt cancellation under HIPC, the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative of the World Bank and the IMF. From the beginning, however, both were aware of the limited agenda for which their input was sought. The long list of ‘non-negotiable conditions’ from the IMF on fiscal and economic policies, to which the governments of the two countries had to consent to qualify for debt cancellation, were also non-negotiable for civil society, giving them a sense of marginalization regarding the real, political issues.

Both networks also shared a direct donor influence. In CSPR in Zambia, one of the major funders, the German bilateral donor GTZ, attended all weekly staff meetings, all meetings

of the management team and all staff retreats. At the provincial level, GTZ had seconded a development worker to help CSPR's provincial teams (Banda 2007:6). Out of the 94 member organisations of the Policy Forum in Tanzania, 17 were international organisations, making the dynamics of interaction complex and full of contradictions. Appreciating the external resources in terms of money and expertise on the one hand, local organisations also felt threatened by their foreign sister who was 'crowding out' local work, by 'knowing better' or by being more recognized because of its resources. The opportunistic attitude of the government vis-à-vis the international organisations - sometimes favouring them over local NGOs but then restricting their membership as soon as they became too critical of the government - made matters even more complex (Engel 2007).

Countervailing force?

The donor support has helped civic organisations in their efforts to direct the attention of their government towards the needs of the poor, but the strong donor presence raises questions about the authenticity of the countervailing force. Whose force is at work here? How countervailing is it? A close look at the case studies shows i) the tensions of coalition building and representation, ii) the narrow profile of coalition members and iii) the cumbersome internal dynamics of the coalition.

i) Tensions of coalition building and representation

Many a coalition is built on the assumption that it will make civil society speak with one powerful voice, but in practice coalitions often produce watered down compromises due to internal conflicts of interest. Not so in the Policy Forum which decided to go for diverging, critical voices instead of a weak common denominator. Consequently, their choice raised the problem of legitimacy: on whose account does the coalition speak. The Forum's pragmatic position that the quality and credibility of the argument and proper ethics of those who voice them are more important than representation, may be valid, it also makes any coalition vulnerable for accusations of promoting hobby-horses of some members and of advocating for unsupported cases.

ii) Profile of coalition members

In order to get the action out into the country and to involve citizens beyond the urban areas, CSPR has made serious efforts to decentralize its work to five out of nine provinces in Zambia. Through campaigns, local research activities and public debates, the CSPR members in the district tried to raise the awareness of common men and women about the policy of the government, its budget and expenditures, and about the rights of citizens to be informed and involved. The appearance of a countervailing force in society got a different meaning upon observing the list of actors involved. In the districts of Monze and Mongu there proved to be a tight connection between the CSO members of CSPR and the government, with almost half of the CSPR activists being teachers in addition to the many members who were civil servants working in provincial or district offices (Banda 2007:69).

iii) Lack of internal cohesion

Another factor undermining the countervailing character of the coalitions is the lack of internal cohesion. Banda reports of power struggles in CSPR with people going for personal gains under the guise of the organization, misappropriating CSPR's status, facilities and funds. In this and similar coalitions the cause of the internal conflicts lies deeper, the clashes stem from misperceptions about the very goals of the coalition.

“The larger the membership, the louder the voice” was the slogan in a project proposal by the Mwanza Policy Initiative in Tanzania.¹⁶ In a short period of time, this provincial coalition, linked to the Policy Forum and set up to ensure a proper implementation of the national poverty plan at provincial level, attracted some 60 CSOs as their members, many engaging in policy matters for the first time. Soon it became clear that the new members did not share the assumed impact of the coalitions as expressed in the slogan. They joined primarily because they expected that being part of the initiative would help them to access external financial resources. Such a mis-match of expectations for joining the lobby network is bound to limit the chances of a coalition becoming a force vis-à-vis the government.¹⁷

Over the years, the Policy Forum and Civil Society for Poverty Reduction have become established partners at the policy table. They have joined the Sector Advisory Groups where national policy is prepared, they contribute to the Joint Assistance Strategies designed by donors and government to coordinate aid flows, and they are engaged in government initiated meetings to prepare the annual national budget. Their own appreciation of their efforts is low as was shown by research among 16 organisations in Zambia active in national budgetary work. Fourteen of these rated the impact of their work as weak or average, due to lack of power and of capacity among the organisations and lack of openness on the part of the government (Muyakwa 2008).

Citizen organisations supporting the implementation of policy

What about the CSOs with a direct role in the realization of programmes for the poor, like the organisations in Uganda who formed partnerships with the local government, or the Kenyan CSOs working on the Constituency Development Fund (CDF)? Have these organisations been able to orient government agencies towards the needs of the poor?

The local government in the Kabarole district in Uganda sought cooperation with two NGOs, the international SNV (Netherlands Development Cooperation) and the local organisation KRC (Kabarole Research and Resource Centre). The national government encourages such partnerships by rewarding a local government with a budget increase of 20 percent when it successfully cooperates with NGOs, but punishing with a budget cut of an equal percentage if it fails to do so. NGOs are expected to complement government efforts in providing social services to the local communities, and officials appreciate them for their expertise.

Researching the partnerships, Felix Andama (2009) notes that these are mainly formed around the delivery of concrete social services, like the construction of classrooms and health facilities, the provision of agricultural inputs, water and sanitation facilities, services that are visible for everyone. Cooperation with NGOs that offer less visible matters like citizen’s education and participation were found to be in fewer demand among local government agencies. Apart from their expertise, the NGOs were also attractive to local governments for their capacity to access additional resources, because as Andama found, donors would support a project proposal coming from an NGO, but not one written by a

¹⁶ MPI Five year strategic plan 2007-2012.

¹⁷ Similar funding tensions were found in other studies of the Knowledge Program as well (see Citizens Forum in Zambia, Kabanda 2010).

local government agency. The list of frustrations, which he recorded from both partners, confirms that the partnerships are more driven by donors and the national government than by the parties concerned. NGOs shared their irritation about the lack of information from the government and about being sidelined in the planning process, while government officials complained that the NGO partner was a nuisance, especially its reports about cases of corruption created a high level of mistrust on the side of the officials.

Theoretically speaking, action against corruption could well indicate that the NGOs are becoming a countervailing force, acting as promoters of good governance. However, the close connection between NGOs and politics makes this doubtful in the case at hand. Andama found political leaders seeking support from NGOs for election campaigns, claiming personal credit for the benefits produced by the NGO, or even launching an NGO as a platform for their political career. Also contradicting the idea of an emergent countervailing force are the close personal relationships between local leaders and NGOs. Thus, the interaction between the partners, says Andama, is far beyond the control of the largely illiterate community members, in spite of all the words about being responsive to local needs and community participation.

Participation in governance for social change

The second assumption to test is the likelihood that citizen participation produces social change in favour of the poor. The study by Mercy Mungai about the Constituency Development Fund in Kenya is a revealing case.

Through an Act of Parliament the government of Kenya established the Constituency Development Fund in 2003. The basic idea of the CDF is that members of parliament (MPs) can dispose of funds for community-based development projects in their constituency.¹⁸ Two and a half percent of the total annual revenue collected by the government is allocated to the Fund. The Act of 2003 provided various mechanisms for people's participation. At local level, a Constituency Development Committee (CDC) is to prioritize the projects in accordance with the needs of the community and to oversee their implementation. The Committee consists of the MP and a group of people from the community. The narrative behind the design of the CDF is that projects identified by a representative section of the community, will be in accordance with local needs, make use of local knowledge, increase community ownership and make the projects beneficial and sustainable.

The practice is less ideal. The Fund has been an instrument in the hands of MPs. They manipulate the membership of the various committees at constituency and district level and exercise power in all decision-making processes. Mungai found that an MP can easily use his/her patronage networks to ensure that the projects identified and prioritized are in the locations where the MP got most votes, or in locations where the MP hopes to get future votes. He/she can nominate his/her favourite members to the CDC, and still be in full accordance with the CDF Act. "The unequal power relations between the MP and the community appear to have been institutionalized by the CDF Act" (Gikonyo, 2008, quoted by Mungai).

¹⁸ Such funding mechanisms for projects at the level of constituencies have become fashionable across the globe. Fifteen years ago, a CDF was established in Zambia, lately countries like Jamaica and Tanzania have created a CDF as part of the decentralisation wave.

CSOs responsible for organising participation

In the CDF process civic organisations are invited to inform the communities about the Fund, to help them with project proposals, to follow the money and see if it is properly spent. For all this, a system of public notice boards, index cards, training courses and public debates has been put in place. While some civic organisations played their role well, there were many problems. With so many CSOs conducting awareness raising activities, the communities got confused by all the different messages. One local CSO doing this work told Mungai that it had not read the CDF Act and relied on what it heard from other CSOs. Monitoring the performance of projects and the spending of the money was often beyond the capacity of the organisations. They lack technical expertise to determine the quality of CDF projects, or research expertise to do proper sampling, data collection and analysis, or both.

Apart from these shortcomings on the side of the CSOs, the power over the whole process rests firmly in the hands of the politicians anyway; they can legitimately spend government money to serve their political agenda. Instead of promoting social change in favour of the poor, the rhetoric of participation serves to cover up political malpractices.

CSOs participating in policy discussions

The trap of being used to legitimize decisions was well recognized by the Policy Forum in Tanzania. Member organisations often felt 'being participated'. The presence in government-initiated meetings where decisions are taken, means that "you are seen as part of those making and supporting the decisions" (Engel 2006). The same uneasiness existed in CSPR circles in Zambia. Members showed frustration about being at the mercy of the government for timely invitations and information, and about not being taken serious by the government. As causes for the lack of effective participation, the two studies suggest a combination of factors: i) absence of a legal framework for the work by CSOs and no clear outline of the tasks, ii) the tradition of respect for those in power where one is not to question authority, iii) the lack of skills in policy and data analysis on the side of the organisations, iv) the lack of commitment by the organisations resulting in a high level of absenteeism at the meetings.

In all four studies, civic organisations were attracted by the promises of participation. Joining the government table was seen as an opportunity to re-direct government plans and resources to the poor, but the practice is rather the opposite: participation appears to have taken the sting out of the civic organisations. By engaging in the policy work they have become part of the system, but without any mandate or real influence.

Searching for more evidence

I complement the small sample on which this synthesis builds, with two recent studies on the results of citizen action for development and democracy. Both draw on a large number of cases and have a certain closeness to our own study. One is about the outcomes of citizenship and participation, conducted by a team of researchers at IDS Sussex¹⁹, the other is about democracy programmes in the Middle East and North Africa, conducted by

¹⁹ Gaventa and Barrett 2010.

Steven Heydemann for (amongst others) Hivos²⁰. The two studies are testimony that the search is on for evidence about the achievements of civil society organisations. Criticism regarding the unsupported claims about the benefits of CSOs and of citizen participation, to which I have referred earlier, has provoked new research into the outcomes of civil society work. Both studies attest the need to reconsider the optimistic allegations of benefits.

Citizen engagement

The study by the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability (DRC) at IDS aimed to find out what difference the engagement of citizens has made. It covers 100 case studies across twenty countries, collected over a period of ten years (Gaventa & Barrett 2010). Citizen engagement was defined in 800 outcomes.²¹ The overall finding of the study is that “citizen participation produced positive effects across these outcome types in 75 percent of the outcomes studied in the sample, though in each category there are examples of negative outcome as well” (ibid).

The authors contend that their findings show that citizen engagement can contribute to development and state-building, not so much in a one-to-one impact of individual actions on changes in policy or poverty levels, but rather through intermediary outcomes. An intermediary outcome may be “more aware citizenship, coupled with stronger citizenship practices, [which] can help to contribute to building responsive states”. Another key finding is that participation is not always used for benevolent purposes and does not always lead to positive results. Twenty five percent of the outcomes were of a negative nature and included tokenism, manipulation, a sense of disempowerment, elite capture of participatory processes. The third key finding is that negative outcomes are as much due to the behavior of the state as to the ability of citizens, while power relations in the newly created participatory spaces reinforced old hierarchies based on gender, caste or race. The message of the study is that citizen engagement may lead to indirect positive results for social change, but that they may be accompanied by negative effects in no small numbers. The last two key findings are quite similar to the issues raised in our studies.

Democracy promotion

The second example comes from studies about the Middle East by Steven Heydemann. Writing in 2010 on the eve of the revolts in the Arab region, Heydemann found not a single case in which democracy promotion has caused or contributed to the breakdown of authoritarian regimes, or to a significant change in the distribution of political power. He also noted the absence of a single case of a meaningful change in the levels of internal democracy within civil society, the capacity of civil societies to serve as carriers of democratic norms, the efficacy of political opposition, the effective functioning of parliaments, (Heydemann 2010:2). This lack of progress has not led to adjustments in the practice of democracy promotion: “...professional promoters of democracy have been remarkably

²⁰ Heydemann (2010). This paper, published as part of the Knowledge Programme Civil Society in West Asia, reviews the policy paper by Hivos and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) about democracy support in the Middle East and North Africa.

²¹ The 800 outcomes are categorized into four broad areas: i) the construction of citizenship, ii) the strengthening of practices of participation, iii) the strengthening of responsive and accountable states, and iv) the development of inclusive and cohesive societies.

unresponsive (-)", says Heydemann, the resistance to change in the approach of those activities running deep among practitioners. The most friendly reason he gives is the idealism amongst practitioners who expose "a seemingly unshakable faith in civil society as a carrier of democracy (-)". On a more critical note, he mentions their dependence on employment, and the bureaucratic inertia. Underneath there is the ambivalence of western governments, who are more concerned about terrorism, Muslim immigration and political Islam than about confronting the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East.

These observations deserve new attention in the light of recent developments. The unexpected uprisings in the region since the beginning of 2011 and the collapse of some regimes are still food for analysts, and while the people's drive for more freedom is obvious, the events cannot be credited to democracy promoters. In a recent paper Heydemann repeats: "... there is little evidence that US and European democracy promotion efforts contributed to the fall of the Egyptian and Tunisian leaders, or to the wave of mass protests occurring in other countries. The incoherence and fragmentation among the opposition forces that forced powerful incumbents out of office is a telling indicator of how limited the impact has been of decades of efforts to develop the democratic capacity of civil societies in the Middle East." (Heydemann and Leenders 2011:2). Analysing the situation in Syria and Iran, the authors come to conclusions similar to those of Chaball and Daloz in 1999 about Africa, that it is a myth to believe that state and society are neatly bounded, as democracy promoters tend to do. They observe that the boundary between state and society in Syria and Iran is highly porous, that civil society often reproduce the authoritarian norms and practices of the regimes, and come to conclude that "the civil society bias evident in current democracy promotion efforts could well be counter-productive" (ibid:4).

Besides questioning a number of assumptions prevailing in projects for democracy promotion, Heydemann rejects the assumption that democracy remains the aspiration of the people in the region and that grassroots politics are naturally democratic. Upholding the need for action to reclaim democracy as a public good, tangible and meaningful for citizens in the Middle East, he argues that this will have to go beyond the western style of democracy, which given its current state in the west, including the growing intolerance in Europe and the US towards Islam, is not the best example (Heydemann 2010). Others take a similar position, like Frans Timmerman, member of the Netherlands Parliament for the Socialist Party, who has stated that in spite of all their differences the countries in the region share the experience of more than 300 years of supremacy from the West, which makes them most reluctant to accept the western ideas about how to run their countries in the future, including the ideas about democracy western style.²²

Conclusions

Testing the assumptions that civic organisations form a countervailing force to the state and that citizen participation in governance will trigger social change the case studies have shown that:

²² Frans Timmerman in a speech at the symposium "De Arabische Lente", organized by the international secretariat of the Partij van de Arbeid, in cooperation with Evert Vermeer Stichting and Alfred Mozer Stichting on April 1 2011. see <http://www.viceversaonline.nl>.

- Civic organisations that “go governance” are far from developing a countervailing force to government. They are not countervailing, because of the overlapping roles played by the people involved – being government officials or politicians and activists at the same time. They are not a force, because of the limited internal cohesion and lack of unified positions taken.
- Participation in policy making in the four countries researched is largely rhetoric, the spaces created by the governments are restricted and easily manipulated. Myths and tensions about participation discussed in recent literature²³, stand out clearly in the case studies. Participation is severely limited by the powers above, giving those involved the feeling of ‘being participated’.
- Foreign donors have been very influential in promoting the involvement of civil society in governance matters at national and at decentralized level, sometimes in the background or implicit, but sometimes dominantly present in civil society coalitions.
- The lack of capacity among civic organisations to play a governance role is largely limiting their performance. Although this certainly puts them in limbo, more serious is the conclusion that
- The organisations are operating in a vacuum. The absence of any formal authority or mandate, the structural deficiencies in the mechanisms developed for participation, and the manipulation by power holders make the efforts of “civics going governance” into a mission impossible.

3 BACK TO THE FUTURE

The CSB Knowledge Programme has three overall questions for its research activities:

i) what are the dynamics of civil society formation and the role of local actors, ii) how do external actors contribute to this process, and iii) how has civil society building contributed to structural changes in unequal power distribution in society. These points are guiding the final chapter and are addressed in the first two paragraphs. The last paragraph offers ideas for future knowledge development on the force of civil society and its potential for changing power structures.

²³ The myth, for example, of resourceful communities who live in harmony and share common interests for which they act in solidarity (Cleaver 1999, Mosse 2004). And the myth that through processes of community participation all citizens will have an equal say (Mosse 1994), or that change is mainly a result of communication and consensus, rather than of conflict and negotiation (Leeuwis, 2000). Cooke and Kothari have even called participation, “the new tyranny” (Cooke and Kothari 2001). They reject the naive assumption about the authenticity of motivations and behaviour in participatory processes. Instead they observe that power relations prevent the marginalized from participating while the very process legitimizes the voices of the most powerful. A recent ISS/Hivos/Oxfam Novib publication with contributions from all over the world offers a critique of participation theory and practice, under the title ‘Participation for what: Social change or social control?’

Dynamics of NGO and civil society formation

Externally driven NGO-boom

The explosion of NGOs in the 1990s was largely the result of external factors, global economic and political developments ranging from the international debt crisis to the collapse of the soviet bloc and the emergence of a worldwide neo-liberalism. It is “one of the central contradictions concerning NGO alternatives” say Bebbington et al. that the space for them to grow and perform new roles was largely driven by the neo-liberal agenda, the very agenda that these organisations have criticized and contested (2007:13). The aid effectiveness agenda with items as ownership, partnership and participation has further stimulated the NGO growth and has promoted citizen organisations to the realm of governance.

Brokers, for whom?

As part of their governance functions, NGOs and CSOs have adopted the role of broker between the government and the poor. At least one of the parties, the government, does not accept that role and is putting up barriers to prevent the civic organisations to play it effectively. There are the practical barriers of late or limited information flows, but there are also structural obstacles, like the CDF Act in Kenya that allegedly supports people’s participation but in practice favours the sitting powers. New obstacles are raised by the NGO bills, which have been passed recently (Zambia 2009) or are in preparation (Kenya, Uganda). While restricting the NGO room for manoeuvre, governments in Africa also show ability to adapt their own language to “the codes of democracy”, as Heydemann (2010) calls it.

How does the other party, categorized as ‘the poor’ or ‘the people’, appreciate the broker role of NGOs? The case studies have not systematically researched that question, but the findings show that the trust of citizens in the NGO sector is not big, due to lack of observable results of the advocacy work, and they point out that people prefer the delivery of straightforward services like agricultural inputs, classrooms, water and sanitation facilities above the less tangible things like civic education and participation.²⁴

The myth of society organisation

Within the institutional triangle of state, market and community, the NGO sector has been considered as part of the community (Wood, in Hulme & Edwards 1997:89). Views on the primacy of these three for the development of a country have shifted over time, as Hulme & Edwards have argued. Until the 1970s, the state was seen as the main provider of all the people’s needs, but soon ‘the myth of the state’ was replaced by ‘the myth of the market’, i.e. that the private sector provided for all consumption needs. By the end of the 1980s a

²⁴ The views of poor people on the role of civil society organisations in their lives were extensively documented in 1999 by Narayan et al in the World Bank study *Voices of the Poor*. The record for the NGOs was mixed and the conclusions show remarkable similarity with findings in our studies, especially Andama’s study in Uganda. After hearing the voices of the poor the researchers concluded “... it is unclear whether NGOs are more successful than formal institutions at reaching the poorest areas. (-) Relations between NGOs and governments are often marked by tension: truly complementary relations between the two are rare” (Narayan et al. 1999: 104).

new myth emerged, the ‘myth of the market plus civil society’ (Hulme & Edwards 1997: 276). It created the frame of thinking that caused the NGO-boom.

Ironically, the more popular the non-governmental development organisations became, and the more common the use of the term civil society, the less the civil society organisations seem to be genuinely part of society. We might call this ‘the myth of CSOs as society’. The new governance roles of civil society organisations appears to have moved them away from the community and to have resulted in free-floating organisations, not forthcoming from nor embedded in or accountable to society.

Initially, the CSO activism to enhance people’s skills for engagement in policy and politics evoked enthusiasm, but lack of tangible changes paralyzed the vibrancy and internal power dynamics have taken its toll. In the meantime, the claimed beneficiaries, the poor, have disappeared from the scene. The initiatives were not a product of their demand, they were absent at the start, and only drawn in in small numbers to realize the proclaimed participation. Supply seems to be the driving force, the supply of donor funds.

Close to donors and to governments

“Too close for comfort” was the qualification that Hulme and Edwards gave to the relationship between NGOs and donors, back in 1997 already. The qualification concerns a gradual process of co-optation, starting with the acceptance of funds, the application of donor language and instruments and culminating into the reproduction of the bureaucratic donor culture (ibid: 278). Our studies showed a similar closeness of the organisations to the donor community. By directly controlling the organisations (Zambia) or by channelling the money to organisations of their own liking (Uganda), donors have a strong influence on the working of the system. There is reason to believe that David Sogge is right in his observation that NGOs may be “local clones” of northern nonprofits. (Sogge 2004:18).

NGOs and CSOs have also moved close to their own governments. In spite of the complaints from NGOs about being sidelined and mistrusted by the government officials, they have become part of the same camp, and are often seen as such by the public. The diagnosis made by Chaball & Daloz (1999) about the lack of institutional separation between civil society and the state bureaucracy in Africa, was assented in the studies (Banda, Andama, Mungai). Other analysts also report about the phenomenon, like Maina who in his research of Kenya called the boundaries between the state, political society and civil society “rather porous, often blurring into each other” (Maina 1998:135). Saasa & Simutanyi also speak of the ‘blurred distinction’ between the public and private sphere in Zambia (2007:6, 18), referring to the highly personalized character of the Zambian political system, and the absence of ideological or programmatic differences between political parties. The situation in the Middle East is no different, as Heydemann and Leenders have argued, calling the democracy promoters’ belief in a distinction between state and society a ‘myth’ (2011:4).

Side effects of external support

Money-wise, CSOs have had a comfortable position during the past decade. The case of Kabarole in Uganda showed that they were able to access money, while local government was not. The situation created uneasy forms of partnership, as citizen organisations were crowding out local governments. Similar forms of competition were found in Zambia

between citizen organisations and political parties and, more fundamental perhaps, between CSOs and parliament, the latter having no right to approve the National Development Plan (successor to the PRSP), while the Zambian government does discuss it with civil society groups (Saasa & Simutanyi 2007: 24). Whatever the reputation of politicians in Africa, it is ironical that non-elected, non representative civic organisations have acquired a place at the policy table, while formal structures of democracy like local government and political parties, have been sidelined.

Parliaments are usually completely insignificant, as was found by Eberlei (2007). He observed that the opportunities created by the PRS process in Zambia for civil society actors to become closely involved in policy matters, fundamentally changed the political environment (Eberlei, 2007:11). The privileged civil society organisations are not seeking cooperation with parliament, links between civil society organisations and the elected bodies are either weak or absent (Eberlei 2007:12, Saasa & Simutanyi 2007:18).

This indicates that the preference of foreign donors to support CSOs in a governance role has not been conducive for the development of a formal democratic control system, it may even have undermined it. After years of project support, one of the lessons was that the creation of a parallel administrative system at project level was counterproductive, but the current promotion of a system of parallel public governance institutions is even more disruptive. Speaking with Eberlei: “it is misleading to simply scale-up the ‘participation ladder’ from the project level to the national level and to demand joint decision making” (ibid:12).

Close to donors, close to governments, removed from society and operating in a vacuum. The findings raise doubts about the validity of a governance role by free-floating citizen organisations. In the end, the civil society building strategy of advocacy to address the causes of poverty and to give voice to the poor has put in the saddle organisations that are more FOR the people than OF the people.

Future knowledge development

Our sample of four cases is small, but in combination with earlier academic writings and recent research on citizen engagement and democracy promotion, the findings call for a fundamental review of the assumptions underlying the support to civil society development. Only few of the organisations figuring in the case studies are Hivos partners, yet the findings do matter for Hivos, since the promotion of a governance and advocacy role by citizens’ organisations has been a key element in its strategy. Further knowledge development could be set out along two major lines, the line of analysing the theory of change on which the strategy and the activities are based, and a more practical line of researching the functioning of new forms of organizing: networks and coalitions.

Theory of change

The theory behind much of the support to civil society activities is that organisation building and collective action are catalysts for changing power structures. It must be recognized though, that many civic actions studied in the Knowledge Programme, which were de-

signed to change the course of government policy, have not been successful in doing so²⁵. This calls for a reflection on the theory of change and its subsequent aid strategies. Eyben et al have developed a useful framework of theories on “how history happens”, and its interpretations in the non-governmental development sector (Eyben et al, 2008). The framework with five common theories of change, including the theory that change is the outcome of joint efforts so that organised groups should be nurtured in their actions to obtain positive societal change, can serve as a starting point for an analysis of the theory of change en vogue among Hivos and its partners.

Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2009) offer another useful framework for analysis. They contrast the classical ‘breakdown’ theory of deprivation as reason why people protest, with the ‘resource driven’ mobilisation theory, developed to explain the social movement activity in western countries since the late 1960s. From a resource mobilisation perspective, people’s protest is linked to the availability of resources and the perceived chances of success, “rather than from rising or declining grievance levels”. For resource mobilisation theorists, poor people will usually not be the first to go out and protest, since “the struggle to survive will take up all the time and energy poor people have, and only when daily life severely breaks down does protest emerge.” If this is true as well for the African situation, many of the civil society building activities may have been based on a false theory of change, notably the grievance theory which assumes that people organize because of their subordinated position, lack of opportunities, inequality and marginalisation. An analysis of when and why people protest needs to be location and situation specific. Hivos Knowledge Program is well-placed to start a series of events with partners to discuss and analyse the theory of change in their particular environment, the outcomes of which can inform future interaction.

The review of the theory of change could extend to a reflection on:

- the very role of organisations for social and political change. Has group formation been over-estimated in the aid sector? What are the prospects of collective action in different situations and what might be alternatives? (See Namara 2009, De Wit&Bernier 2009, Berenschot 2010)
- the future for democracy and institution-building in African countries. If western forms of governance are not suitable in the African context, what are alternatives?
- the kind of organisations that can serve the poor in the particular context in which they live, identifying genuine forms of civil society development. It has been said that NGOs have hijacked civil society in countries in the South (WRR, quoting Edwards, Fowler, Molenaars and Renard, Rose). How can civil society get its own identity and integrity back?
- the need and desirability of external support, both material and immaterial. In many cases, external support seems to have been disruptive for genuine civil society building. What does that mean for the role of external partners and for financial aid?

²⁵ This was noted in countries as far apart as South Africa, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. While the mobilisation process may have brought out large numbers of people, the very aims for which the people set out to campaign were not attained.

New types of organisation

Over the past decades new types of organisation have become popular. Especially for performing the governance role civic organisations have joined hands in coalitions, associations or networks, more or less formalized structures. Bilateral and multilateral donors, as well as private grant makers, have embraced networks as new organizing structures. Hivos also supports many national and regional networks, which conduct lobby and awareness raising activities on various issues ranging from civic education, violence against women, HIV/Aids, etc. In view of the problematic character of free-floating organisations encountered in our studies, which have become detached from the groups they claim to represent and/or serve, more knowledge is needed about the functioning of networks or coalitions as agents of social change. A recently developed framework by IDRC could be most useful to study networks by attending to three broad categories of inquiry: i) the network vibrancy: how healthy is the network in terms of participation, leadership, capacity; ii) the network connectivity: the nature of relationships within the network and its external reach; and iii) the network effectiveness, identifying the extent to which the network realizes the expectations and is able to make a difference (IDRC 2010). The Hivos Knowledge Programme could set out to research the functioning of networks beyond the individual partner evaluations to enable comparisons and to identify trends in the way networks function, and to better understand their viability as social change mechanisms.

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ANNEX 1: FOUR STUDIES SUMMARIZED

Introduction

The following pages give a summary of the four studies on which this synthesis paper builds. The cases have been forthcoming in a random way: under the theme of ‘civic action for a responsive government’ and guided by the three major research questions of the Knowledge Programme on Civil Society Building, ISS students, and researchers and activists in various African countries were invited to make a proposal for research. The submitted proposals were assessed by the ISS Knowledge Programme team, and presented for advice to the Hivos KP team on Southern Africa. Once selected, a process of collaboration started between the researchers and ISS staff, in some cases leading to joint work during the research, in others to supervision and advice. The studies have been conducted between 2006 and 2009, in Tanzania, Zambia, Uganda and Kenya.

The guiding research questions were:

- How can we understand the *dynamics of civil society formation* and the role of local actors in this process?
- How do *external actors* (donors as well as support organisations) contribute to this process?
- How does civil society building as a process contribute to *structural change* in the unequal balance of power in society?

The theme ‘civil society for a responsive government’ was chosen in view of the growing involvement of a wide range of national actors in policy design and implementation. “In many African countries, civil society organisations have been formed or re-organized for the purpose of participating in the poverty reduction strategy process, in its formulation and in the monitoring of its implementation. Funds for conducting this work have come from bilateral, multi-lateral and non-governmental (NGO) donors.” (Research Plan) The rationale for the study on civic action for responsive government was to find an answer to the questions if and under what circumstance citizens organisations can play a role in policy processes, holding their government accountable for poverty reduction. “It [the research] will focus on the dynamics and effectiveness of civic actions and it will analyse the contribution of external support in the process.” (ibid)

This umbrella offered space for a variety of studies with a common focus on the relatively new role of civic organisations in public policy and politics, a role of advocacy and lobby, of monitoring and watch-dogging. Thus, all studies analyse what happens ‘when civics go governance’.²⁶

²⁶ Governance “the formation and stewardship of the formal and informal rules that regulate the public realm, the arena in which state as well as economic and societal actors interact to make decisions” (Wil Hout, 2010, Inaugural address, quoting Hyden, Court and Mease 2004).

Civil Society Participation in Tanzania's Policy Processes, the case of Tanzania Policy Forum

Sources:

Hermine Engel 2006, 'Seizing and Stretching Participatory Space, Civil Society Engagement in Tanzania's Policy Processes', ISS MA thesis.

Hermine Engel 2010, 'Seizing and Stretching Participatory Space, Civil Society Engagement in Tanzania's Policy Processes', Working Paper 1 in Hivos & ISS Working Paper Series The Power of Civil Society.

Introduction

In 1999, Tanzania was considered eligible for debt relief under the HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) initiative of the World Bank and the IMF. To qualify for debt cancellation the government had to prepare a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) together with a broad range of stakeholders, including civil society organisations. Stakeholder participation was set as a condition by the international institutions to ensure national ownership of the policy. Researching civil society's participation in this process, Engel studied the case of the Policy Forum, a coalition of 94 NGOs, research institutions and NGO networks, established in 2002.

Policy Forum

The Policy Forum has its roots in the need - identified after the first activities around the Tanzanian PRSP process - for a more effective civil society approach to policy advocacy. Whereas many CSOs had been involved in service delivery, the demand for participation in policy processes, which was increasing at rapid pace, required other capabilities. The Policy Forum's key objective was to "[build] on the collective and individual experiences to date to create a more systematic approach to policy engagement" (Hakikazi 2002) The Forum was well aware that one should make efforts to avoid the "one-off method of participation that has come to be expected of civil society by the government and donors" (ibid). Its engagement with the PRSP was based on the view that "there is now more room for civil society to make a difference than there used to be" (Gould and Ojanen, 2003:7 quoted by Engel 2010:5) At the time of Engel's research in 2006, the PF counted 94 members, 77 were Tanzanian organisations, 17 were international organisation operating in Tanzania.

In 2002, the Policy Forum had successfully influenced the country's PRSP, getting its views included in each of the priority sectors addressed in the document. The Forum was equally able to influence the subsequent Joint Assistance Strategy designed by donors and government to coordinate aid flows. As a network of organisations, the PF jointly engaged in meetings initiated by the government on overall policy making, while member organisations engaged individually on thematic issues of their specific expertise. Engel's paper presents the key findings of her research, which explored the strategies of civil society organisations to ensure more meaningful participatory engagement. The five emerging issues identified in the study are: co-optation, coordination, representation, international vs. local dynamics, and engagement in larger political processes.

Cooptation

Engel found that participation is recognized on paper, but not practised. The engagement was more of a consultative nature making Civil Society Organisations vulnerable to the whims of the inviting party, government and donors. CSOs in the country showed aware-

ness of the danger of joining government-initiated meetings on policy matters, as this involvement easily leads to cooptation, "... decisions are taken in your presence, so you are seen as part of those making and supporting the decision." Engel encountered reports of 'being participated', a form of involvement "to meet the donor conditionality and to keep the various stakeholders happy" (p 7). Explanatory factors for this situation were found in the historical and cultural context which gives much respect to those in power and where by tradition one is not to question authority, and in the lack of skills in policy and data analysis on the side of the organisations.

Houtzager (2003:92) had warned that entering alliances with the state "inevitably surrenders some degree of autonomy" – including pressure to affirm decisions already taken. This may be particularly the case when civil society has not been effectively prepared for the engagement due to limited capacity and lack of sufficient information. Engel noted the preferred strategy of the PF for a '50/50 participation', on the one hand taking part upon invitation by the government with limited space for own initiatives, and on the other hand creating spaces "where civil society can develop its own agenda (-) through advocacy and capacity building".

Coalition, Coordination and Control

Coalition building among members of the civil society sector has been considered a key element for successful advocacy. It can be looked upon from various perspectives. There is the view that a coordinated civil society would be a stronger force to be reckoned with, it would send out a stronger message to those in power and it would thus have a greater influence on government. From another perspective, government and donors were believed to emphasize the importance of coordination because they need a coordinated body of organisations to invite to participatory forums. As critics remarked: "A strong correlation is seen here between coordination and control". The most outstanding example cited by Engel's respondents was the establishment in 2005 by the EU of a Non-State Actors (NSA) coordinating body to incorporate NGOs, media, trade unions and the private sector. This donor and government-driven initiative evoked scepticism among civil society actors as its invitation policy was sidelining the more critical PF members who were kept out of the task team. (p 9)

Coalition building is based on the assumption that civil society can and will speak with one voice. However, the PF organisations experienced that the scenario of one neat coordinated package to speak with a single unified voice on policy matters, required too much compromise, and was in practice impossible. Several PF members emphasized the undesirability of such compromise, preferring diversity and a critical voice above a weak common denominator. (p 10)

Representation

The arguments for coalition building among CSOs relate to the issue of representation. Government and donors favour strong coordination among CSOs to guarantee broad representation of citizens and to facilitate the selection of organisations to invite to the policy table. The PF realizes though, that for both practical (e.g. time and distance) and ideological reasons representation in the true sense is impossible. Instead, as a former PF chairperson argued in Engel's research, "it is more important what you are bringing to the table, what research or data (-). What is important is the credibility of the evidence... don't say you are speaking on behalf of this particular constituency, you should be evaluated on

the strength of your analysis of the issues.” (p 11) The PF preferred this above efforts to secure full consultation to reach consensus, because the results of the latter “may be so watered-down to please as many views as possible and to make everyone feel represented”. In this view, legitimacy is seen as a product of credibility of the evidence put forward and proper ethics of those who claim to be working on behalf of the poor.

International vs local dynamics

The strong presence of international organisations was also a key issue found by Engel during her research in Tanzania. On this point her article starts by quoting Simbi and Thom who wrote in 2000:

There once was a time when many northern NGOs ran development projects by themselves, employing staff in country, or using expatriates to oversee work. A second stage emerged when a number of northern NGOs ... moved to a “partnership model” in which local organizations applied to northern NGOs to carry out development projects ... Since the mid-1990s, this model has evolved into a third stage in which northern NGOs no longer simply provide funds, but must now also be seen to add value and build capacity ... Implementation by proxy appears to be emerging as the fourth stage in this progression ... [where] the northern NGO defines the parameters of the relationship, assesses the African NGO, and has comprehensive management structures in place to ensure compliance” (Simbi and Thom 2000:213-215)

In Tanzania the first stage is still very much in practice although the other stages seem to exist at the same time. At all the stages, the dynamics of interaction with international organizations is complex and filled with contradictions. On the one hand, international organisations are valued for the resource they bring, in terms of money and expertise, and local organisations have welcomed their inputs. On the other hand, they may feel threatened by the international sister because it is ‘crowding out’ local work, by ‘knowing better’ or by being more recognized because of its resources. The government has shown a double face, in some cases favouring the international organisation over the local NGO, in another case being opportunistic, by suddenly restricting membership of committees to Tanzanian NGOs when the international member was becoming too critical.

The signals of ‘implementation by proxy’ experienced by the PF led the organisation to start looking for funds which would ensure its independence and would also free it from the burdensome reporting procedures. Several respondents emphasized the desire that local and international NGOs team up, whereby the latter’s role is to strengthen the local partners to take responsibility for Tanzania’s development.

Engaging in big issues vs. micro-ization

Respondents shared with Engel their concern of being called in to deal with the local issues or with issues of minor importance, while being sidelined when larger political issues were at stake. Tendler launched the term ‘micro-ization’ for this phenomenon. A major point of contention in PF was the lack of effective engagement around the macro-economic stabilisation programme. To reach HIPC decision point the government of Tanzania had to consent to a funding agreement with the IMF known as the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility, which contained “nearly three dozen non-negotiable conditions pertaining to the government’s economic and fiscal policies” (Gould 2005:25) These macro-economic policy conditionalities form the basis for new lending, so that the PF had wanted to discuss the impact of these conditions on the poor. It felt, however, that “the political will of the

government – also seen as constrained by donor conditionalities - does not leave much room for effective engagement on macro-economic policy and its linkages to the micro policy discussions.” (p 15)

In view of the scarce room for civil society organisations to get involved with the larger political issues, the Policy Forum opted for “self-created spaces to influence policy more effectively by coming together independently as civil society organisations to determine alternative strategies.” These strategies include facilitating public debates, raising awareness in communities, conducting policy analyses, working through the media, performing independent monitoring of implementation. The PF strongly felt that for engagement at the level of larger political processes it had to be more pro-active and to build coalitions among civil society groups and citizens.

Conclusion

An effective response of civil society organisations to the requests for its engagement in policy processes requires ability “to seize and stretch the participatory spaces made available by government and to create alternative spaces of engagement to influence policy processes.” For networks like the Policy Forum “a continuous critical assessment is necessary to ensure that participation is not limited to the level of consultation, but that it is re-politicised to affect the necessary structural changes (-).” (p 16)

Civil society participation in Zambia's Policy Processes, the case of CSPR Zambia Civil Society for Poverty Reduction

Sources:

- Saul Banda 2007, Integrating a Rights-based approach (RBA) in Monitoring Poverty reduction Strategies, Lessons from CSPR in Zambia, ISS MA thesis
- Braathen, Einar (2006), A Participatory Pathbreaker? Experience with Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers from four South African countries, NIBR Working Paper 2006:122 (NIBR = Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research)
- CSPR Evaluation report 2008,
- Stephen Muyakwa 2008 'Situation analysis and learning needs assessment: participatory budget monitoring and resource tracking for health and HIV/AIDS project', Zambia draft report.

Introduction

Around the turn of the century, Zambia like Tanzania, qualified for debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative led by the World Bank and IMF. The condition was similar: prepare a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) together with a broad range of stakeholders, including civil society organisations. In Zambia, it led to the formation of Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR), a coalition of 50 civil society organisations. Having worked closely with some of the organisations involved in the coalition, Saul Banda, ISS MA student in 2007, researched the engagement of CSPR with the policy processes in Zambia. This summary makes use of his findings, as well as of findings of related studies about CSPR's work as policy advocate.

Civil Society for Poverty Reduction - CSPR

CSPR was established in 2000, under the auspices of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) with the objective to mobilize and coordinate civil society engagement in the formulation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. In 2005, CSPR became registered as an independent organisation. The work of CSPR was done from various angles and with components at central and decentralized level.

Policy advocacy

Its initial mission was quite successful, many of CSPR's comments and ideas were included in the draft PRSP of 2001. CSPR was very active in organizing a participatory process, involving many people in rural areas. (Braathen 2006) After the PRSP was adopted and put into operation by the government, CSPR continued its involvement in national policy fora, by monitoring the implementation of the policy and partaking in the formulation of the successors of the PRSP, the Fifth National Development Plan (FNDP) and the Sixth National Development Plan, which started to be discussed in 2010.

Participation in the national policy fora was through individual CSPR members, who accepted the invitation by the government to join the Sectoral Advisory Groups (SAGs) in their specific fields of expertise. SAG's comprised representatives from the government, civil society, academia, private sector and international donors. The early experiences were of a mixed nature. In some of the SAGs the participation of CSPR members has been successful, but from the beginning it was evident that in the SAG on Macro-economic policy the role of representatives of CSPR was reduced to being observers (Banda 2007:57). An assessment of the functioning of the SAGs points to the following problems: i) no clear terms of reference, ii) lack of commitment from members leading to a high absenteeism,

iii) absence of a legal frame supporting the work, iv) lack of being taken serious by the government.²⁷ CSPR members showed frustration about the fact that the agenda was largely driven by the government and that civil society groups were at the mercy of the good will of the government for timely invitations and information.

With the Sixth National Development Plan (SNDP) now in the making, NGOs have become part of the process as members of the SAGs. The action and consultation process seems to be less dynamic than it was in the period of the first PRSP in 2001. The situation now is that of established NGOs being invited at the table, who know the game and know what they want. As the Guidelines of the Ministry of Finance state that every paragraph of the Plan has to be endorsed by the SAG, this effectively means that the NGOs agree to the Plan once it is officially submitted.

Budget work

Every year, CSPR has been doing what is called ‘budget work’, the analysis and monitoring of the annual national budget. Together with several other NGOs, CSPR joined the government initiated meetings in the preparation of the budget. Its input in this regard was well noted among sister organisations who were also involved in the process.²⁸ The work included the submission of proposals to the Ministry of Finance and National Planning, based on a situation analysis and stakeholder meetings in the districts. In addition, CSPR has been organizing annual meetings with Members of Parliament on the government budget right after its submission to Parliament. The meetings are meant to discuss issues and gaps in the budget, but due to the large majority of the ruling party (MMD) in Parliament it is virtually impossible for MPs to make any significant changes. CSPR also plays a role as a watchdog on government spending. When the Auditor General presents its report to the Public Accounts Committee, CSPR makes its own analysis of the account, especially reporting about any ‘over-commitments’²⁹ they may encounter.

Muyakwa (2008) notes that the CSOs active in the budgetary work are not very positive about what they were able to achieve. Fourteen out of 16 organisations interviewed in a study in 2008 rate the impact of their work as weak or average. Asked for concrete examples the respondents mainly stated vague results, like ‘higher priority being paid by government to poverty issues’. Most common factors hindering the budget work of CSOs were said to be lack of information from the government, lack of capacity and skills in the organisations and the inability of Parliament to act upon the input provided by CSO and to amend the budget due to their limited powers in this area (Myakwa 2008:33-39).

Reaching out to the provinces

In addition to its work at the national level, CSPR aimed to have programmes in five of Zambia’s nine provinces with the intention to mobilize local communities to participate in poverty reduction initiatives in their local environment “enabling the poor to speak for themselves” (Banda 2007: 55). A Provincial Focus Group was being hosted by one of the

²⁷ CSPR report 2005, quoted in Muyakwa, Stephen L. (2008: 28).

²⁸ Muyakwa (2008) reports that the field study among CSOs on their role in participatory budget monitoring and resource tracking, shows that CSPR was most frequently mentioned as participant in the budget work. (ibid, p 34).

²⁹ A euphemism for ‘corruption’.

member organisations and a similar construction existed at the district level. The intended Area Committees (below district level) have only existed on paper (Banda 2007:48).

In the early years, activities of consultation and campaigning at provincial level were realized, but overall the C SPR structure has been top-heavy. C SPR was mainly located at the national secretariat with lack of visibility at provincial and district level, and with a top-down system of planning and implementation. (Evaluation C SPR 2008:viii) Accordingly, the identification of issues at sub-national level was found to involve mainly the members of the provincial management team; local communities and district authorities were not much part of it. Therefore, “the issues and activities might not be relevant to the needs of the local people” (C SPR Eval Report 2008:x)

Actors in CRSP

A closer look at the actors involved in C SPR reveals two interesting features. The first is the tight connection between CSOs and government on the personal level, due to the large involvement of government employees in C SPR and its member organisations. In Monze and Mongu almost half of C SPR activists were teachers, in addition to the many members who were civil servants working at provincial or district offices (69). The second outstanding feature is the strong presence of donors in C SPR. As one of C SPR’s major funders, the German GTZ attended all weekly staff meetings, all meetings of the Programme Management Team, and the C SPR staff retreats. At the provincial level, GTZ had seconded a development worker to help the provincial teams with planning and implementing their work (Banda 2007:66)

Internal struggles

The organisation was further challenged by internal power struggles, with people going for personal gains under the guise of the organisation. Banda notes: “... the board has been ‘hijacked’ by individuals representing ‘briefcase’ organisations that are of a questionable character” (Banda 2007:63). And: “... some Board members have the habit of interfering with day-to-day running of the organisation, with unnecessary visits to the Secretariat offices (-) in which case they would request transport refunds in addition to using office equipment such as computers, telephone and fax.” (ibid p 64). The high staff turn-over has put severe strains on C SPR’s ability to perform, leading to heavy reliance on out-sourcing of the work. Ironically, “In some cases, those engaged as consultants turn out to be the same individual C SPR Board members, raising serious questions about transparency and accountability.” (ibid p 64/65)

The Local Government–NGO Partnerships in Uganda, a case of Kabarole district

Sources:

Felix Andama, 2009, “Friends or Foes?” The Local Government–NGO Partnerships in Uganda, a case of Kabarole district, ISS MA thesis.

Felix Andama, September 2010, “A marriage of convenience” The Local Government - NGO Partnerships in Uganda, a case of Kabarole district”.

Introduction

Pressure to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of public administration incited many governments in developing countries to undertake public sector reforms. In Uganda, this process led to measures of decentralisation, including the encouragement of partnerships between government agencies and non-state actors. Local government and non-governmental organisations in Kabarole district thus started to work together for the development of their region. Felix Andama, ISS MA student 2009, has studied their cooperation, investigating the driving forces behind it and the nature of the joint efforts. Taking the cases of Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC) and the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) he analyses the partnerships.

Involvement of non-governmental organisations in public service is no novelty in Kabarole. It started way back in the 19th century when the missionaries established schools and hospitals, thus becoming important service deliverers. As part of the administrative decentralisation process in Uganda, at the end of the 20th century, the role of non-state actors in public affairs intensified. NGOs like the Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC) were formed, along with smaller local organisations active in different sectors.

Driving forces for partnerships

Andama identified various factors that motivated local governments and non-governmental organisations to work together. The government side seeks cooperation from NGOs, because they expect them to complement their own efforts in meeting the demand for social services by the local communities. As a government official stated: “We look for NGOs that fit our development priorities and can fill the gaps.” Governments recognize the expertise of NGOs in particular fields. This was especially so in the case of SNV, which has technical staff specialized in education, agriculture, human resource management and administration and who can offer support in the different sectors of district and local governments.

A major attraction for government officials is that NGOs have the capacity to access additional resources. It was said that donors may support a project proposal coming from an NGO but not one written by a sub-county or district local government, which only receives donor money through central government funds.

An important motivation for partnership on the side of the NGOs is to help improve the quality of service delivery by the government by supporting local government agents on the one hand and communities on the other. Apart from technical support, this also includes the tackling of corruption where needed.

NGOs were also found to be interesting partners, because they can help political leaders during their election campaigns. People have started NGOs or have used them as a platform to launch their political career. At election time, some politicians have taken credit for the work being done by the NGO, e.g. by claiming that thanks to them a particular NGO has come to the region.

Local governments and NGOs both show eagerness to deliver tangible social services to communities, like the construction of classrooms and health facilities, the provision of agricultural inputs, water and sanitation facilities. Such services are visible for everyone and results can be attained in a relatively short period of time. Cooperation with NGOs that focus on intangible matters, like community mobilisation and citizen's education and participation, were found to be less in demand among local governments.

Nature of partnerships

Partnerships are high on the agenda of the government of Uganda as can be told from the measures taken to promote its effectiveness. Each year, an assessment is made of the local government's compliance with the involvement of NGOs and other actors and if found inadequate, the local government gets a budget cut of 20% the next year; if the performance is good, a 20% increase in funds from the national government is rewarded.

Co-production and co-governance

Andama identified two forms of cooperation: co-production and co-governance. Following the definition by Joshi and Moore, he defines *co-production* as "... the provision of social services through a regular long term relationship between state agencies and organised groups of citizens, where both make substantial resource contributions." (Joshi and Moore, 2004) In co-production, service providers may be i) independent, able to substitute each other, or ii) interdependent, where a minimum input from both is required for any output to be obtained (Mitlin, 2008). SNV works mainly with the district government in capacity building. It helps strengthen management structures and systems to improve governance. Andama labels this form of cooperation as co-production, since the contribution of each party is essential for the end result.

Co-governance refers to an arrangement in which the non-state actor participates in the planning and delivery of public services (Brandsen and Pestoff, 2006). The partnership with KRC aims to empower local communities to actively take part in planning and budgeting, and it helps the local government structures to respond to the needs in the health and education sectors. KRC has developed various monitoring instruments with which the community can track the public expenditures. The objectives of the work are to promote public sector accountability and to improve systems of service delivery. Andama calls this a form of co-governance "because KRC is involved in the promotion of participatory planning, budgeting, monitoring of service delivery and promotion of accountability in the public sector."

Competition and conflict

The partnerships can be characterized as one of cooperation, but also of competition and conflict, which are fed by the following factors:

- partnerships are often pushed by external actors like the national government and international donors, so neither the government nor the NGO acts out of free will;

- government agents consider NGOs as a nuisance, especially if they are requesting accountability of the government and bringing out corruption affairs;
- NGOs tend to demonise local government officials, causing mistrust and irritation.

Critical factors determining effective partnership

In his research Andama identified factors that may benefit the partnership between local government and NGOs, but which are present to a limited extent only. These include:

Accountability and trust

Basic factors for effective partnership are information sharing, accountability to each other and trust. In Kabarole district, both local governments and NGOs claim to be sharing their information, but complain that the other is not. A district official stated that “They are not sharing their information, yet they have access to our information. We are suspicious that they are hiding some things from us.” A look at the kind of information to be shared shows that the district and sub-county local government are interested in information about the budget, work plans and reports of activities of the NGOs, which NGOs seem reluctant to share. NGOs are interested in the budgets and work plans of the local governments to which they feel to have right of access. Reported cases of corruption by the NGOs have contributed to a high level of mistrust among the cooperating partners.

Level of involvement

Related to information sharing is the level of involvement in each other’s activities and programmes. The NGOs claim they do involve the local governments in their activities by inviting the local leaders to meetings and sharing plans with them. They feel that the government does not take them serious in the actual planning process. “When they bring you on board, you find that you have very little input, because they have already planned their thing”. On the other hand, the local governments expressed concern over the low level of seriousness exhibited by the NGOs, who send persons to attend meetings, like the budget conferences, that cannot take decisions on behalf of the NGOs.

Informal relationships between leaders of the partner organisations

Informal relations between the leaders of both parties can determine the working relationships between the institutional partners. An NGO official had this observation about how the informal relationships affect the way the partners work and perceive each other. “The personal relationship our leaders have had a bearing on the kind of relationship we have as an institution. You may find a local leader has a bad relationship say with the director of an NGO, you find that you as an organisation end up having a bad working relationship with that NGO.”

Work experiences of leaders

The leader’s previous working experience, either as an NGO official or in local government, was found to be of great importance for the ability to negotiate in the complex relationships between the local governments and NGOs. This working knowledge facilitates the process of relation-building, since the leader may be in a position to understand the challenges faced by the other partner. The close links usually kept with former colleagues promotes the effectiveness of the partnerships.

NGOs involvement in active local politics

Involvement of the NGO officials in “active” politics, especially elected political positions, seriously affect the partnerships between the local governments and NGOs. A local government official noted that some of these bad relationships are due to leaders of some NGOs, who mix the NGO work with their political agenda. This was confirmed by a spokesperson from NGO-side who noted that; “an NGO official stood for an election and this led to a lot of conflict between the local government and NGOs in Kabarole district as mistrust set in.”

Some reflections by way of conclusion

Quoting Mitlin (2008) that co-production and co-governance by state and citizens may be used by NGOs as a way to secure political influence, Andama confirms this to be at work in the Kabarole case. Politicians take credit for success attained by NGOs and NGO officials have sailed on the winds of the NGO to promote their personal political ambitions

Andama links his findings about the centrality of personal links between leaders of local government and NGOs to an observation by Lister (1999), that “the dominance of personal relationships within the organisational relationships calls into question much of the theory currently being developed for NGOs in terms of capacity building, institutional strengthening, scaling-up and diffusion of innovation, which all rely on organisational processes as the basis for change’ (Lister, 1999:15).

Community empowerment as supported by the NGOs may lead to people’s awareness about their rights to services, and it may enhance their capacity to hold the service providers accountable, both state and non-state actors. However, Andama notes that lack of power and capacity on the side of the largely illiterate community members make it difficult for them to actively participate and to speak out and hold the local government and NGOs accountable.

If decentralisation is to bring services to the people, to make these responsive to local needs and to empower communities to participate, the environment has to change before it can happen in a serious way. This would require changes in the rules and regulations governing the cooperation processes, but it would also require changes in attitudes and behaviour of local government as well as non-state partners. Andama concludes that for the time being, “practice is far from principles”.

Civil society and the Constituency Development Fund in Kenya

Sources:

- Mercy Mungai (2009) *Civil Society Organisations' Role in Enhancing Accountability and Community Participation: The Case of the Constituency Development Fund in Kenya*
 Alex Ngoma (2010) 'Administration and Utilization of Financial Resources in the Public Sector: The Case of the Constituency Development Fund in Zambia', internal paper for ISS-Hivos Knowledge Programme Civil Society Building
 Various newspaper and other articles from Jamaica, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda.

Introduction

Funding mechanisms for projects at the level of constituencies have become fashionable across the globe. Fifteen years ago, president Chiluba of Zambia established "a new budget format that will provide constituency grants that will fund locally generated project ideas". (GRZ 1995, quoted in Ngoma 2010). In other countries as well, CDFs have been created as part of the decentralisation wave, including Jamaica, Tanzania and Kenya. The basic idea of a CDF is that members of parliament (MPs) have funds available for development projects in their respective constituency, small funds depending on the size of the district, its population and the degree of poverty.

Mercy Mungai, ISS MA student 2009, researched the Constituency Development Fund in Kenya. The study presents findings on the CDF mechanism and its implementation. Whereas the CDF Act provides for active involvement by citizens and citizens' organisations, Mungai's paper explicitly looks at the space for CSOs in the CDF process to participate in a meaningful way. Primary data were collected in three constituencies, Nairobi, Machakos and Makueni, where both local and national NGOs are engaged in activities around the CDF.

CDF in Kenya

The Kenyan government established the Constituency Development Fund through an Act of Parliament in 2003. The CDF was to channel financial resources to the constituency level for community-based development projects that would improve people's social and economic well being. By bringing resources closer to the people and giving them decision making power over its use, the CDF was also to promote the participation of people in their own development. The Fund has received 2.5% of the total annual revenue collected by the government, 75% is allocated equally among the 210 constituencies, 25% is divided on the basis of the poverty index in the constituency. It is estimated that – on average – each constituency has received at least 30 million Kenyan shillings annually.³⁰ This being tax payers' money, it could be argued that each and every Kenyan contributes to the CDF (Gikonyo, 2008, quoted by Mungai).

The mechanism of the CDF was designed to ensure participation by common people. At local level, a Constituency Development Committee (CDC) is set up to prioritize and oversee the implementation of projects in accordance with the communities' needs. The composition of the CDC is determined by law. It should include the elected member of parliament, two councillors, two male and two female representatives from the consti-

³⁰ IDRC, *Projects in Kenya 2006*, website accessed 7 September 2010, www.idrc.ca.

cy, two persons representing religious organisations, one youth and one NGO representative, with a maximum membership of 15 people. The projects prioritized at local level are submitted to district committees and finally to a national board. The decision of approval is taken by the Constituency Fund Committee (CFC), a national committee that is composed of MPs only. The implementation of the projects is through the existing government structures at the district level. The narrative around the design of the CDF is that projects identified by the representatives of the community would be responsive to local needs, make use of local knowledge and values, and thus increase community ownership making the projects beneficial and sustainable.

The practice has been less ideal. The CDF has been an instrument in the hands of MPs. They can manipulate the membership of the various committees at constituency and district level and exercise power in all decision-making processes. Mungai explains that an MP can easily use his patronage networks to ensure that the projects identified and prioritized are in the locations where the MP got most votes, or in locations where the MP hopes to get future votes. He/she can just nominate his/her favourite members to the CDC and it would be perfectly in line with the CDF Act. “The unequal power relations between the MP and the community appear to have been institutionalized by the CDF Act”. (Gikonyo, 2008, quoted by Mungai)

Spaces for citizens’ engagement

According to the CDF Act, MPs “shall, within the first year of a new parliament and at least once every two years thereafter, convene meetings in the constituency to deliberate on development matters in the location, the constituency and the district’ (section 23(2)). Whether the community participates in the identification of projects depends on how the MP acts, who is invited to the meetings and who is not. The findings reveal that there is actually minimal involvement of the community. Most decisions related to project identification were made by those close to the MP and then passed as having been identified by the community.

After the identification of projects, people and the organisations have a formal role in the process of prioritisation that takes place in the Constituency Development Committee, in which various seats are reserved for representatives of the community and for CSOs. Again, the MP chooses the partners. He/she decides which CSO can participate, and thus ensures that the members nominated to the CDC are those that will help advance his/her interests.

Mungai found that the actions at the district level were limited. A District Projects Committee (DPC) has been put in place for harmonisation of the proposals coming from the constituencies. The DPC comprises mainly of technical departments of government who are to make sure that the projects submitted are in line with the government’s development priorities and that there is no duplication between projects being implemented under CDF and those being implemented by the line ministries. The DPC should assess if the costs allocated to the projects are realistic and look for co-financing opportunities with donors who may be interested in funding some of the projects implemented under CDF. It was reported by some of the technical departments that, in practice, CDCs did not forward projects to DPC for harmonisation and that there was minimal involvement of the technical departments at the district level. CSOs were playing no role at this level.

At the national level, the CDF Board decides about the projects submitted by the 210 constituencies. The Board's decisions are subject to approval by the Constituency Fund Committee (CFC) composed only of MPs. The Board has some formal slots for CSO representation.

The picture that emerges is that, in spite of formal provisions in the CDF Act for people's participation in the identification and decision making phases, the role of community members and CSOs is more nominal than real. The CDF Act gives the community the right to identify the projects they consider necessary, but the space is severely limited for citizens as the MP chooses who participates in project identification and who becomes a member of the CDC. The opportunities for the engagement of citizens do not get any better during the implementation process of the projects. The day to day running of the projects is done by the Project Management Committees (PMCs) with the assistance of the relevant technical department as stipulated in the CDF Act. The CDC oversees the implementation, but, here again, the weight of people outside the sphere of influence of the MP is nil.

Lack of information

Apart from periodic internal audits by the CDF board and regular audits by the Kenya National Audit Office, no independent evaluation of CDF has been undertaken. It also appears that the kind of information being monitored in CDF is mainly financial information. Writing a state-of-the-art paper about the CDF in Zambia, Alex Ngoma found an almost complete lack of information and documentation on the fund, which has been ongoing in his country for almost 15 years. "... the Ministry of Local Government and Housing (MLGH) only had a copy of the December 2006 Guidelines despite being the ministry responsible for overseeing the administration of the CDF (-). The official of the MLGH in whose portfolio fell the CDF referred (-) to Cabinet Office (-). Cabinet Office simply had no information (-). Similarly, the library at Parliament had no information about the CDF."(Ngoma, 2010)

The role played by CSOs

To open up the process for people's participation, various CSOs have undertaken activities to inform communities about the Fund and to mobilise them to demand a bigger say in the project identification process. National and local NGOs worked together in producing information material and in conducting training workshops for the communities. It was believed that adequate access to information would make communities to put 'pressure from below', which might force the MPs to involve the community in decision making for fear that they may be voted out at the next general elections. "

Officially, the CDC is required to provide communities with information by announcing the selected projects and the financial allocations on public notice boards. This does not always happen. Faced with lack of information, two CSOs in Makueni and Machakos decided to create a watchdog committee to oversee the implementation of projects. By collecting information directly from the field, the committee checks if the contractors are on site doing the work, it keeps track of the materials being delivered and of the money being used. Also, the CSOs mobilize the community to write letters to the CDC and the MP of the area demanding proper information about the projects in their area. An action model applied by various CSOs is the so called 'bunge la wananchi', the citizens' parliament, bringing together the area MP, the members of the CDC and the local community. The

public forum gives the community the opportunity to question the officials about the CDF projects, provided of course that they show up at the meeting which was often not the case.

Some CSOs have set up a system to monitor the CDF projects. A CSO network at the national level with members across the country trained 'grassroots monitors' to follow and assess the implementation process. Information provided by these monitors is managed through a computer software programme, which makes it possible for the CSO network to keep track of projects across the country. Use is made of pictures taken at the project site to compare the actual status of the project with the formal reports of the CDC. In nineteen constituencies local monitors were trained to work with index cards, a source of information for the public and an instrument to put pressure on the MP. The cards proved to be useful in identifying the 'double-funding' of projects, i.e. so-called CDF projects which had actually been realised with money from other sources.

Performance by CSOs

Mungai's field research revealed limitations in the approach and capacity of CSOs to conduct the various activities around the CDF. Almost all CSOs in the region conduct awareness raising activities with little or no collaboration amongst them. The result was a duplication of activities, waste of resources and conflicting messages going to the communities, which at times were overwhelmed with information and calls for action. One local CSO doing this work admitted it had not read the CDF Act and had not been trained on the content of the Act. It relied on what it heard from other CSOs. The audit work often seemed to be beyond the capacity of the organisations, which lack technical expertise to determine the quality of CDF projects, or research expertise to do proper sampling, data collection and analysis, or both.

Conclusions

The design of the CDF appears to have institutionalized unequal power relations between MPs and citizens, so that the Fund is far from being a participatory mechanism. Mungai concludes that "the political context within which CSOs operate constrains to a large extent the ability of CSOs to perform their roles. (-) A lot of power lies in the hands of the MPs who act as legislators, implementers and overseers of the CDF processes." This has opened the door to "corruption, political patronage".

Given the unequal power relations in the 'invited spaces', civil society organisations were started to look for alternative 'created spaces' of engagement, from which they could undertake awareness raising and sensitisation campaigns to educate the community and to mobilize them to demand for more information and for more involvement in the CDF process. Research of the CDF projects and monitoring its implementation were also tasks that the CSOs had taken up to increase their influence. Mungai found they were not always very effective and efficient in doing that. She concludes that CSOs "tend to focus on their external environment (political interference) to explain the challenges confronting them while not paying particular attention to their internal challenges that directly constrain their effective engagement in CDF."

Critical concerns from elsewhere

Critics from other countries have signalled the impossibilities of a CDF. Martin Henry, criticizing the CDF in Jamaica, wrote in *The Gleaner*: “No breathing politician, an egoistic and corruptible human – not an angel from heaven – would fail to consider how to use the resources at their disposal (-) to improve their chance of re-election.” Irenei Kiria of the Tanzania Policy Forum wondered in her article ‘Constituency Development Fund: Who decides?’ whose toy the fund actually is. “Have citizens been consulted?” She gives the answer: “... we will implement the CDF because it has been done in Kenya and because the central government has decided to do so. I have not heard anybody saying the citizens decided.” Faced with plans to set up a CDF in Uganda, Nyakato Abooki wrote in *The Monitor* of August 20 2010: “The CDF can make a very big change in a lot of lives in this country, but it does not have to be channelled through the 400 MPs.”

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