

Alternative Forms of Non-Governmental Organisation: Lessons for the UK from the CIS and East Asia

Workshop Abstracts

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Abstracts**

Panel One

1. Richard Batley

Whose Public Action? Analysing Inter-sectoral Collaboration for Service Delivery

This was a project within the ESRC research programme on Non-Governmental Public Action which looked at theory and practice internationally. The project researched NGO-Government relations in service delivery in South Asia. Led by Professor Richard Batley (IDD), partners included the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the Centre for International Education (Sussex), the Water and Engineering Development Centre (Loughborough), and Queen Elizabeth House (Oxford).

In most developing countries, non-state provision of basic education is large; in basic health and sanitation, it is almost always greater than that of government. Most private provision operates separately, making up for gaps and deficiencies in public services. However, many NGOs or voluntary associations work in a relationship with government, either using their funding to improve public services or receiving funding to offer complementary services. The case for this sort of 'partnership' is widely proposed by donors and acknowledged by government and non-governmental organizations.

The research aimed to understand how relationships between governments and NGOs as service providers have evolved and are organized, and what balance of influence emerges between actors. It considered their relations in three services: primary education, primary health and basic sanitation. The research focused on India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Among non-state service providers, the focus was on bodies that described themselves as 'not-for-profit', non-governmental organizations, charities, voluntary and community organizations.

The core hypothesis was that government and non-state providers have structurally different perceptions and priorities that are likely to lead to contention about the purposes and processes of public action. The way that their relationship (a formal contract or looser

agreement) is organized, by setting the rules of the game, affects the capacity of the 'partners' to assert influence.

The research objectives were to understand

1. The conditioning factors (law, politics, policies and financial sources) that historically have influenced the goals and identities of non-government actors and their relations with government.
2. How these organizations with their different goals are accommodated in alternative forms of agreement to collaborate.
3. Whether the characteristics of service sectors influence the perspectives of actors and the forms of collaboration between them.
4. The strategies that actors employ to manage the relationship.

The overall finding is that while non-state service providers are subject to external constraints and to the rules that govern relationships, they exercise strategic choices in response.

Government policy, in all three countries and across service sectors, uses the discourse of partnership with both the commercial and voluntary or NGO sectors. This arose partly in response to the 'precipitating jolt' of public sector deficits and the recognized failure of public services in the 1980s, but also to international policy prescriptions, articulated mainly by funding agencies and transmitted by donors, government and NGO policy entrepreneurs. However, current commitments to the principle of partnership are undermined or underlain by histories of rivalry as well as of collaboration between governments and non-state service organizations about their respective roles and access to funding. While partnership is a widely diffused model it is still by no means wholly legitimated.

The research explored whether the discretion of service providers is structurally constrained by their relationships with government at two levels – the degree to which they depend on government's policy authority and control of finance, and the rules of their specific agreements

with government. For example, the Bangladesh cases tend to be associated with tighter policy control supported by coordinated flows of funding, and the Indian cases with a more permissive policy environment and locally variable financial sources. Moreover, the Bangladeshi cases are also associated with more formal and hierarchical contractual relations with NGOs; an influential factor has been the role of donors in driving partnership and in setting the requirements for the delivery of measurable results.

In all three countries, there is a tendency towards increased formalization of agreements, as written agreements or contracts. There is widespread concern that this can lead to the reduction of the autonomy of civil society actors, making NGOs and voluntary associations into arms of government. While this may be true where contracts are extremely formal and hierarchic, the research found that relationships between governments and NGOs were not usually so unbalanced.

First, even though relationships of NGOs with government were formally mainly hierarchical, they were less authoritative than at first appeared, because they emerged from established informal relations and these were often sustained as an important basis of trust. Second, in most cases NGOs have options about their sources of funding, although many detect a shift to the channelling of funds by donors through government. NGOs are not powerless in their relations with governments and donors; they pursue strategies that balance independence, financial survival and commitment to their own goals. We identified three broad strategies:

- NGOs that avoid financial dependence on government or donors, rely on untied independent funding, and seek mutual relationships with government.
- Those that seek to reduce financial dependence on any one donor or government contract by maintaining a mix of sources of funding, and take a lead in shaping their relationship with government and other funders.
- Those that have to accept dependence on one or a few sources of funding and adapt to the requirements of hierarchic relationships.

Third, while their common basic strategy is above all always to avoid confrontation with government, the case-study NGOs affect policy and its implementation by demonstration. NGOs are outsiders to government but, through contracts or agreements, become insiders to a relationship whose structure gives them influence. Paradoxically, playing the 'insider role' may compromise actors' independence whilst also giving them the necessary leverage to assert influence. Insiders have the opportunity to understand the rules and the constraints on change, to demonstrate that their purpose is not disruptive, and therefore to develop convincing explanations for why change is necessary. Getting in on the inside may be compromising but the inside is also where change can take place.

Fourthly, many NGOs are astute at giving government the impression that it is in control, while actually employing strategies to manage the relationship. Sometimes their greater familiarity with international discourse and connections in government allow them to take the lead in shaping agreements. NGOs may engage in a cycle where they influence government's service strategies, shape forms of collaboration and then enter into agreements to deliver the service. Successful approaches seem to be based on a form of soft lobbying from the inside rather than strident advocacy.

Further information at:

http://www.idd.bham.ac.uk/research/service_providers.shtml#Whose

2. Kevin Morrell

Stories of Conflict

We use stories ('representations of events') to make sense of and simplify the world. Stories help us to reconcile contradictions, cope with ambiguity, and also share information. They can simultaneously be both explanations and justifications for how society is, or should be, governed. In this session I will introduce some of the potential benefits of using stories in a systematic way to inform contrasting accounts of power. To illustrate this I will compare two early 20th Century films: *Strike* (1925) & *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) directed by Sergei

Eisenstein; with the more recent film *Billy Elliot* (2000) directed by Stephen Daldry. These portray very different accounts of power and conflict. This comparison can assist discussion of these central aspects of governance in other contexts.

Panel Two

1. Eka Datuashvili - CSRDG

Civil Society Actors in Historical Perspective

The Georgian Case

This presentation will review formation of the Civil Society Sector in Georgia. It will briefly cover historical background from 19th century, the process which was interrupted after invasion of Georgia by the Soviet Russia and the implications of the Soviet period. The ‘new wave’ of civil society organisations, which was started in the 1980’s, when process of “glasnost” and “perestroika” was started in Soviet Union will be discussed. This period gave to people chances to unite according to particular interests and express their positions. The public movements of that period were mainly about environmental issues and protection of cultural heritage.

Attention will be paid to developments since 1990, the period when Civil Society of Georgia was established, as a result of interventions of developmental organizations from US and Europe, supporting independence and democratization processes.

The outcomes of about 20 years developmental processes will be discussed, outlining the main achievements and challenges of the sector today.

Examples of CSO roles in the critical stages of the recent history of Georgia will be shared. In particular, the role of CSOs in the Rose Revolution, the 2007 political crises in the country and during invasion of Russia in 2008 and the recent election processes.

2. Estêvão Cabral

The changing roles of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in East-Timor.

This talk will begin with a brief sketch of the main events and phases in the political history of East-Timor: the four centuries of Portuguese colonial rule; the Carnation Revolution in Portugal and the emergence of political parties in 1974; the Indonesian invasion in 1975 and the subsequent occupation (1975-1999); the referendum of the East-Timorese population in 1999; the United Nations Transitional Administration in East-Timor (UNTAET) (1999-2002) and the establishment of the first new nation of the 21st century in 2002. In the second part of my talk, I will provide an overview of the role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in East-Timor in two main phases: the Indonesian occupation (1975-1999) and the post-conflict phase (1999 to the present). My focus will be on international NGOs based in the UK. These include the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR/Progressio), Amnesty International, Tapol (Tahanan Politik, literally 'Political Prisoner') and Catholic Aid for Overseas Development (CAFOD). I will show how their role took on greater significance in the last decade of the East-Timorese resistance to the Indonesian occupation of the territory (1989/1999), due to globalisation, the advent of new technology and the changing communicative landscape. In the third part of my talk, I will exemplify the ways in which links between international NGOs and local NGOs currently operate. Here I will refer to my current research related to the development of adult-literacy programmes.

3. Angus McCabe

Marginal and Mainstream: Reflections on the UK and International Third Sector: Abstract

The history of the third sector in the UK is one of, often repeated, shifts from being marginal to social and economic policy to being a central plank of Government thinking and service delivery. This presentation reflects on the changing roles and status of the sector in the UK and places this in an international as well as an historical context. The key questions asked relate to

the perceived independence and 'difference' of the third sector, changing organisational forms and expectations and how these relate to the experiences of other NGOs internationally.

Panel Three

1. Julie Gilson

Transnational Advocacy in East Asia

A growing body of scholarship attempts to identify the relevance of transnational groups, focusing in particular on themes of globalization and legitimacy. These groups accommodate a range of diverse actors, interests and agendas, and many seek to work within or alongside states, regional or international institutions, not necessarily to challenge them in an adversarial way. Whether parallel track two processes or other forms of cross-border initiatives, these groups share a transnational identity and in this way constitute particular forms of space in global governance structures. It is this spatial representation that forms the focus of my current work, which seeks to delineate the multiple ways in which the *transnational* is constituted. This exercise is important for clarifying the ways in which actors represent themselves as 'activists' in (a) changing global arena(s), and in particular seeks to create the basis for challenging problematic assumptions about the legitimacy and forms of governance represented by transnational alliances of individual actors and actor clusters. Whilst much of the literature on globalization does acknowledge the need to recognize and classify new scales of activity in contemporary global governance, there is a tendency to talk in terms of vertical hierarchies of power. This paper, in contrast, aims to represent the transnational as the site of 'complex, connected, potential processes' (Marston *et al.* 2005: 426). Following Lefebvre, then, I seek to emphasise and explore the dialectical nature of social space, as well as to elucidate the 'social (spatial) practices' that go to make up the transnational (2009: 18). In so doing, I aim to address the central theme of this panel; namely, to contribute to redefining the spatiality of activism, by questioning how advocates determine the physical borders within which they function alongside those cognitive borders to which they attach themselves.

2. Andrew Wells-Dang

Agency and Created Space among Civil Society Networks in Vietnam

This presentation examines advocacy efforts of two local citizens' networks in Hanoi, Vietnam. The Bright Future Group is a network of disability activists that formed in the 1980s and has sought (and obtained) legal recognition and increased rights for people with disabilities over the last several decades. A newer network of activists has coalesced in the past three years around public space issues in Hanoi, particularly the preservation of the city's largest urban green area, Reunification Park (see Wells-Dang 2010). While different in their history and issue areas, the two networks share a number of common characteristics in their informal status and means of operating. A few formal NGOs are involved in both networks, but the core members of each are individual activists.

Manuel Castells claims that networks are "the new social morphology of our [western] societies" (1996:469). Yet network structures seem particularly well suited to an authoritarian political context like Vietnam's. Much analysis of Vietnamese politics emphasizes the restrictive legal structures that limit the emergence of autonomous civil society organizations – restrictions that have arguably increased in the past several years. As unregistered entities without physical assets, however, networks do not pose easy targets for state or corporate opponents. Extending beyond the "invited spaces" constructed by authorities, networks have developed alternative forms of civil society in what John Gaventa (2007) terms "created spaces" claimed by less powerful actors from power holders. For instance, the Bright Future Group has developed and engaged allies within the state in order to press an agenda of accessibility and equal rights for the disabled, using a strategy of embedded advocacy. The Reunification Park network has put greater emphasis on using media and public opinion to oppose privatization and corruption, while still taking advantage of links to the state system where possible, in what I term "inside-outside" or "jujitsu advocacy."

Both Hanoi case studies form part of my ongoing PhD research at the University of Birmingham on the subject of advocacy strategies of civil society networks in China and Vietnam. I am conducting research from a base in Hanoi, where I have lived for the past 13 years and am currently employed as country representative of an American NGO. Work and personal connections allow me to take an unusual position regarding my research, a mixture of inside and outside perspectives. This network-based research strategy mirrors in part the advocacy conducted by the networks I am studying.

Works for reference:

Castells, Manuel (1996) *The Rise of the Network Society*, vol. 1. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gaventa, John (2007) "Levels, spaces, and forms of power: analyzing opportunities for change," in Berenskoetter, F. and Williams, J. (eds) *Power in World Politics*, London: Routledge, pp. 204-24.

Wells-Dang, Andrew (2010) "Political Space in Vietnam: A View from the 'Rice-Roots,'" *Pacific Review*, March 2010.

3. Irina Bregvadze - CSRDG

Civil Society Sector in Georgia – Development Trends and Challenges

This presentation examines the current status and main development trends of the Third Sector in Georgia, based on quantitative and qualitative research, conducted in 2002, 2005, 2010 by the Centre of Strategic Research and Development of Georgia (CSRDG) and United Nation Association of Georgia (UANG).

The development of the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Georgia has increased dramatically since the mid-1990s. CSOs have mushroomed, supported by a generally conducive legislative and political environment. Nevertheless, during recent years questions arose regarding the breadth of this civil society, as well as the extent at which NGOs impact on society at large.

The research conducted by CSRDG and UNAG provides a comprehensive analysis of the CSO development in eight key fields of evaluation: Field of Activity, External Relations, Structural Development, Operational Process, Mission and Strategy, Logistical Base, Financial Resources and Human Resources management.

The presentation, will be focused only on the some aspects of the countrywide assessments of Georgian CSOs. Mainly, it will cover:

- Current achievements the third sector in the country;
- Challenges facing the CSOs
 - o Financial Sustainability trends
 - o Autonomy
 - o Organizational and Resource Development
- The main field of activities, covering spheres and gaps in the current operational priorities of the developed CSOs (Civil Society Organizations).
- The main role of the civic sector in Georgia
- Monitoring (aimed at keeping Government responsible and accountable); Advocacy and Service provision function of the operating CSOs
- Cooperation potential and Practice among Civic, Government and Business Sector - cases and trends

Works for reference:

- *Civil Society Sector in Georgia – Development trends and Georgia - Countrywide assessment of the Civil Society Organizations in Georgia 2010* – Conducted by Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia and United Nations Association of Georgia (Financed by OSGF and EED)
- *Countrywide assessment of the Civil Society Organizations in Georgia 2002-2005-* Conducted by Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia and United

Nations Association of Georgia in frames of Citizens Advocate! Program (CAP) - US

Agency for International Development (USAID)

- NGO sustainability Index - Georgia
- Freedom House. Nations in Transit 2009 Country Reports. Georgia
http://www.freedomhouse.hu/images/nit2009/georgia_es.pdf