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# Lifting 'white man's burden' onto the shoulders of Southern Civil Society - transforming Northern NGOs into global organisations.

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**White men's burden**

The author with CARE in Ghana, October 2010



**Handing over to Civil Society**

- and in Tanzania, September 2012

**Abstract**.
During the latest decades, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have played an important role providing development aid to societies in the developing countries. In a still more competitive market of funding (both public/institutional and private), the NGOs - often originated from smaller, humanitarian oriented civil society organisations - are professionalising their management and operations and are now merging into large, integrated transnational aid-'corporations' with a global reach and a considerable economic and political influence.

This has in some recipient countries led to the large NGOs being perceived as yet another player in the international aid system dominated by the OECD countries. In addition, the international NGOs have been met by worries and criticism concerning whether they can still be regarded and operate as truly civil society organisations.

The paper describes and explains the background for these developments and discuss different ways to tackle a number of dilemmas confronting all NGOs working in the field of international development aid.

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## 1. Introduction.

Within the broader range of civil society organisations (CSOs), a group of more specialised non-governmental international organisations (NGO's) have played an important role in development aid, especially since the 1980s. From a charitable and humanitarian beginning operating in a limited number of countries, they have developed into huge organisations involved all over the Southern hemisphere with a broader range of activities in the area of long-term development aid and humanitarian emergency relief.

> Without going into a longer discussion of terminology of CSO and NGO, the two terms are here used to describe "third sector organisations", i.e. belonging neither to the public sector nor to the market. CSOs are seen as a broader range of more or less formalised organisations whereas the term NGO is used for a sub-category of professional organisations with a formal structure.

At a closer look one can, however question both their degree of internationalism and to which extend they are truly independent from governments. Such ambiguities are not limited to the NGO's themselves but have since the beginning characterized international development aid and as a matter of fact right from the days of colonialism also the relation between the Northern colonizers and territories being colonized. It can for instance be found in Rudyard Kipling's poem 'White Man's Burden' (see the first three verses below) published in 1899 in relation to the American colonization of the Philippines, and especially in diverse interpretations of the text in the debate that followed it.

> *Take up the White Man's burden, Send forth the best ye breed*
> *Go bind your sons to exile, to serve your captives' need;*
> *To wait in heavy harness, On fluttered folk and wild--*
> *Your new-caught, sullen peoples, Half-devil and half-child.*
>
> *Take up the White Man's burden, In patience to abide,*
> *To veil the threat of terror And check the show of pride;*
> *By open speech and simple, An hundred times made plain*
> *To seek another's profit, And work another's gain.*
>
> *Take up the White Man's burden, The savage wars of peace--*
> *Fill full the mouth of Famine And bid the sickness cease;*
> *And when your goal is nearest The end for others sought,*
> *Watch sloth and heathen Folly Bring all your hopes to nought.*

To what extend should the colonial relation between the North and the South in addition to geopolitics and trade also accommodate a moral, humanitarian obligation to convey the white man's interpretation of 'civilization', democracy, societal norms and cultural values?
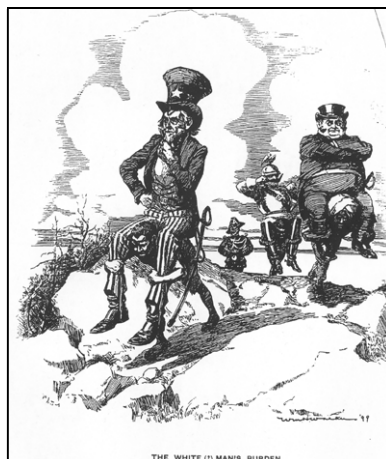

"The White (?) Man's Burden", Life Magazine 1899

These question became even more relevant and controversial in the post-colonial era and during the

bipolarity of the cold war where development aid was used also as an instrument to influence the new states – not only their economic development and foreign policy but also their internal affairs, both in a political and cultural sense. With the fall of communism and a considerable economic growth in a number of third world countries, the conditions for international development aid have taken yet another turn. It applies both to the whole political-economic environment of aid, to the donor-recipient constellation and to the goals and means of providing aid to promote a broad diversity of changes in the recipient countries.

> The paper is primarily dealing with long-term economic and social development and does not cover the different forms of relief related to emergencies, a field in which a number of the larger NGOs are very active. In addition, the focus of the paper will be their publicly financed activities and to a lesser extend their fundraising from non-institutional donors.

On this backdrop it's the main focus of this paper to take a closer look at how these changes are influencing the environment in which aid oriented NGO's operate and how they try to adapt to new challenges. Both in terms of their own self-image as a truly global, rather than a northern 'white men's club', and with regard to the way they operate in the recipient countries vis a vis governments and civil society. As a lead in to this main theme of the paper, the following sections will briefly deal with a few background issues. What is 'development aid' and why is it provided? What are the main trends in the latest decades' changes in the world of economic growth and other conditions determining the role of development aid?

## 2. International aid and development.

Basically, official development aid is, as illustrated in figure 1, a transfer of resources from rich citizens in the Northern Hemisphere via their governments directly, or through multilateral institutions, to governments in poor countries and further to their citizens. This very simplified structure is preconditioned by a fundamental disparity, concerning not only inequality in economic wealth and structural power, but to some degree also when it comes to roles, norms and attitudes, inherited from the 'White Man's burden' syndrome of the colonial era.

Figure 1: A simple depiction of the basic aid system[2]
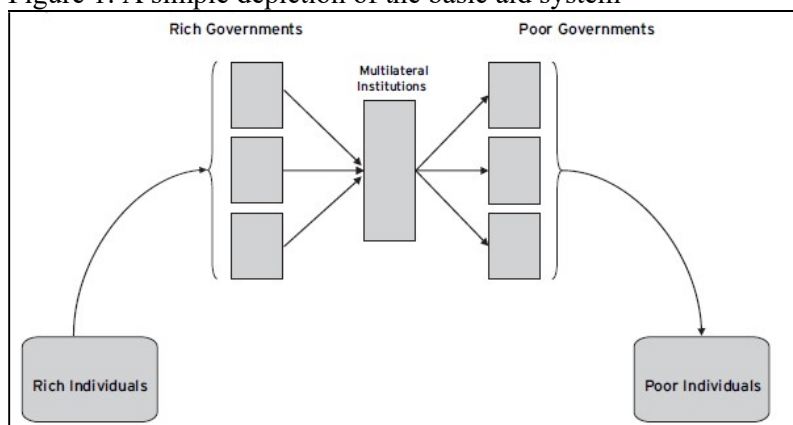


Adding to this basic structure, aid can be characterised by the following features:
- The resources being transferred can be of a variety of physical goods (for instance machinery, medicine or food), money (grants or loans) or immaterial services as consultancy advice and assistance.
- Unlike commercial trade, aid is usually not provided on the condition of direct return benefits. It thus contains – to a varying and often disputed degree - normative elements of philanthropy, as signalled by the terminology of the transferral action, 'aid'.

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[2] Homi Kharas: Trends and Issues in Development Aid. Wolfersohn Center for Development, The Brookings Institution, 2007,

Issues like for instance the grant element in loans and vested trade-interests in aid provision gives the aid concept an ambiguity, which can be found in much of the debate on aid, both between donors themselves and between them and the recipients.

The same applies for the first part of the term, 'development aid', i.e. <u>development</u>, which is even more complex than the second. In its most simple form 'development' is usually understood and defined by economic growth measured as an increase in GDP, often related to the size of the population, 'GDP per capita'. Without going further into the debate on development economics, it should be mentioned that this very rough measurement does not take into account a large number of parameters relevant for describing development in a broader, socio-economic sense. For instance, how evenly the fruits of economic growth are distributed both geographically and amongst different social and ethnic groups. Also issues like transport infrastructure, a healthy business climate, a well-functioning public sector, the degree of corruption, the matureness of the political system and the broader civil society should be encompassed to define and measure development.

This whole area has been a battleground amongst development theorists for decades. The 'structural functionalists' of the 1960ies, with the American political scientist Gabriel Almond as one of their leading figures, gave birth to a new understanding of the role of societal institutions beyond their mere formal character, which was an important step away from (some of) the previous ethnocentrism of both academic studies and development work. Based on main parameters such as 'structural differentiation', 'cultural secularization' and 'subsystem autonomy' countries could, it was argued by Almond[3], be ranked on a developmental ladder leading from primitive, tribal societies to modern Western like democracies.

Structural functionalism had a considerable influence both in academia and amongst people involved in in the field of development. At the same time, it came under severe criticism[4] among other things for precisely its mechanistic ethnocentrism, placing Western democracies as the undisputed ideal template and goal for all the societies in the "underdeveloped world". The term is here used consciously because its use and misuse was much more than just a normative question of terminology, which replaced the word '<u>under</u>developed' by the more evolutionary term 'developing'. The title of the book "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa"[5] by the Guyanese historian Walter Rodney, turning the understanding of the relations between the old and new world upside down, can be seen as a symbol of a very diverse group of scholars, who from opposite positions and under different labels drew attention to the structural relation between the old and the new world.

Some of them saw both colonialism and the post Second World War international system as instrumental in establishing conditions for modernization of societies in the Third World. A typical example is Lucian W. Pye[6], who pointed at three stages of development in the dissemination of world culture and the system of nation-states: a) Influencing the traditional authorities in the direction of international (i.e. Western) standards, b) Colonial administration and foreign rule, c) Indirect assistance and foreign aid. According to Pye these stages:

> "… represents the progressively deeper involvement of representatives of the international system in the domestic modernization process in traditional societies. Such involvement progressed from concern with the formal, surface qualities of the nation-state to an appreciation of more fundamental political dynamics underlying the structure of the state."

It is interesting to note, that Pye here regards the post-colonial era not as a break with Western intervention, but rather as a "progressively deeper involvement" with foreign aid as one of the ingredients. That is precisely what another group of development theorists argued, however from a different and

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[3] Gabriel Almond and G.Bingham.Powell: Comparative Politics, A Developmental Approach, Boston 1966.

[4] For an overview of Almond's work and the critique it met, see Stanley Rothman: "Functionalism and its Critics". Political Science Reviewer, Fall 1971.

[5] Walter Rodney: How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, Bogle-L'Overture Publications, London 1972

[6] Lucian W. Pye: Aspects of Development. Boston 1966.

very critical position[7]. Not only did they oppose the whole idea of 'development' as progressive evolutionary change process leading towards the template of the superior and more advanced societal formation of the Western societies. They also regarded the political economy of the 'center-periphery' structure as a continuation of the dependency of colonial intervention being detrimental both to political and economic independence as well as to the genuine development of the societies of the Third World. This critical position in respect of the structural inequality between the rich and poor countries also pertained their view on international development aid seen as merely an instrument among others used by the donor countries to influence the foreign policy and internal affairs of the recipient countries.

A parallel understanding of development aid as an instrument of foreign policy was actually found during the Cold War among many political scientists in the field of international politics[8], although usually seen from quite the opposite and less normatively critical angle. In their study of aid policy and in their role as advisers for governments they focused on the relevance of aid and its effectiveness as part of the weaponry in the arsenal of states engaged in power politics. How could aid be used to win over non-aligned states to the one or the other side of the bipolar international system? Was aid instrumental in modernizing underdeveloped societies? Would it result in stable and robust governmental systems, and was it realistic to expect prosperity leading to less conflict, because developed countries could be supposed to be less warlike?

Despite their mutual differences, the above-mentioned approaches to the study of international aid were not very far from each other when it came to explaining why governments in the period of the Cold War engaged in providing development aid. The rationale behind can be summarised in two main categories:

- Security policy: Influencing the governments of recipient countries to adhere to the donor's foreign policy interests, both in a longer, geopolitical perspective and with a short-term goal of aligning the recipient government in specific situations, for instance casting a vote in the UN. This category includes also the idea that promoting economic growth and broader development in the recipient country can promote stable (democratic) regimes inclined to conduct a peaceful foreign policy.
- Commercial interests covering a wide range of purposes including long term associating the recipient country to the  donor's economic sphere of interest, export promotion, access to local markets and raw materials.

It is interesting to note, that very few scholars, if any, during the time of the Cold War gave much room for altruistic, humanitarian motives in donor policies, except for communicative purposes in securing popular support among their own electorates. Especially the so-called 'realist school' of political scientists was firmly convinced that governments always act (and should act) in narrow self-interest and that also their policy on international aid should be carried out with that purpose.

It should however be mentioned that this rather cynical position has not been shared by all. There have been people engaged in practical aid and development work and in academic research, who over the years have argued for a broader and more humanitarian oriented understanding of international aid. Thus Carol Lancaster, combining these two backgrounds, argues[9] that more than half a century of continuous provision of aid, promoted both within the UN system and by national and international NGO's has gradually established a generally accepted norm in the international system that aid is also provided on a more altruistic and humanitarian reasoning.

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[7] As examples could be mentioned: Samir Amin: L'Acumilation à l'échelle mondiale, Editions Anthrpos, Paris 1970. Arghiri Emmanuel: Unequal Exchange: A Study in the Imperialism of Trade. New York & London: Monthly Review Press, 1972. Arturo Escobar: Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World. Princeton University Press, 1995.

[8] Among others: Hans J. Morgenthau: "A Political Theory of Foreign Aid", The American Political Science Review, Vol 56, no. 2 1962. George Liska: The New Statecraft. Foreign Aid in American Foreign Policy. Chicago 1960. Joan M. Nelson: Aid, Influence and Foreign Policy. N.Y 1968.

[9] Carol Lancaster: Foreign Aid. Diplomacy, Development, Domestic Politics (University of Chicago Press. 2007.

Summing up, although such ethical and humane motifs can certainly be found in the literature on international development aid, it is security policy and commercial interests which are the reasons most often given as explanation to the aid policies of the donor countries. Adding to that it is interesting to note, that this counts both for people taking a critical position to aid and those supporting it. It is precisely in this intersection, that the aid oriented NGOs are operating. Their historical background and ethos are clearly humanitarian oriented, so is their popular support and private fundraising. At the same time, most of them are partly financed through public funds, which make their actual independence from official aid policy and non-governmental position a controversial issue. That is just one of the challenges NGOs are meeting in the changing world in which they operate.

### 3. A changing global environment.
In the mid-20th century, official development aid (ODA) was provided in a world with a rather clear divide between the wealthy donors in North America and Europe and the poor recipient territories on the Southern Hemisphere. Since then much has changed in the economic environment of aid policy.

First of all the club of rich countries has, measured by GDP, now been enlarged by a number of countries in Asia, especially China and India. Whereas Latin America and Africa are falling behind. China's present position as the world's second biggest economy has influenced its role in world politics, international trade and in the area of aid as a new player outside the OECD, DAC group. Estimates by OECD and the World Bank suggest that the non-OECD economies (including China and India) by 2030 will account for two-thirds of global GDP compared to only one-third in 1990 and that they by 2025 will have a higher share of global exports than the developed countries[10].

Figure 2. Country income groups according to 2010 gross national income (GNI) pr. capita.[11]
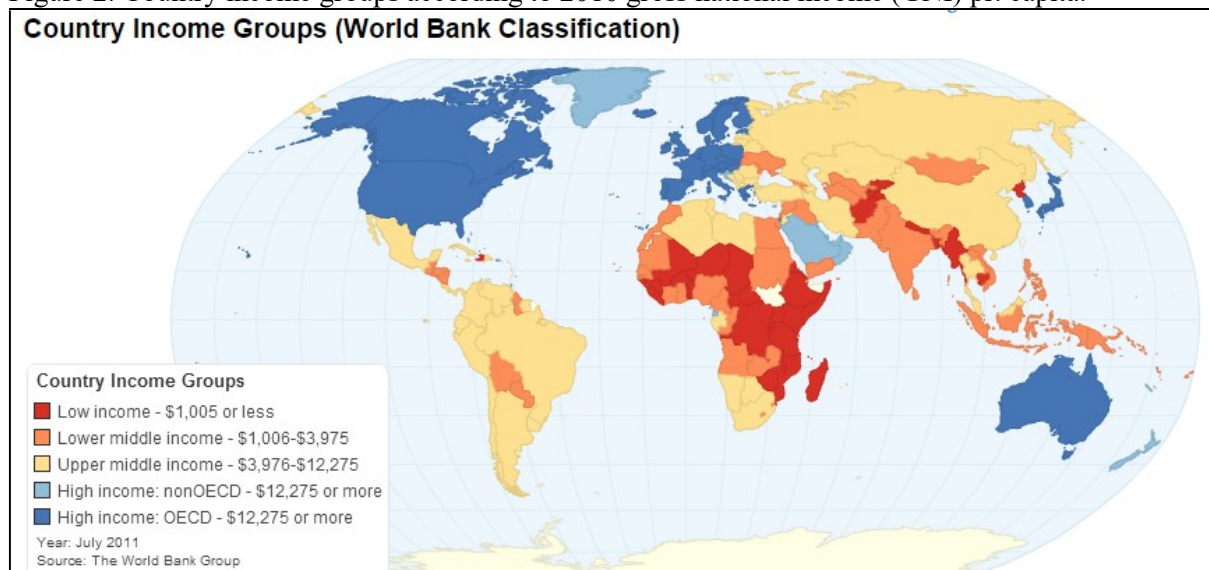


The total production or income in a country is however, an insufficient measurement of societal development and the living conditions of its citizens. Including the size of the population in the equation, one gets a more diversified picture of the distribution of global wealth. In figure 2 countries are listed in five groups according to gross national income (GNI) pr. capita with the OECD countries as the rich club, Africa and South-East Asia as poor areas and a number of countries and regions in-between.

We can then add a more dynamic facet to the picture by looking at the economic growth rate as shown in figure 3, where countries are grouped in 5 categories comparable, but slightly different, to those in figure 2.

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[10] Romilly Greenhill and Annalisa Prizzon: Who foots the bill after 2015? What new trends in development finance mean for the post-MDGs. Overseas Development Institute (ODI) working paper 360, p.4
[11] The World Bank Group/ChartsBin.com: http://chartsbin.com/view/2438 accessed Marts 2015.

As seen in the graph, the high-income countries have in the period since 2000 (also before the financial crisis) had the lowest economic growth compared to all other categories, even surpassed by low-income and least developed countries. Provided that this trend continues, it could be optimistically interpreted as if global economic inequality will gradually diminish and maybe even disappear in the longer run.

Figure 3: Growth of per capita GDP by level of development, 2000-2015[12]
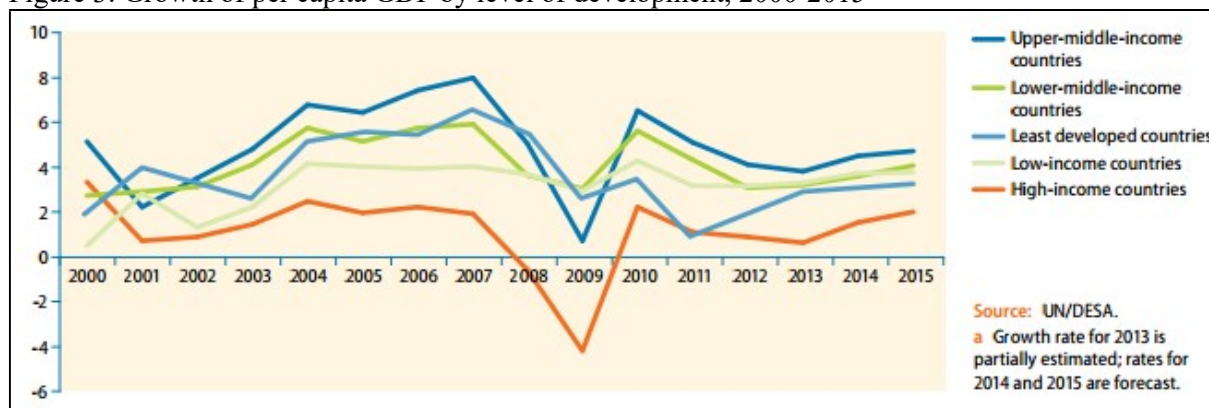


However, a closer look at changes in levels of inequality during the latest decades' economic developments reveals that economic growth does not automatically lead to declining inequality, neither between different countries nor internally amongst their citizens.  A UNDP study states, that

> "… Over the last two decades, income inequality has been growing on average within and across countries. As a result, a significant majority of the world's population lives in societies that are more unequal today than 20 years ago. Remarkably, in many parts of the world, income gaps have deepened – and with them, the gulf in quality of life between the rich and poor – despite the immense wealth created though impressive growth performance"[13].

The UNDP report reject the "Kuznets hypothesis", which argue that economic development, driven by pure market forces, in the beginning inevitably results in an increasing inequality, which by the same forces of the market will decrease again as a consequence of development. Instead, the report points at a much more complex interrelation between factors and relations hindering and fostering development and in-/equality. Both economic development and the level of inequality are strongly influenced by the structural character of international trade and financial globalisation processes. Inequality is not a one-dimensional economic phenomenon, but relates to a complex combination of broader societal areas: Health, nutrition, climate change, education, gender, governance and cultural norms, ethnicity and religion. Neither should inequality be seen only as a purely moral, human rights issue. The UNDP report argues that the rising income inequality is harmful to the development itself, both in narrow economic sense and in a broader societal perspective. Overall, the necessary comprehensive effort to reduce inequality places great demands on governments of developing countries and at the same time leaves little operative political space. The report points at three potential areas of government engagement: "a reframing of inequality-justifying narratives, the constructive engagement of the business community and – perhaps most important – the strengthening of venues for civic engagement".[14]

Related to these economic changes in the global environment one can mention a few other developments in the political-economic global system influencing aid policies. The dissolution of the bi-polar international political system after the end of the Cold War reduced some of the competitive use of aid to win over non-aligned states to the one or the other side. On the other hand a new element of instability has emerged with the so-called "war on terror" fought in regions of the developing world of which several have economic and/or strategic importance for global actors. Many of the countries

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[12] World Economic Situation and Prospects 2014, United Nations, New York 2014, page 5
[13] Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries. UNDP, New York 2013, p. 1
[14] Humanity Divided, op.cit. p. 4

involved are "fragile states" with internal conflicts, unrests and unstable regimes. This has again actualized aid as an instrument for achieving stability, combining direct support for the existing government and efforts to promote long-term development seen as instrumental to stabilize existing regimes or promote new ones.

This new global system has also seen the emergence of a new group of donors, the so-called BRICS-S countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and South Korea). Especially the entrance of China as new world power is important. It has, besides influencing the world economy in general, been followed by a significant growth in China's foreign aid and government-sponsored investment activities (FAGIA) in all developing regions of the world. A RAND report estimates that the total Chinese engagement, covering a wide range of programs " … is very large - many times larger than the separate grant-aid development assistance programs conducted by the United States, Europe, Japan, and other donor countries"[15]. It should here be mentioned, that state controlled Chinese FAGIA is covering a much broader area than the official development aid (ODA) of the OECD countries, also encompassing what would otherwise be categorized as direct foreign investment (DFI) by private sector corporations. Of that very reason, one can question the genuine development aid element in the Chinese engagement. Rather it is probably to a large extent motivated by China's rising demand for raw materials, energy and agricultural products, which is the main driver behind China's growing influence both globally and internally in the developing countries. Also because the Chinese involvement comes "without strings attached" concerning human rights, good governance, land rights etc., which are – at least officially – included in the aid policies of most OECD countries.

Finally it should be mentioned, that economic growth in the modernized centres and improved public funding of many developing countries, the rising number og donors and the proliferation of both national and international donor agencies, has improved the recipient countries' bargaining position. This has made the recipient governments less inclined to accept conditions attached to aid. Also one can find governing elites becoming more assertive and critical to the influence following foreign aid being on guard to the activities of aid agencies challenging national sovereignty.

All in all a new economic and political environment represents a challenge to aid policy. This applies both to the channels through which aid is provided and the very complex, cross-sectoral contexts that must be addressed to secure comprehensive and sustainable (her understood in a wider societal sense) long-term impact.

**4. Redirecting development aid and the role of states and civil society.**
In the more than fifty years of international development aid, much attention has been directed on a number of core issues. Besides the size of the total funding, also questions such as what kind of transfers can be counted as aid, which countries should be prioritised, binding clauses on the use of aid, the division between bilateral and multilateral aid, the loan component compared to grants, how debt relief should be administered and whether it should be counted as genuine aid. These issues will only be touched very briefly to the extent that they relate to this paper's primary focus on the role of NGOs in development assistance.

As a starting point, it is important to get the proportions right. All international resources transferred to developing countries are, as shown in figure 4 (with data from 2011), only a third of the net domestic government expenditures of those countries. Further, the role of official development aid (ODA of DAC/OECD) has over the years declined in quantitative terms and counts only for US$ 148.7 billion, or 7% of the total US$ 2100 billion transfer between rich and poor countries. If we to the DAC-ODA contribution add flows coming from other donors ('Other official flows', 'Private development assistance', 'Development finance institutions' and 'Non-DAC development cooperation') we reach US$ 327.7 billion (or 16%). The resources provided by private organisations, US$ 45.3 billion, is only 2% of the total international flow. These aid-related resources can be compared to military expenditures, foreign direct investment (FDI) and remittances from 'the diaspora', which taken together counts for 59%.

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[15] Charles Wolf, Xiao Wang, Eric Warner: China's Foreign Aid and Government-Sponsored Investment Activities. Scale, content, destinations and implications. RAND Corporation 2013, p. xiii.

Figure 4: Domestic resources and international resource flows 2011. [16]
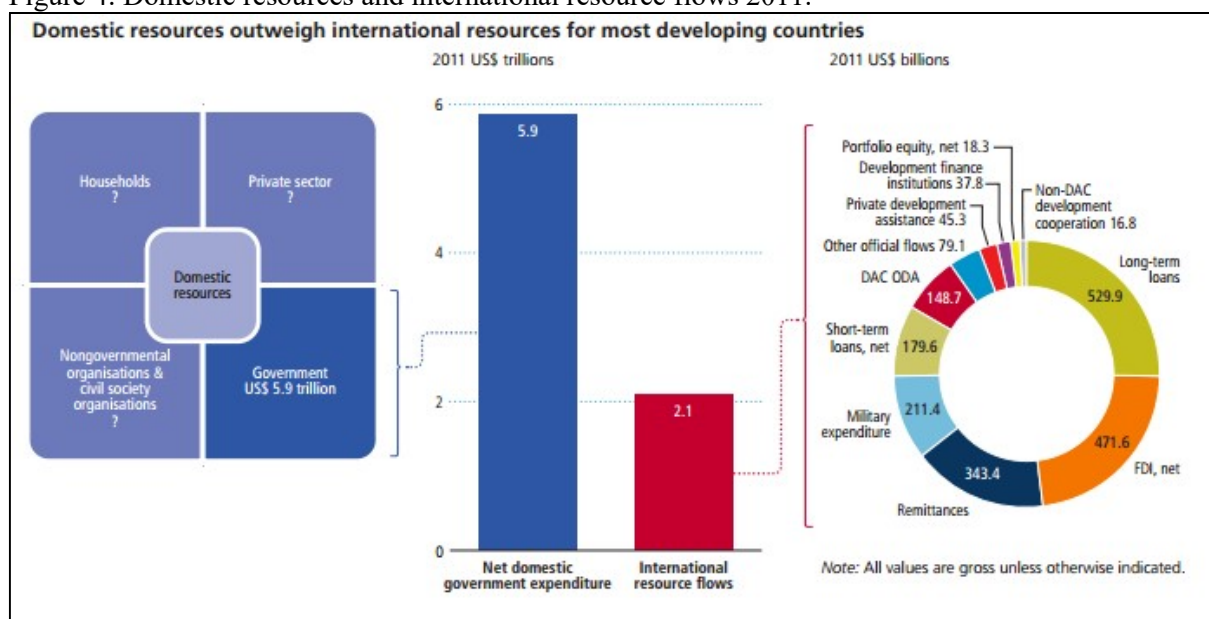


Further, it is worth noting that, the above mentioned 7% of total transfers provided through ODA, which is often considered having the 'real' aid element, can be broken down in a number of the sub-categories. Here the so-called 'Country Programmable Aid' (CPA) used directly in development programs, so to speak 'in the field', has since 2004 only counted for little more than half the ODA[17]. The rest consists of depth relief, humanitarian aid, in-donor costs, core funding of NGOs and 'unallocated and other non-CPA'.

A second issue relates to the concerns whether and how the UN 'Millennium Development Goals (MDG) will be reached, both concerning the volume of international aid and its effect. Most donor countries lack behind the old 1970 0.7% BNI goal for ODA, and a considerable proportion of funds categorized as development aid assistance is used for non-aid purposes to fund activities related to for instance 'the war on terror', other engagements in international conflicts and the funding of relief to a still growing number of refugees.

With the high priority given to reduce extreme poverty and hunger, it might also be a problem, that some of the aid funding, probably to promote trade interests, is re-directed toward the relatively better-off countries. According to an OECD report[18], CPA to the less developed countries is expected to decrease leaving two-thirds of the LDCs with less aid in 2017 than in 2014, whereas aid to middle-income countries will remain relatively stable. What these figures do not reveal is the fact that due to significant inequality and the marginalized position of large groups of citizens in most – also the middle-income - developing countries, much of the aid provided often has very limited effect on the living conditions of the poorest.

Adding to this rather pessimistic listing of the some of the problems related to international aid as a mean of promoting a positive development of third world societies with improved living conditions for the poorest, one should also mention the concerns about the effectiveness of aid in itself. Aid has always been exposed to criticism both in academia, amongst the practitioners of the aid business and by

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[16] Investments to End Poverty. Real money, real choices, real lives. Development Initiatives 2013, p. 34
[17] 2014 Global Outlook on Aid. Results of the 2014 DAC Survey on Donors' Forward Spending Plans and Prospects for Improving Aid Predictability. OECD 2014. p. 13
[18] 2014 Global Outlook on Aid. OECD, op.cit. p. 19-20

politicians. With the "Paris declaration on aid effectiveness" (2005) some of those concerns came on the official agenda. Although there is plenty of room for skepticism to the 'partnership commitments' aimed at improving effectiveness and the indicators chosen to measure progress, the Paris declaration and the follow-up initiatives have somehow legitimized broader concerns on the role of development aid and the way it is provided and used.

One of the problems with the present set-up of international aid often mentioned is the growing complexity of the aid business, as described by Deutscher and Fyson[19]:

> "The institutional complexity of the global governance of aid presents real difficulties, given that more than 280 bilateral donor agencies, 242 multinational programs, 24 development banks, and about 40 United Nations agencies are working in the development business. The increasing number of private foundations and the existence of so many nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) add to the complexity. The proliferation of donor activities – including an estimated 340.000 development projects around the world – leads us to question current ways of managing the aid business".

Figure 5: Illustrating some of the complexity of the international aid structure[20]
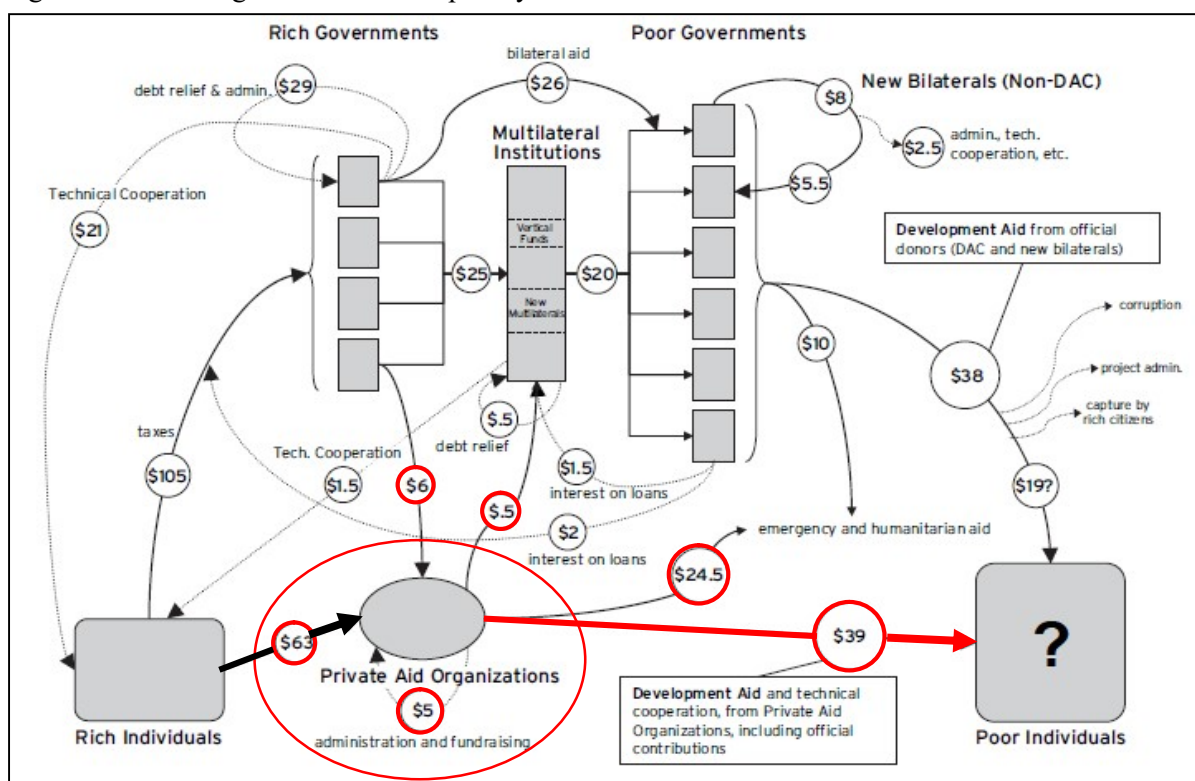


Note: The basic structure here is the same as in figure 1. Aid flows (data from 2005) in US$ billions.
        Red graphics added by the author.

Some of this complexity illustrated in figure 5 and the absence of proper coordination has serious implications at the receiving country level. Receiving and administrating the many aid relations and the related transaction costs becomes a burden in itself, as illustrated in an OECD report concerning the ongoing work of simplifying and coordinating donor-recipient relations. In 2005, 10453 donor visits/missions were conducted to 34 countries, an average of 307 missions per country per year[21]. From at survey carried out in Tanzania, DAC reported in 2006 that 700 projects were managed by 56 paral-

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[19] Eckhard Deutscher and Sara Fyson: "Improving the Effectiveness of Aid". Finance & Development (IMF), September 2008, vol. 45, no. 3 p.2.
[20] Homi Kharas: Trends and Issues in Development Aid. Op.cit. page 16.
[21] Aid Effectiveness: 2006 Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration. OECD Journal on Development: Vol. 8, no. 2, p. 55.

lel implementation units and that half of all technical assistance provided to the country was not coordinated with the Tanzanian government[22]. Adding to this complexity has been the significant growth and huge variety of NGOs.

Besides the need to reduce transaction costs and tackle lack of coordination and bureaucratic complexity this relates to the more fundamental division of roles in the donor-recipient relation. Here the overall picture seems to be a bit confusing and contradictory.

One the one hand, there has over the last decades been a clear trend of bypassing the government institutions of recipient states by direct funding of Southern civil society organisations (CSOs). A vibrant civil society is by many seen a precondition for a broader societal development and stable political systems. Channelling development aid, both in form of funding and advocacy, directly to local civil society organisations seems to be a short cut to promote development. Some, as for instance Clayton et al.[23], explain this development also as part of a wider neoliberal agenda and New Public Management policy to promote structural adjustment programs prioritising a strong private sector and the market at the expense of the states. According to Greenhill and Prizzon[24] there is also a growing pressure on the traditional (Western) donors to justify aid-giving to electorates by more clearly linking aid to commercial and foreign policy objectives. In addition, they point at an apparent greater risk aversion in development spending in particular with regard to general budget support of recipient governments. Both these trends correspond with the still more important role of the Northern NGOs, not only in respect of fundraising but also as an alternative pipeline for service provision to the civil society of developing countries bypassing their governments.

On the other hand, this trend has been criticised for undermining both the possibilities of establishing a coherent development policy of Southern states and the accountability of their governments. As stated by Deutscher and Fyson:

> "Decades of development assistance have shown … that if countries are to become less dependent on aid, they must be able to determine their own priorities and rely on their own systems to deliver that aid. Moreover, asymmetries in the aid relationship, whereby donors respond to their own constituencies rather than to citizens' needs in developing countries, have distorted the accountability of domestic institutions in recipient countries"[25]

If the recipient governments are given more responsibility and control over the incoming flow of funds for development purposes, it will not only diminish some of the complexity by reducing the number of actors. It will also promote the efforts to establish a closer relationship between different programs and recipient countries' own development strategies. Moreover, it will make it easier to establish and develop national systems for procurement and consistent and coherent management and reporting systems. Several of the Paris Declaration's recommendations point in that direction. Also within the World Bank system, notorious for its market-based development policy, one can from time to time find arguments for giving the state a central role in the development of the countries of the third world. Back in 1997, the World Development Report[26] dedicated a chapter ("Refocusing on the effectiveness of the state") to argue for the necessity of state involvement in development policies and their execution. Seventeen years later, Harmann and Williams with reference to the World Bank, point at a number of examples showing "... the centrality of the state not just in directing specific investment spending or intervening in specific markets, but more generally leading the process of development through

[22] IDA: Aid Architecture: An Overview of the Main Trends in Official Development Assistance Flows. International Development Association (IDA) 2007, p. 23.

[23] Andrew Clayton et al. Civil Society Organiszations and Service Provision. Civil Society and Social Movements. Programme Paper No 2, 2000, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. p. 3

[24] Rommily Greenhill and Annalisa Prizzon: Who foots the bill after 2015? What new trends in development finance mean for the post-MDGs. Working Paper 360, Overseas Development Institute 2012.

[25] Deutscher and Fyson, op.cit. p1

[26] World Bank: World Development Report 1997: The State in a Changing World

the formulation and implementation of a development strategy"[27]. Lessons learned from some of the emerging middle-income countries in South East Asian, and experiences with weak governments in other parts of the world being unable to manage development have apparently left its mark.

The difficult and controversial link – or balance - between civil society and state concerning societal and democratic development is discussed by Francis Fukuyama in a recent article.

> "In the past, there has been heavy emphasis on levelling the playing field on authoritan countries through support for civil society organizations, and on supporting the initial transition away from dictatorship.
> Creating a viable democracy, however, requires two fundamental stages which the initial mobilization against tyrant gets institutionalized and converted into durable practices. The first is the organization of social movements into political parties that can contest elections. Civil society organizations usually focus on narrow issues, and are not set up to mobilize voters – this is the unique domain of political parties. The failure to build political parties explains why more liberal forces have frequently failed at the ballot box in transitional countries from Rusia to Ukraine to Egypt.
> The second required stage, however, concerns state-building and stats capacity. Once a democratic government is in power, it must actually govern – that is, it must exercise legitimate authority and provide basic services to the population. The democracy-promotion community has paid much less attention to the problems of democracy governance than it has to the initial mobilization and the transition. Without the ability to govern well, however, new democracies will disappoint the expectations of their followers and deligitimate themselves" [28].

International development NGOs – providing service delivery from Northern states to Southern civil society – are working precisely in the middle of this intersection between state and society. They have to find a (new) role accommodating four separate and very different stakeholders: their popular base in the civil society of the Northern societies, the developed states providing a considerable part of their funding, their customary beneficiaries of the Southern civil society and the state agencies in the developing countries where they are active.

**5. The changing role of NGOs in the twilight zone between state, civil society and market.**
The developments described in the previous sections confronts the NGOs of donor countries with serious challenges. They were established in the post-war era as national, value based humanitarian organisation with a broad variety of objectives/missions, often quite far away from the area of economic and social development of the Third World[29]. Some aiming at relief work in war-torn Europe, others engaged in environmental issues, human rights, health, women's rights and many other topics. Gradually a number of these organisations turned their engagement to the Southern hemisphere and broadened their scope to encompass also developmental issues of a general societal kind.

Originally established in a single, Northern country, they have over the years expanded to become international organisations, which bring together national member organisations in diverse blends of federal/con-federal structures. The largest of them, organisations like WorldVision, Save the Children, Medécins Sans Frontères, Oxfam, CARE and ActionAid, have a yearly turnover at the US$ billion level, a widely spread network of local offices in developing countries with many thousands employees. These are very big and very complex transnational organisations with considerable influence both on an international level and in the national members' home base.

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[27] Sophie Harmann and David Williams: "International development in transition". International Affairs 90:4, 2014, pp. 925-941.

[28] Francis Fukuyama: "Why Is Democracy Performing So Poor?". Journal of Democracy, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2015.p.19

[29]  A more thorough description of the development of international NGOs can be found in Thomas Davies: NGOs – a New History of Transnational Civil Society. Hurst & Co., London 2013, pp. 127-173.

The more important position of NGOs can be seen not only in the growth over the last decades in the number of NGOs operating across boarders in the humanitarian and aid field, by some estimated to be as high as 18,000[30]. Also the public funds (ODA) channelled through NGOs have been raising. According to an OECD/DAC report, in 2009 DAC members distributed US$15.5 billion to and through NGOs and two-fifths of DAC members allocated more than 20% of their bilateral funding to or through NGOs[31]. It should be mentioned, however, that its rather difficult to obtain consistent and reliable data on ODA disbursements to NGOs due to a complex and differently interpreted OECD reporting system [32].

Explaining this impressive development in the post-Cold War era Thomas Davies[33] points at the influence of neoliberal development policies emphasising the role of the commercial market and a decreasing role for governments as direct service providers. In addition, he mentions the substantial role for NGOs in some developing countries, which may have had the impact of weakening already fragile state institutions. At the same time Davies draw attention to a certain 'resilience of the state' (here meaning the <u>Northern</u> states) and an increasing capacity to control NGOs by making them dependent on government funding. They are met by growing concerns among DAC members regarding the lack of documented effectiveness and high transactions costs of dealing with many small organisations. Clayton et al. mention a number of common deficiencies with the service provided by the NGO/CSO sector including limited coverage; variable quality; amateurish approach; high staff turnover and poor sustainability[34]. Adding to that they also draw attention to the apparent lack of evidence in a number of meta-studies to support that international NGOs are more cost effective than state service providers and better at reaching marginalised groups of Southern societies. Catherine Agg support this observation in her report. [35]

Consequently, NGOs are met by rising demands, not only to align more their strategy and policy with those of the donor states' agencies, but also to improve (i.e. to professionalise) their operations and methods to document the effect and efficiency of their work. How difficult it is to strike a balance between Civil Society Organisations (CSO) autonomy and donor-governmental influence can be seen in an OECD/DAC report, giving a rather ambiguous and double-tongued advice to both parties:

> "Donors need to find a balance between respecting CSO autonomy and steering CSOs in a direction that helps meet donors' development co-operation objectives. … Too much steering by donors could compromise the freedom of CSOs to challenge official policies, act as a watchdog or demand accountability. … DAC members, in providing support to CSOs to implement an aid program, nevertheless expect CSO intermediaries to align with their priorities".[36]

One of the consequences of the close cooperation with donor agencies has been a gradual transformation of NGOs concerning both their identity, their approach and organisational base. They have increasingly become institutionalised in their publicly funded work with service delivery and advocacy. Over the years some of them have – to different degrees - scaled down, or modified their original role and image becoming less mobilising 'activist-organisations' softening their privious critical position towards the policies of official institutions and commercial companies. In their (NGO-) critical analysis of the relations between Northern NGOs and indigenous civil society, membership-based, organisations (MBOs) Banks, Hume and Edwards describe the two types of organisations by giving them a number of attributes (admittedly drawn to extremes) as shown in table 1[37].

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[30] Homi Kharas, op.cit. p. 14
[31] OECD. How DAC members work with civil society organisations. An overview 2011, p.7.
[32] Cathrine Agg: "Trends in Government Support for Non-Governmental Organizations. Is the "Golden age" of the NGO Behind Us? Civil Society and Social Movements. Programme Paper No 23, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development 2006, pp. 16-23.
[33] Davies, op.cit. pp. 164- 168
[34] Clayton et al. op.cit p. 7.
[35] Cathrine Agg: Op.cit. pp. 4-5
[36] OECD: How DAC members work with civil society organisations. An overview 2011, p. 39
[37] Nicola Banks, David Hume and Michael Edwards: "NGOs, State and Donors Revisited: Still Too Close for Comfort?" World Development, Vol. 66, 2015. pp. 709.

Actually, some of the Northern NGOs engaged in development work have emerged from a MBO-like background and still carry traits of it. Others, have never been membership-based, but were right from their origins characterised by (most/some of) the attributes in the right column of the table. The main argument of Banks et al is that the gap between the Northern NGOs and the Southern MBOs represents a serious barrier to progress. To tackle the fundamental causes of poverty NGOs will have to reorient their approach "… toward a stronger, more inter-connected civil society in which NGOs play a key bridging role between MBOs, local and national governments and transnational".[38]

Table 1. Contrasting orientations and attributes of MBOs and NGOs

|  | **Membership-based organisations** | **Non-governmental organisations** |
|---|---|---|
| Relationship with the State | Oppositional | Accommodating |
| Constituents | Members | Staff |
| Accountable to | Members | Donors |
| Program design | Demand-side approach | Supply-side approach |
| Community participation | Political | Non-political |
| Strategy | Development as leverage | Development as service delivery |
| Developmental ideology | Development as social, political and economic change | Project-based and target-oriented 'Development' |
| Tackling/addressing | Root causes of poverty | 'Symptoms' of poverty |

While lowering their voice in their Northern home base, the international NGOs have however to a lesser extend downgraded their critical and activist watchdog role in the Southern countries where they operate. Here NGOs often take a critical position towards local regimes – also in worldwide campaigns - on issues like human rights, corruption and unaccountable public administration. Likewise, their advocacy activity is frequently directed towards helping marginalised minorities against negligence from authorities, farming communities against land grabbing and other areas of governmental malpractices.

Considering the growing economic strength and communicative influence of many international NGOs and their close relations to the Northern governments, it is explicable that activities of NGOs by some are associated with illegitimate intervention challenging the national sovereignty of the states of developing countries[39]. Consequently, international NGOs are increasingly faced with opposition and various forms of restrictions in some of the Southern countries where they operate, because they are seen as proxies for foreign governments circumventing official, state controlled channels. Also because local civil society organisations assisted by the foreign NGO 'human rights based' advocacy are often playing an oppositional role towards authorities of the developing states.[40]

Taken all together, the international NGOs working in the aid business have to adjust to a number of mutual conflicting demands from their very diverse stakeholders. The challenge is that it seems difficult to meet the requests from some without somehow offending the others. In the following section this serious dilemma will be discussed further by a few illustrating examples.

## 6. The Northern NGOs' response to the new world of development and aid.
NGOs working in the development field are quite aware of the need to address the above mentioned challenges and have during some years been working to find proper solutions. Because of different backgrounds and differing starting points there is quite many variations among the solutions although they are dealing with more or less the same themes. Therefore, the following discussion will only present a few simple standard models as an illustration of the prevailing considerations among NGOs without commenting on the individual NGOs.

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[38] Banks et al, p 715

[39] Vanessa Pupavac:"The politics of emergency and the demise of the development state: problems for humanitarian advocacy". Development in Practice. Vol. 16, numbers 3&4, June 2006, pp. 255-269.

[40] Civicus (World Alliance for Citizen Participation) State of Civil Society 2013. Creating an enabling environment.

The three models (A-C) presented in figure 6 should not be understood as mere organisational models. Rather they serve as frameworks for a number of interrelated issues of a broader scope related to three possible strategic directions asking the following three main questions: What are the international NGOs trying to obtain, and what should be considered, when aiming at:

- going from loosely connected con-federations toward integrated transnational corporations (from A to B)
- connecting better to Southern civil society (from A+B to C)
- securing continued legitimacy among stakeholders at the "home base"? ( A)

Figure 6: Three standard models for international NGOs
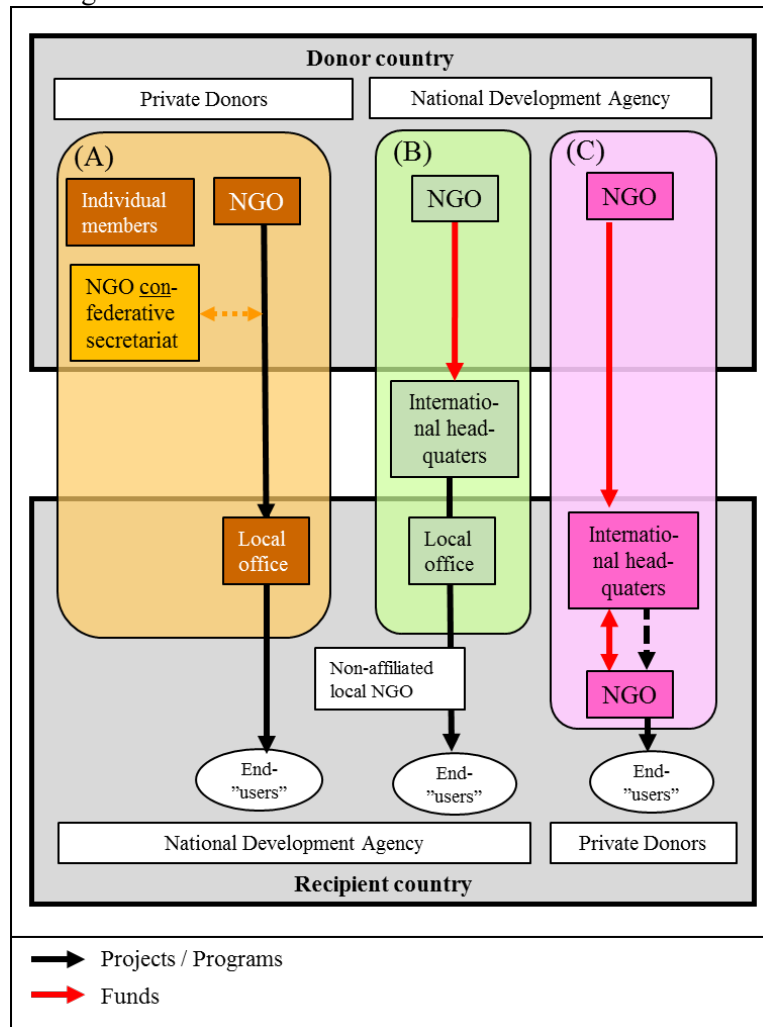


### 6.1. From loosely connected con-federations toward integrated transnational corporations.

'Small might be beautiful' – but 'bigger is better', seems to be the slogan directing corporate thinking and merger-& acquisitions policies in all businesses, also among NGOs in the development business. The first wave of expansion was, when some of the well-established, large NGOs in a donor country, often as part of a fundraising strategy, established new affiliates on "virgin land" in other Northern donor countries. Some of these new affiliates later became autonomous, national entities, which - together with hitherto independent NGOs - entered into the international umbrella associations of the present days. Under a common brand and served by a jointly managed secretariat they have become important players on the international aid scene in relation to both public opinion, multilateral organisations and through their national members also to governments of individual donor countries. Thanks to that, they have been able to handle an increasing share of the ODA through a wide spread network of local offices in recipient countries, controlled/owned by either the "founding father" organisation or a few of the other, larger members.

Although often dominated by the large and more resourceful "founding father", they are formally confederations of independent members with their own governing boards, their own staff and not seldom also with policies and administrative procedures (for instance program policy, finance- and HR-systems, quality control) more or less differing between each other. With the con-federal structure comes the inherent weakness of slow and inconsistent decision-making, on critical issues often based on the lowest common denominator to obtain consensus. Conflicting interests and unclear definitions of roles also lead to a prolonged and inconsistent implementation of decisions taken.

With the still fiercer competition in the market of funding, both institutional and non-institutional donors, and the raising demands from national and international donor agencies to reduce transaction costs and raise efficiency, the international NGOs have to professionalise their operations and management and improve methods to document and report the impact of their work. One way to meet these requirements is to transform the rather loose con-federative network of independent national members into more business-like, globally managed, federal organisations, as illustrated in figure 6 by moving in the direction from A to B. That can for instance include changing the international secretariat to become a corporate headquarter, loosening its ties with the dominant member and by giving it direct management responsibility for all activities in recipient countries, including all local offices. Consequently, it will to some extend reduce the role of national members to primarily fundraising, with the proceeds forwarded to corporate headquarters.

Besides the many good, rational reasons for going in that direction, it also raises a number of difficult and controversial issues:

- Transferring operational responsibility from a number of national member offices to a single corporate entity can certainly lead to efficiency gains and reduced complexity (and transaction costs) at the recipient end of the pipeline. It can however also result in loss of legitimacy and estrangement between donor and recipient, because the new transnational "corporation", although formally still being a non-governmental organisation, will lose some of the 'civil society' traits and image that characterized the former relation between smaller, national donors and local recipients.

- The change from a con-federative to a federative governance structure is often handled as if it primarily concerns a formal-legal amendment of the statutes with the primary aim to repair the experienced and visible deficiencies in the existing system[41]. Too little attention is given to existing and future power structures, both within the NGO and its surroundings and to different organisational cultures among the member organisations concerning both governance and management.

- Adding to that, changing governance is often taken as the first step of transformation before real agreement is reached on issues like future mission, changing relations with stakeholders and how future operations should be structured and managed.

*6.2. Connecting better to Southern civil society.*
The growing scepticism and even outright opposition from authorities towards foreign NGO organisations in recipient countries, is related to the image they - rightly or wrongly – have as extended arms of donor governments. In order to be accepted in the future as legitimate partners in relation to governments and the local CSO/NGO community in the Southern hemisphere the international NGOs will have to find new ways of operating (i.e. going from A+B to C in figure 6). Not only will they have to diminish the image of being a club of Northern, rich and white 'do-god'ers' and develop a new identity as global associations of peers. It will probably also be necessary to find a new and more integrative way of working with Southern civil society than the traditional service provision through local, decentralised offices.

A first step, and probably the easiest one, is to move the corporate headquarter from its original location in North America or Europa to the Southern hemisphere. That has been done, or is under consid-

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[41] Daneala Costa et al: Taking a Strategic Approach to Governance Reform in International Civil Society Organisations (ICSOs). Berlin Civil Society Center, 2012.

eration, by most international NGOs. A second strategy is to enlarge their membership by incorporating "Southern members" among CSOs of the developing countries, by giving them full membership in the international organisation or a temporary status as affiliates preparing for full membership. This approach to become "truly global" also encompasses the transfer of ownership of local offices including managing responsibility from the headquarters of the international NGO to the local members of Southern countries.

Considering the impressive economic growth in many developing countries and the emergence of a group of very wealthy citizens and successful businesses, that has followed it, fundraising in these countries has become a new opportunity in a still more competitive market.

Some of the larger NGOs have taken steps in this direction. However with varying degree of success, because there are a number of difficult issues to tackle:

- What kind of Southern organisations will fit to the role of becoming "peer-members" parallel to their Northern counterparts? Should it be existing Civil Society Organisations, for instance popular movements with a membership base engaged in more or less activist endeavours directed against authoritarian regimes? Considering that many developing countries lack truly independent civil society organisations with the necessary organisational strength, should - and can - an organisational base alternatively be developed from the local business communities, which are not seldom the very target of local CSO advocacy?

- Taken into account, that Southern candidates for membership are often mentioned as "peers", should it be a condition, that they are truly economically viable and self-supporting (financed through local fundraising) right from the beginning, or can an interim period with continued, corporate financial support from the international NGO be acceptable – and for how long? What about the revenues from successful local fundraising. Should they be used exclusively to finance local development programs or (as in the case with funds raised in Northern countries) be transferred to the global fundraising budget of the international NGO?

- Are the Northern NGOs in fact (out of political correctness or in hope of being accepted in Southern societies) re-defining what "aid" is all about by closing their eyes for the fundamental characteristics of the concept: the disparity between rich and poor and the structural difference between superior power and subordination, with different degrees of conflicting interests arising therefrom?

- Will the incorporation of Southern CSOs in huge transnational aid delivery conglomerates make them depart from their role as most needed mobilising grass root organisations acting (also) as watchdogs in relation to local authorities? Take for instance the following description from an ODI report, which could be interpreted as if the expansion of the Northern international NGOs in the Southern hemisphere is aiming more at NGOs of the right column of Nicola Banks' table (see page 14) as an extension of a global service delivery system  than supporting a growth of the membership-based civil society organisations:

    "… INGOs have also invested in building the capacity of local NGOs, which are now valuable <u>partners in implementing programmes</u>. In many countries, local NGOs are developing a reach and <u>capability for service delivery</u> in poor areas, in slums and among marginal communities …"[42] (Underlining by author)

Clayton et al. also see new opportunities for NGOs/CSOs in working partnership with Southern governments in service delivery. At the same time, they point to the inherent risk of institutionalise them as a part of a professional service delivery system:

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[42] Hormi Kharas and Andrew Rogerson: Horizon 2025. Creative destruction in the aid industry. Overseas Development Institute 2012 p. 11.

> ".. to what extent will the scaling-up of their involvement in delivering services detract CSOs from playing a more critical role in setting development priorities and policies and advocating on behalf of marginalized groups?[43]

*6.3. Securing continued legitimacy among stakeholders at the Northern "home base".*

There are, as mentioned above, very good reasons why some of the larger development NGOs have chosen to establish more unified and professional organisations characterised by some degree of a federal organisational structures. Also strategies aiming at becoming "truly global" by establishing a Southern membership and mooving corporate headquarters to the Southern hemisphere can be justified.

However, one must also be aware of the risk that some of the Northern, national entities by that will weaken their national identity and local brand and consequently alienate themselves from important stakeholders in their "home base".

- Donor governments and development agencies often, although to varying degrees, emphasise the national affiliation of the NGOs they fund. It makes it easier to influence their policy and operations according to national priorities, and also gives a better background for justifying aid-giving to national electorates by clearly linking aid to commercial and foreign policy objectives of the donor country.

- On that backdrop, some of the Northern (national) NGOs becoming more/fully integrated in huge international organisations might be regarded as mere fundraising agencies for a distant transnational corporation and deemed obsolete because donor governments in the future might prefer to deal directly with recipient government agencies and/or a growing number of capable Southern NGOs.

- By merging with a global organisation, the former independent national members also risk to distance themselves from national non-institutional/individual donors. That counts especially for organisations with a civil society oriented membership base accustomed to have a locally based national governing board and management, which they can hold accountable.

## 7. Conclusions – navigating between the Scylla of corporate effectiveness and the Charybdis of losing operational flexibility and CSO identity.

Accommodating to a changing environment of development aid present the international NGOs with a number of very real dilemmas. Basically it has to do with a gradual change, which many civil society organisations experience. They often originate from some kind of a grassroots, activist background mobilising people for 'a good cause'. If successful, they step by step become recognised as a relevant actor both by their followers in the public and by their adversaries, being it public bodies or private companies. Progressively such movements turn into professional organisations, which are recognised as valued counterparts receiving financial support from authorities and corporate stakeholders.

For the international NGOs going in the direction of more unified and centralised governed organisations the challenges of such a development, described in the previous sections, are even more difficult to address. That has to do with the diversity both among themselves and in relation to their stakeholders:

- They have to manoeuvre between and accommodate to the various aid policies of their institutional Northern DAC donors and private companies with which they co-operate. That was easier for the individual national NGO members of the more loosely related con-federations, but can be a real obstacle for international NGOs with unified ('corporate') strategies and policies.

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[43] Clayton et al. op.cit. p. 20

- A similar diversity exists in the Southern countries, where they operate. It can be difficult to obtain a consistent corporate policy and operating approach when confronted with very different constellations between state agencies and private companies – especially considering also how to relate closer to Southern CSOs of which many are following an oppositional course to both authorities and private business.

- Finally, the same diversity can be found among the Northern NGOs themselves. Some still have traits of their CSO background with a membership base accustomed to a governance system, which hold a national board and a local management accountable. Others have a different background and organisational culture, which all the way have been closer to a corporate NGO system. It's a delicate balance to unify such a variety into a single corporate structure.

Figure 7: CSOs/NGOs and stakeholder relations

| Type of organisation | Stakeholders in territory of operation (Northern/Southern) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | State | Market | Civil society |
| Member-ship Based CSOs | Often oppositional toward governments on specific issues (civil rights, trade policy etc.) | Can be critical to private business on specific issues (environment, use of natural resources, land etc.) | Rooted in Civil Society as mobilising, "grass-root", issue- / case-oriented |
| NGOs | Some are partly funded by and working close to governments aligning more or less with donor states' policies. | Working together with (and sometimes funded by) businesses corporations and funds. | The Civil Society (non-governmental) role can be somewhat unclear |

The challenge caused by this complexity is illustrated in the simple table of figure 7, where the first column shows the two (standard-) types of aid providing organisations and the three following columns their principal stakeholders. As illustrated tentatively in the squares of the table the organisation/stakeholder relation can for each organisation / country (Northern and Southern) probably be described with some consistency concerning policies. It is much more difficult to do so, if one has to present shared corporate characteristics and policies of an international organisation covering a large number of different organisations and donor countries and the even larger number of recipient countries.

On that backdrop, one could envision a risk of the evolving huge transnational aid corporations with integrated common governance and management systems and uniform corporate policies becoming dinosaurs in the changing international aid environment. In spite of the many good reasons behind the trend of establishing more corporate like organisations, a supplementary, if not alternative, strategy could be considered. It might be more in line with the evolving global economic and political conditions also to consider structures that are more flexible and to work with a variety of policies, which can accommodate the diverse stakeholder constellations and heterogeneous economic and political conditions in the still more complex field where the NGOs will be operating in the future.

It is never easy to lift a heavy burden, neither to find more shoulders able and willing to carry it. Especially if one has a vague and disputed understanding of the causes of the burden and whose shoulders are those carrying the heaviest loads. That also applies to the burden, which Kipling in his time so ambiguously allotted "the White Man".

## 8. List of used acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| BRICS-S | Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and South Korea |
| CPA | Country Programmable Aid |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| DAC | Development Assistance Committee (of OECD) |
| DFI | Direct Foreign Investment |
| FAGIA | Foreign Aid and Government-sponsored Investment Activities |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GNI | Gross National Income |
| LDC | Less Developed Countries |
| MBO | Member-ship Based Organisation |
| MDG | Millenium Development Goals (UN) |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| ODA | Official Development Aid |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Program |

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