JOURNAL FÜR ENTWICKLUNGSPOLITIK

vol. XXXI 1–2015

CIVIL SOCIETY, COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Herausgegeben von:
Mattersburger Kreis für Entwicklungspolitik
an den österreichischen Universitäten

Journal für Entwicklungspolitik (JEP)
Austrian Journal of Development Studies

Herausgeber: Mattersburger Kreis für Entwicklungspolitik an den österreichischen Universitäten

Produktionsleitung: Bettina Köhler
Umschlaggestaltung: Bettina Köhler
Titelbild: Simone Datzberger

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Journal für Entwicklungspolitik XXXI 1-2015, S. 4–12

Civil Society, Cooperation and Development

Tiina Kontinen, Henning Melber

While the title of this special issue suggests clarity, on closer scrutiny the terms involved deserve some careful (re-)interpretation. Often associated with a certain meaning and not further questioned, they actually invite efforts to establish what they really mean for those using them. 'Civil society', after all, remains a contentious, highly ambiguous, if not dubious term, just as 'development' does. Even more so, in fact, if we consider more recent discussions on a global civil society (Kaldor 2003; Kössler/Melber 1993, 2002; Löfgren/Thörn 2007). Like development, civil society has manifold different meanings and interpretations. Suffice to say that civil society agencies can be most uncivil, just like development can mean the opposite to its positive connotation (cf. Heine/Thakur 2011). Hence, the thematic focus of this guest-edited issue of JEP does not imply a straightforward answer to the implicit question of whether the role of 'civil society' in promoting 'development' is a good or bad form of cooperation (cf. Melber 2014). This cautionary caveat refers also to the complexity of the 'aidnography' and furthermore to the motivations and experiences of those engaged in various roles and locations within international development cooperation (cf. White 2015). Our introduction presents a few more general reflections on the subject, followed by a short summary presentation of the contributions.

1. Civil society cooperation in a globalised environment

The decline of the former colonial world half a century ago resulted in a much more diversified internationalism. Hitherto hardly existing forms of international relations emerged through new interactions entered by the

new sovereign states appearing on the global scene. These relations posed new realities facing Western hegemony and expansionism. The end of the bipolar world, which shaped most inter-state relations during the Cold War period, and the subsequent new multipolar tendencies with new powerful actors from the so-called global South emerging, created another dynamic. The slogan of the World Social Forum (WSF) as one indicator of new alignments in formation states that "Another World is Possible". It testifies to new social struggles taking shape at the turn of the century. But the other world taking shape in parallel was to a large extent influenced by different agencies, not least symbolised by the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the new global state players. While local as well as global forms of civil society changed, fundamental changes also took place in other influential spheres of power. State(s) and civil society required new efforts to come to terms with the emerging realities, shaped increasingly by a neoliberal paradigm and its world-wide effects. These realities blurred an imaginary line between the state and non-state actors and the different meanings and roles involved. Such a previously cultivated, almost automatically applied assumption of divided responsibilities between state and society tended to equate what became associated with the term 'civil society' as something positive, by definition. In the meantime, however, a necessarily more nuanced debate has gradually occupied space in the public and academic discourses, with some less simplified approaches. To get beyond the rather polarised debates over the meaning of civil society, it was suggested "to conceptualise global civil society in *analytical* terms as a political space, in which a diversity of political experiences, action strategies, identities, values and norms are articulated and contested; a space of struggle and conflict over the values, norms and rules that govern global social space(s) – and ultimately over the control of material resources and institutions. Whether global civil society means increasing democratisation or colonisation then becomes empirical questions, to which the answers largely depend on the context" (Thörn/Moksnes 2012: 5; original emphasis).

This is an approach which provides access to assessing and dealing with development in its ambiguity on a case-to-case basis. While already a theme among political philosophers of the 19th century, the notion of civil society gained new value through the theoretical reflections of Antonio Gramsci. Largely disappearing from the social sciences debates for almost

half a century, it has, since the popular protest movements in Eastern Europe during the 1980s, gained new currency as a category. Soon afterwards, the battle over its meaning signalled another victory for those who associated civil society with bourgeois democracy and saw it as an integral part of a specific notion of 'good governance', which became the watchword and reference point for the 1990s (cf. Abrahamsen 2000). Since then, civil society has been taken for granted as a relevant category and political factor by means of civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations – as reflected by the common use of their acronyms CSO and NGO – acting both in local and global policy making and norm setting (Cheema/Popovski 2010).

The concept of civil society was appropriated with enthusiasm by the aid system latest since the mid-1980s, especially because of the ambiguity of the concept. The at best ambiguous notion 'civil society' fitted well both the neoliberal agendas of mainstream development agencies with an emphasis on good governance, and those of alternative development stressing the collective action and transformative potential of civil society (Howell/Pearce 2002). Subscribing both to the neo-Tocquevillean idea of associations as mediators between states and citizens, and the neo-Gramscian understanding of civil society as a space for counterhegemonic action, the diverse actors energetically started to allocate funding and to support civil society with a diverse vision of the 'development' that civil society could bring. Within the aid system, civil society soon mainly translated into NGOs (Edwards 2004), which gradually developed into an international organisational field with particular isomorphic organisational practices and circulating 'buzzwords' (Tvedt 1998; 2006; Watkins et al. 2012). The academic attention to the dynamics of this field grew exponentially in the 1990s, ranging from theories of development management (Lewis 2007) to close examination of the dynamics of the system (Hilhorst 2003).

But to what extent is civil society or parts of it involved in social transitions to which the term development is usually applied? As so often, there is a thin line between becoming critically engaged with a system in order to change it and ending up being coopted by the system in order to stabilise it – which, strictly speaking, might still allow for reformist changes on a limited scale according to the proclaimed aims, such as, for example, poverty reduction or peace building or fighting hunger and diseases (or even

reducing carbon emissions, for that matter). However, one should not close one's eyes before the reality that "[I]n practice most of today's development-oriented NGOs are contracted by international organisations and governments to supplement government efforts at providing services to the poor, to foster the neoliberal paradigm and to take the place of collective social movements and their confrontational politics which seek to change power structures rather (sic) seeking accommodations within it" (Singh 2010: 86).

This raises anew the fundamental as well as strategic question of with whom to engage and for what purpose. Actors within the civil society agencies and social movements hold very different views and testify to the fact, stressed at the beginning, that civil society is anything but homogenous and embraces very different if not antagonistic interests and forces. Most importantly, even if civil society proponents at times create the impression that they are the ones who can fix social challenges and shortcomings best, this is a naïve illusion we should not fall for. While civil society is an important ingredient of governance, and certainly of 'good governance', it is at best an influential catalyst and facilitator, but not the panacea for fixing social evils on its own: "CSOs are not a magic path to development, nor are they a substitute for responsive, effective states capable of delivering tangible and sustained improvements in people's lives. In practice development requires both" (Green 2008; as quoted in Singh 2010: 88).

The "Mindset Appeal", which was drafted as the point of departure by the Civil Society Reflection Group on Global Development Perspectives (2012: 4) ahead of its work to compile a CSO-input for the Rio+20 conference, rightly demanded (in vain) from the Rio 2012 Summit to "re-affirm the State as the indispensable actor setting the legal frame, enforcing standards of equity and human rights, and fostering long-term ecological thinking, based on democratic legitimacy." States remain relevant if not decisive entities and battlefields over the future of societies and the wellbeing of the people composing these societies. Given the efforts for "bringing the state back in", one tends to agree with the warning that "it would be highly premature for development studies to replace the paradigmatic importance of the state by that of civil society" (Schuurman 2001: 13).

It is of interest that the global shifts and the evolving role of global civil society actors such as the International Advocacy NGOs (IANGOs) have also impacted on the reflections of the World Economic Forum

(WEF), which in mid-2012 established an initiative to explore the rapidly evolving space in which civil society actors operate. As stated in the Executive Summary of the report, released for Davos 2013, "[…] civil society should be the glue that binds public and private activity together in such a way as to strengthen the common good. In playing this role, civil society actors need to ensure they retain their core missions, integrity, purposefulness and high levels of trust. […] Civil society can play a particularly powerful role in this process as an enabler and constructive challenger, creating the political and social space for collaborations that are based on the core values of trust, service and the collective good" (World Economic Forum 2013: 6).

This all sounds very enlightened from the point of view of those who still continue to hold and execute the power of definition over official versions of narratives in policy and governance matters. After all, who should trust whom and why? Civil society agencies engaged in development cooperation and other forms of international exchanges are often dependent upon substantial public funding from within the states in which they are based. Changing priorities in the financial allocations to NGOs, as well as new paradigms in development cooperation, have gradually shifted the emphasis of the criteria imposed on such NGOs to obtain and further secure the material support for their activities from states. This tendency has also gradually further undermined the autonomy of NGOs, whose operation requires budget allocations from ministries. At the same time, it enhances the pressure on them to reinvent themselves in the light of the contextual changes, as a recent case study of one of the biggest Dutch NGOs has suggested (Elbers/Schulpen 2015). Similar tendencies can be also observed with regard to the International NGOs (INGOs), which by necessity have to engage with the aid industry or are actually part of it (cf. Kane 2013).

2. Exploring the different perspectives on civil society cooperation

Against this background, the contributions to this special issue provide a variety of approaches to the civil society-development nexus. They are revised versions of papers originally presented in two working groups on civil society and NGOs at the 2nd Nordic Conference for Development

Research on Knowing Development – Developing Knowledge held in Espoo, Finland, during November 2013 (see also Jauhola/Kontinen 2014).

The first part of the issue problematises the applicability of the very concept of civil society in a variety of contexts. *Simone Datzberger* recapitulates some of the social theory foundations of the term and its meaning(s). By doing so, she shows how closely the concept is embedded in Western political theory. Nevertheless, it nonetheless lacks coherence and has different meanings. She therefore questions its uncritical or un-reflected use, especially when addressing the contemporary post-conflict states. *Axel Borchgrevink*, somewhat contrasting this understanding, contends that the concept has an analytical function. He illustrates the meaning(s) by summarising different manifestations and forms of civil society in Nicaragua from a historical perspective.

In the context of international development cooperation, the concept of civil society has often been used in a quite restricted way in reference to NGOs, which range from large IANGOs operating worldwide as global players to small local organisations. However, the NGO field has become increasingly professionalised, and good will and best intentions alone are no longer good enough. NGOs need to operate in a more focused and clearly defined way in their management as a matter of survival, and are often forced to scale down in order to maintain a sustainable basis. *Rachel Hayman* discusses how NGOs deal with the withdrawal from their partner countries and how the knowledge of the strategies needed is shared. *Tiina Kontinen and Hisayo Katsui* present two case studies from Finland to illustrate the dilemmas in their efforts to seek best knowledge practices with regard to transparency, accountability and participation of local stakeholders. The NGOs have also conceptualised new evaluation methods in response to the pressure to create knowledge, but remain confronted with a balancing act.

Civil society development is by nature and definition a continuously changing field. For example, there is an increasing attempt to re-interpret the relationship between various diasporas and their home countries in the framework of development. *Päivi Pirkkalainen* discusses the relationship of the Somali diaspora and local development initiatives as a particular case, which shows how a diaspora moves between its roots of origin and the new home environment.

In a personal account based on field research confrontations, *Sirpa Rovaniemi* shares experiences concerning the challenges that an ethnographer meets in the twilight zone between encounters with civil society agencies, the aid industry, and the research community in the case of colliding interests within a local community organisation in India.

The different cases and levels of reflection complement each other in a search for common ground with regard to the overarching question of if and to what extent civil society initiatives are able to offer support for a form of development which merits the name. The conclusion is – as one could expect – rather inconclusive: civil society actors are neither per se better nor worse than official ODA activities of state agencies. It largely depends on a case-to-case assessment. This is where this introduction comes to a full circle and ends where it had started. While the informality of some initiatives might be a strength, they could be also a weakness, in as much as the professionalism of other actors might reproduce similar ambiguities. Civil society is no panacea for development, nor a guarantee of promoting the kind of development that would merit support. Yet, as non-state actors, these forms of internationalism play a role and are important. They hence deserve and require a closer examination in order to further explore the scope as well as the limitations of such interaction. We trust that the contributions add useful insights to a needed (self-)critical investigation. We thank the editorial group of JEP for providing us with this forum, the reviewers of the submissions for their many valuable comments, and we are also grateful to Bettina Köhler for her guidance and communication during the process of editing the articles presented.

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Journal für Entwicklungspolitik XXXI 1-2015, S. 13–29

Civil Society in Sub-Saharan African Post-Conflict States: A Western Induced Idea(l)?

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1. Introduction

Since the late 1980s there has been a burgeoning interest, among academics and practitioners, in the role and involvement of local civil society in peacebuilding and development processes. (Re-)enforcing, (re-) creating, (re-)building or strengthening civil society, has become the new legitimising toolkit for external interventions and their respective peacebuilding and development agendas. Remarkably, with regards to the sub-Saharan African region, the historical, cultural, socio-ethnographic and local context of civil society, as well as its comprehension often remains unaddressed and has largely become an uncontested idea(l). Above all, civil society, as understood by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century bourgeois Western society, never really matched the realities of social and political life in sub-Saharan Africa. Notwithstanding, civil society is "one of those things (like development, education, or the environment) that no reasonable person can be against. The only question to be asked of civil society today seems to be: How do we get more of it?" (Ferguson 2006: 21)

This article explores alternative ways of approaching the notion of civil society in the scope of peacebuilding and development efforts in the sub-Saharan African region. It will first elaborate on how civil society is currently approached in peacebuilding and development practice and discourse. In order to challenge liberal appropriations of the concept in post-conflict sub-Saharan Africa, it will be necessary to put forward a broad definition of the Western usage of the term. Accordingly, the second section provides a succinct overview of how civil society emerged as a concept in Western philosophical thought. It aims to briefly delin-

eate why commonly agreed definitions of the term remain quite vague in Western social science and philosophy. The third section will then critically examine what Lewis (2001) calls the 'usefulness' of the concept of civil society in non-Western contexts, with a special focus on sub-Saharan Africa. It will be argued that civil society, as it emerged as a philosophical construct of the Occidental world, never really matched realities of social and political life in equatorial Africa. In setting out some distinct features of sub-Saharan African civil societies as they evolved over history, space and time, this article explores aspects that shape the civil sphere in post-conflict sub-Saharan African states – albeit in varying degrees.

2. Civil society in current peacebuilding and development practice and discourse

The zeitgeist of the democratisation processes in Southern Europe and in Latin America from the 1970s onwards, and the liberalisation of Eastern Europe since the late 1980s, shaped the pro-liberalisation rhetoric of peacebuilding and development practices and discourses. The appeal of both modern democracy and a vibrant civil society became to be seen as a magical formula for peace and development in conflict-affected countries around the world. Indeed, since the landmark 1992 document *Agenda for Peace*, there has been a "steady increase in the deployment of localism in the discourse and practice of the liberal peace, together with actions by local communities to harness, exploit, subvert and negotiate the internationally driven aspects of the local turn" (Mac Ginty/Richmond 2013: 771). Recent initiatives such as the *New Deal* stipulate that "an engaged public and civil society, which constructively monitors decision-making, is important to ensure accountability" (New Deal Building Peaceful States 2013). The *New Deal's* outcome document further stresses the need for capacity building of civil society and promotes a country-owned vision and plan in close consultation with civil society actors (ibid.). At the same time, the number, involvement, and activities of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and local CSOs has increased in the developing world. The figures speak for themselves.

There has been a rapid increase of funds from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD) via Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). While in 1985–1986, funding provided to CSOs amounted to $3.1 billion per year, this increased to $6.7 billion in 1999 and $7.1 billion in 2001 (Debiel/Sticht 2005: 10). In comparison, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (UK-DfID) reports that it spent at least £694 million through CSOs in the period of 2011–12, out of which a total of £154 million went to sub-Saharan Africa alone (ICAI 2013). Additionally, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) has established relationships with over 30,000 CSOs worldwide (United Nations n/y). Many of these are located in post-conflict and underdeveloped states and benefit from numerous long-term and short-term funding schemes monitored and administered by several United Nations (UN) agencies. Similarly, CSO involvement in World Bank funded projects has grown over the past decade, from 21 percent of the total number of projects in fiscal year 1990 to an estimated 81 per cent in fiscal year 2009 (World Bank 2010). In addition, the World Bank reports have increasingly involved CSOs in the formulation of Country Assistance Strategies (CAS) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) (ibid.).

Undoubtedly, the growing attention towards civil society in peacebuilding and development assistance has clearly had some positive effects. For instance, externally led programming has become a more inclusive and comprehensive endeavour, while strengthening the capacities of the civil sphere. Nonetheless, the hype on and around the realm of civil society in peacebuilding and development frameworks could not escape from new challenging side effects with regards to the civil sphere. On the one hand, non-Western and often century-long suppressed post-conflict societies are often less accustomed to the political culture of free and equal practice and political emancipation as it was cultivated over centuries in Western politics and thought. In the sub-Saharan African region, most societies are characterised by the legacies o colonial rule, societal, economic, political and/or ethnic disorder, elite capture, and severe poverty. On the other hand, the clearly demarcated liberal boundaries of state/society and politics/economics often do not match with the structure, social stratification and everyday realties of societies outside the Occidental world.

Realising that peacebuilding and development assistance had to go beyond the sheer technicalities of instituting free market economies, multi-party electoral systems or a broader human rights agenda, the international community started to engage in efforts of norm promotion. Externally driven agendas literally started to 'liberalise' the civil sphere in question by means of all kinds of projects or programming on the ground. To give an example, in 2009 the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (UN PBF 2009) provided $140,000 of funding to Sierra Leone for a project entitled *Attitudinal and Behavioural Change (ABC) Secretariat* (PBF/SLE/A-6). The project description reads as follows: "One of the causative factors of the decade long civil war is the negative attitude of Sierra Leoneans towards state property and the citizenry. It is the view of government to change this negative trend by re-orientating the minds of our citizens through continuous engagement and discussions on the need to change their attitude towards work, authority, state property and fellow citizens." Similar rhetoric can be found in the Ugandan case. The country's National Development Plan (2010–2015) repeatedly refers to various trainings and ways of programming that seek to transform the mindset of the population in order to appreciate productivity and development.

Such language clearly reflects Duffield's (2001: 11) general observation, that apart from promoting liberal institutions, peace and development programming and interventions also aim at transforming dysfunctional and war-affected societies into cooperative, representative and especially, stable entities. In short, the institutionalisation of a liberal agenda in non-Western post-conflict states presupposes to import, transplant and root liberal values and norms into seemingly *illiberal* societies. In doing so, supporting civil society is geared towards the construction of a particular kind of social order, organised around the individual and his or her own rights (Barkawi/Laffey 2001). It targets people's principal beliefs, attitudes, values and ideals, thereby indirectly suggesting what role the individual, the self, and the community should play in that system. Implicitly, it is about the reformation of the political culture of a society which, depending on a country's socio-economic and historical context, might or might not have led to conflict in the first place. Hence, a liberal agenda starts from the premise that reforming state-society relations based on the societal morals of liberalism, creates and fosters responsive and legitimate institutions

that can effectively deal with the peacebuilding and development process of a conflict-ravaged country. Strikingly, such an approach frequently distracts from an often unheeded question at hand: *who* is it that ought to be strengthened, reinforced and consequently liberalised? Accordingly, the ensuing section provides a succinct overview of how civil society emerged as an intellectual construct in Western philosophical thought. It aims to briefly elaborate and delineate why commonly agreed definitions of the term remain quite vague in Western political science and philosophy. In doing so, it would go beyond the scope of this article to fully engage in the vast number of discourses on civil society, which have been summarised in greater detail by so many others (see Cohen/Arato 1994; Hall 1995; Keane 1998). This section will, nevertheless, attempt to do justice to the main scholarly contributions in order to define the term and find some definitional common ground for ensuing discussions.

3. Civil society in Western political practice and thought

Civil society is probably one of the most theoretically, rhetorically and semantically contested concepts. As the history of Western political thought has shown, many theoretical and intellectual constructs build on different understandings and interpretations of the very idea of an existing civil society. Concepts such as democracy, social contract, social capital or even political culture, to name a few, are heavily informed by the various definitions, approaches and interpretations of the role, purpose and functions of a presumably existing civil society.

John Locke, often cited as the 'transitional figure' in the early-modern reorientation of social thought, was amongst the first philosophers who understood civil society as an entity in its own right, thus co-existent with the state but not yet subsisting as a separate sphere (Seligman 2002: 14-20). The first clear distinction between civil society and the state finds its origins during the time of the Scottish Enlightenment, and also occurred in the Anglo-American world against the backdrop of the American Revolution. One of the leading thinkers was Thomas Paine, who believed in a naturally self-regulating society. Paine's *Common Sense* (1997 [1776]), but also *Rights of Man* (1999 [1791]), perceive society as the sole source of

legitimate authority, and contrast an individualistic, egalitarian society to government. Probably one of the most articulate accounts of civil society in this era can be found in Alexis De Tocqueville's (1994 [1835, 1840]) *De la démocratie en Amérique*. He referred to civil society as variations of politically active and independent associations – quite simply, life outside the household. For Tocqueville (1994: 191-198, 115-120) these civic associations not only provide an opportunity for citizens to exchange views (e.g., free dissemination of news), but also serve as an autonomous platform to nurture civic virtue and keep a close eye on the government.

With thinkers such as G.W. Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx – notwithstanding their sometimes conflicting philosophical viewpoints – the conceptualisation of civil society yet again gained a new dimension. For Marx (1992 [1844]), civil society develops only within the bourgeoisie, which is largely interlinked with the political society (or superstructure) and consequently disregards both, the bourgeoisie and political society. Antonio Gramsci reversed Marxist viewpoints with his ideas on the *Organisation of National Societies*. In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci (2011: 383) distinguishes political society from civil society by explaining the latter as "the hegemony of one social group over the entire nation, exercised through so-called private organisations like the church, trade unions, or schools". As Bratton (1994: 55) put it, Gramsci's political society is the embodiment of force and civil society is the manufacturer of consent. Still, Gramsci actually acknowledges that in reality the political and civil society often overlap.

That associations, clubs, churches, but also the family can, and in fact do promote antidemocratic and illiberal ideas was the traumatic experience in the events before, during and after World War II. For the first time, the concept of civil society lost its idealistic flavour. The aftershock of World War II led Western civil societies more to an active experience of what it meant to be a member of a society than to a pure ideological envisioning of it. Such civil activism was reflected in anti-nuclear, anti-Vietnam movements, various student protests, civil rights movements and the 1968 revolution. What is more, all these events were supported with advanced technology and the growing dissemination of news and new media.

The second major conceptual, as well as more visionary, transformation of the notion of civil society was largely owed to dissident intellectuals in communist Eastern Europe. In an uproar against totalitarian regimes,

revisionists, such as Jan Tesař, Václav Havel and György Konrád, expressed in various forms the notion that the communist project was exhausted and would leave no room for human rights. This was famously manifested in initiatives like KOR (Polish Workers Defense Committee) or the Charta 77 (Keane 1998: 19-23). For Kaldor (2003: 76), the end of the cold war embodied "a radical extension of political and personal rights, which led to the demand for autonomy, self-organisation or control over life and consequently arose as a global concept."

After the fall of communism, the 1990s came to be seen as the golden era for civil society movements, associations and organisations, fuelling fruitful and vast debates on the role of CSOs in local, national and global spheres. The number, involvement and activities of CSOs increased worldwide. Civil society became not only a fashionable, but also overused political, philosophical and phenomenological tool-kit for exponents from the new left to neo-liberal to more conservative strands. In the present day, the idea of civil society is often posited as a panacea, while taking on a large variety of meanings in different countries or regions.

Nowadays, there is a broad consensus that a suitable definition of civil society should draw a line between the realms of state, market and civil society, but still leave enough analytical and interpretational leeway for the ambiguities inherent in the concept. For example, Spurk (2010: 11) defines civil society as "a large and diverse set of voluntary organisations – competing with each other and oriented to specific interests – that are not purely driven by private or economic interests, are autonomously organised, and interact in the public sphere. Thus, civil society is independent from the state and the political sphere, but is oriented toward and interacts closely with them." Lewis (2001: 12) further reminds us: "The concept of civil society contains within it the seeds of contradiction in being both unitary and divisive, and prescriptive and aspirational, but it nevertheless leads us to focus on changing structure and process." Above all, there is a broad intellectual consensus that a society – and every individual therein – has the ability to liberate itself from imposed political, economic and religious structures. However, it is the emancipatory character ascribed to the concept of civil society that makes it so difficult to set definitional boundaries regarding to what extent civil society seems to be separate from, and to what extent it is in fact intertwined with, the realms of the political,

private, public and economic spheres. In short – as a product of political but also societal and cultural emancipation, civil society remains an on-going process and progress. Yet the intention here is not to refrain from a broad and general working definition. On the contrary, some conceptual common ground is essential for the remainder of this thesis, the aim of which it is to examine the consequences of applying a liberal notion of civil society in the sub-Saharan African context. Reflecting on the definitions and conceptual discourses delineated above, the concept of civil society, as it emerged as an intellectual construct and idea of Western Enlightenment thought, will be broadly defined and understood as: Independent from the state, political, private, and economic spheres but in close interaction with them; a domain of social life in which public opinion can be formed; and as a process and not an event.

The above described liberal notion and understanding of civil society has shaped to a great extent the language of international peacebuilding and development actors in their efforts to strengthen and support the civil sphere. The World Bank, for instance, defines civil society thus: "[T]he wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. CSOs therefore refer to a wide array of organisations: community groups, NGOs, labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, and foundations" (World Bank 2013). In the main, donors generally prefer to support more organised and formalised versions of civil society (such as CSOs). Loose, non-registered or home-grown clubs are, by and large, the beneficiaries of the work done by officially registered and M&E (Monitoring and Evaluation) checked and audited CSOs.

4. Civil society in the Sub-Saharan African context: A Western artifice?

Civil society, as it evolved as an intellectual construct of the Western world, never really matched the realities of social and political life in sub-Saharan Africa. If compared to other non-Western regions (Asia, Latin

America or the Middle East), the concept gains many additional complex layers regarding historical, political, cultural and economic characteristics and developments. To begin with, a strict prescriptive focus on the potentials or promises of civil society in the peacebuilding and development processes of sub-Saharan Africa risks disregarding a still existing stigmatisation of centuries-long slave trade and the effects of colonial rule. In the case of West Africa, for instance, Hahonou and Pelckmans (2011) find that the legacy of slavery continues to shape the everyday lives of millions of citizens, as well as the political landscape, in countries such as Benin, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Burkina Faso. Evoking slavery, they argue, brings shame and in some instances even leads to societal marginalisation. The effective silence surrounding the issue of slavery and the impact it has had on contemporary state and society relations has also consistently been neglected by colonial administrations and by most postcolonial governments. During colonial rule, African societies were once again bereft of their own, self-created or 'African' way of sociocultural evolution. In Howell and Pearce's (2002: 179) words: "By carving up territory into distinct spheres of influence and subjugating diverse societies to external political domination, colonial powers were able to fragment and reconstitute the fabrics of pre-existing societies and reconstruct the physical boundaries of political order." Ethnic divisions, tribalism, clientelism and patrimonialism were fuelled and impelled by colonialism, a process which consequently led to a severe fragmentation and impoverishment of local societies. In turn, decolonisation resulted in more civil wars than civil societies. According to the UCDP/PRIO armed conflict database, between 1946 and 2010 around 30 countries in sub-Saharan Africa (that is 65% of all states in the region) experienced armed conflict (UCDP 2012). As initially argued by Mamdani (1996), upon independence, sub-Saharan African societies continued to struggle with racial or ethnic privileges and unequal patterns of power and resource allocation, as well as little tolerance for political opposition. According to Mamdani (1996: 13-34), independence deracialised the state and its institutions but not civil society itself, which was retribalised as a consequence of persistent ethnic tensions. Historically accumulated privileges, an urban / rural divide, and direct and indirect (customary) rule and laws not only challenged democratisation processes later on but also fuelled ethnic tensions. Surprisingly, externally

steered efforts to bring about peace, democratisation and development in the region, rarely contemplate the legacy of centuries-long oppression when it comes to the (re)construction and formation of local civil societies. Yet, societal configurations as well as state-society relations are often not consistent with a Western notion of civil society that, ideally, contributes to a country's peacebuilding and development efforts. It thus appears that a large part of peacebuilding and development discourse and practice is detached from a considerable body of literature that generally questions the appropriation of the concept of civil society in non-Western environments (see Chabal/Daloz 1999; Chatterjee 2004; Chazan 1993; Comaroff/Comaroff 1999; Ferguson/Gupta 2002; Ferguson 2006; Harbeson et al. 1994; Kaviraj/Khilnani 2001; Lewis 2001; Lumumba-Kasongo 2005; Mamdani 1996). Picking up on Mamdani's (1996: 19) earlier point, there is still a need in current practice and scholarship for an analysis of (and in fact empirical enquiry into) civil society that allows understanding it in its actual form, rather than as a promised agenda for change.

For some scholars, civil society is non-existent in the sub-Saharan African context. Harbeson et al. (1994: 1-2), built on the hypothesis that "civil society is a hitherto missing key to sustained political reform, legitimate states and governments, improved governance, viable state-society and state-economy relationships, and prevention of the kind of political decay that undermined new African governments a generation ago." Quite similarly, Chabal and Daloz (1999: 21) perceive civil society as an 'illusion' in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa and argue that the state is so poorly institutionalised, and so weakly emancipated from society, that there is very little scope for conceptualising politics as a contest between a functionally strong state and a homogeneously coherent civil society. By drawing on the examples of Kenya and Zambia, Bratton (1994: 64-71) distinguishes between three different dimensions of civil society, namely the material, the organisational and the ideological. Even though he considers civil society as necessary for political transitions in sub-Saharan Africa, he concludes on a less positive note: "[T]here is a strong likelihood that political regimes will re-emerge in African countries in which inter-elite dynamics drive decision-making and in which popular forces and organisations are again systematically excluded. The ascendancy of civil society may prove to be short-lived, and any popular upsurge may be

followed quickly by widespread citizen disillusionment with the return of politics as usual" (Bratton 1994: 71).

Harbeson, Chabal and Daloz, as well as Bratton, share one common approach, that is, they indirectly contrast the regulation of societal and political life in post-colonial Africa with state-society and economy-society relations as we encounter them in the West. From this perspective, civil society is once again approached as a normative and prescriptive construct that *ought* to achieve or contribute to peace, development and democratisation. However, this is an ill-fated approach, as "different circumstances produce different meanings" (Jenkins 2001: 251). Consequently, the central questions should rather be, what it actually means and entails to be an African citizen in the 21st century. This also reflects Allen's (1997: 337) observation that civil society in sub-Saharan Africa appears to be merely an ideological construct: "[A]part from the grant-seeking NGOs and the academic, it is proponents of the 'liberal project' who need civil society: western governments, their associated agencies, multinationals, and IFIs. Africanists can dispense with it: 'civil society' forms part of a large body of general concepts that have appeared briefly to illuminate analysis but which are too diffuse, inclusive and ideologically laden to sustain illumination: nation building, modernisation, elite, dependency, disengagement – even, perhaps, ethnicity."

This invites us to reflect, not only on the extent to which civil society is somewhat artificially constructed by external actors through specific funding schemes, affiliations with INGOs, and capacity building or training programmes targeting local civic associations/organisations, but also to what extent it emerges rather organically in its own pace, manner and formation. For Denskus (2007), the engagement of the international community repeatedly showed that imposing short-sighted liberal governance frameworks helped to stabilise existing elite structures. Lumumba-Kasongo (2005) further contends that it is not that Africans would not appreciate the ideas or principles of liberal democracies, but the processes of creating rules, norms and institutionalisation has been hijacked by the political elite. He further holds that *this* democracy and its processes have not been able to address the core issues of African societies, such as equal distribution of resources, social justice, employment, gender equality and individual and collective rights (Lumumba-Kasongo 2005: 202).

Besides, literature in the form of both scholarly and non-academic discourses on civil society in peacebuilding and development processes only marginally addresses the issue of the political culture in war-torn societies (cf. Almond/Verba 1963). Although democratic institutions were more or less successfully (re-)established on the surface, the civilian (thus legitimising) sphere of many post-conflict societies continues to be embedded in neo-patrimonial and/or religious networks and tribalism. The argument here is not that researchers and practitioners do not recognise these cultural idiosyncrasies. Instead, liberal peace and development discourses remain largely detached from post-colonial discourses which focus on the legacies of colonialism, the bifurcated state and how both have affected and shaped the political culture in contemporary sub-Saharan African societies. The impact of persisting neo-patrimonial networks and tribalism on the political culture of the civilian sphere rewards further examination, but it is also worth asking to what extent the political culture in post-conflict sub-Saharan Africa appears to be once more only a pseudoimitation of a Western idea(l). Mind-sets how to live a responsible communal life, as well as the political nature of communities, stand in stark contradiction to liberal norms and ideas of civil society. The freedom of the individual is not always detached from attitudes towards the community, thereby challenging a liberal understanding of civil society as embedded in a political culture that cherishes the realm of the individual, the very self, constantly striving for personal rights.

5. Conclusion

In the light of the above outlined arguments, it is suggested that civil society in sub-Saharan Africa represents much more than a normative and terminological fad. Civil society has to be approached, understood and contextualised in terms of local realities in order to really hold a key to explaining and addressing more effectively the long-term needs of a conflict-shattered society, as opposed to agendas and priority plans based on a Western notion of the concept. This implies giving firm consideration not only to factors such as the legacy of slave trade and colonialism, urban versus rural areas, local versus elite ownership, neo-patrimonial networks

and chiefdom systems, but also the political culture and cultural identities of a society – to name but a few. This list of aspects is certainly far from being extensive, and many other characteristics have to be explored, such as gender relations and equality as well as society's overall life circumstances (e.g. living conditions, health, nutrition, education).

Moreover, the argument that the nature of civil society in sub-Saharan Africa can be understood only through a local lens is not entirely new (cf. Ferguson 2006; Jenkins 2001; Lewis 2001; Mamdani 1996). By contrast, alternative approaches towards civil society in ongoing peacebuilding and development processes in sub-Saharan African post-conflict states are scarce. There are a few exceptions, such as Verkoren and van Leeuwen (2012), who highlight how and why the idea of a social contract between the state and society needs to be re-negotiated in non-Western post-conflict environments. Both authors caution that neoliberal agendas underlie aspirations for civil society building, sustaining the model of a Western state with an effective bureaucracy that provides for the wellbeing of its citizens. More knowledge is needed about how 'indigenous' (understood here as non-occidental) manifestations of civil society acquire legitimacy and maintain their own forms of accountability (Verkoren/van Leeuwen 2012: 87). This article further contends that a re-negotiation of the social contract must be put into historical context. State-society relations in sub-Saharan African states surfaced in a completely different manner, pace and time in history than in the (neoliberal) West. As the previous section has shown, there are numerous debates on the effects of colonial rule that offer a great entry point to anchor and interlink current peacebuilding and development research more thoroughly with the past. Similarly, the issue of political culture can tell us a lot about the nature and characteristics of state-society relations emerging from a bifurcated state. As a domain of social life, it seems to be a promising new entry point to revisit the issue of how we approach local societies in non-Western states. At the same time, it opens new avenues towards a more thorough understanding of the opposing tensions between the individual and the community, between particular and universal values – and therefore liberal interests. In short, any theoretical (mis-)usage of 'civil society' has to be carefully questioned and reexamined. Preconceived perceptions and prescriptions hinder and distort rather than (re-)shape and construct cultural and societal identities.

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Abstracts

The promise of a flourishing, vibrant and democracy-committed civil society has emerged as a posited panacea in ongoing peacebuilding, democratisation and development assistance over the past three decades. As for sub-Saharan African post-conflict states, however, the local context and understanding of civil society remains often unaddressed. By and large, civil society has become an uncontested idea(l). This article argues that a classical Western liberal-individualist model of civil society is continuously challenged by the cultural and historical particularisms of states in the sub-Saharan African region. Settled modes of thinking in peacebuilding and development research and practice have to take into account local characteristics that are already part of, and grounded in, existing and historically rooted experiences.

Die Rolle einer starken, politisch aktiven Zivilgesellschaft für die Förderung von Demokratie, Frieden und Entwicklungshilfe wurde in den letzten drei Dekaden zu einer fast unumstrittenen Idealvorstellung in entwicklungspolitischen Konzepten. Hinsichtlich afrikanischer Post-Konflikt-Staaten südlich der Sahara bleiben der kulturelle Kontext und vor allem das lokale Verständnis von Zivilgesellschaft allerdings häufig unberücksichtigt. Es wird argumentiert, dass ein westliches Modell von Zivilgesellschaft, das ideengeschichtlich auf liberalen und individualisti-

schen Konzepten gründet, mit den kulturellen und historischen Besonderheiten dieser Staaten nur schlecht vereinbar ist. In den existierenden Denkmustern und Diskursen der Friedensförderung und Entwicklungspolitik sollten daher die historisch tief verwurzelten lokalen und soziokulturellen Merkmale dieser Länder verstärkt berücksichtigt werden.

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Journal für Entwicklungspolitik XXXI 1-2015, S. 30–47

Civil Society Under Different Political and Aid Regimes in Nicaragua

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1. Introduction

While 'civil society' is a frequently used concept in academic writings and development discourses, its precise meaning is too seldom explicitly defined. Usually, it is taken for granted that we know what it refers to. This is unfortunate, as it leads to the conflation of different attributes ascribed to civil society, attributes which should not be taken *a priori* to be overlapping. While civil society on the one hand may be delimited as a society's associational sphere, it is simultaneously ascribed an inherent civilising or democratising character. This easily leads to assumptions of uniformity of interests, creating a harmonious image of civil society. Furthermore, a clear separation of civil society from the state and the market is often assumed, while in reality boundaries may be blurred. In development cooperation, the lack of reflexivity towards the concept means that often it refers simply to NGOs. The consequent selectivity of funding may have a huge impact on the composition of the associational sphere, not necessarily in the form of increased popular representation.

This article argues for a more analytic concept by analysing various aspects of Nicaraguan civil society: its internal divisions and shifting composition; the intimate relationship between the evolving characteristics of the sphere and larger political changes; and the fundamental role that aid has played. Nicaragua's turbulent political history of an overthrown dictatorship, a revolutionary regime eventually replaced by neoliberal governments, and the return of the former revolutionary President Ortega, has meant dramatic shifts in the relations between state, market and society. Civil society aid contributed to the creation of a strong and

outspoken NGO-sector, but the pull-out of most European bilateral donors after 2007 has meant that funds for the sector are drying up, with drastic consequences for many organisations.

The case of Nicaragua illustrates the usefulness of an analytically more stringent concept of civil society. The example shows that the boundaries between state, market and civil society are not fixed, but open to change. It also demonstrates how aid can have important structuring effects for civil society. Finally, the case warns us that we should not expect clear dividing lines between the spheres of state, civil society, market and development cooperation.

The article first briefly discusses the concept of civil society. The second part analyses three phases of Nicaraguan recent history from a civil society perspective. The conclusion draws out implications for how civil society should be conceptualised.

2. Civil society

Over the past decades, the idea of civil society has come to occupy a central position within the development sphere, both among academics and aid agencies and practitioners. Indeed, among the latter, 'strengthening civil society' has come to be one of the key objectives of development interventions. Yet, there is little reflection on what the concept of civil society or its strengthening should mean. This lack of reflection leads to the conflation of different notions of civil society. Paradoxically, it may be this lack of definitional precision – or as Comaroff and Comaroff (2000: 8) put it, the "inchoate and polymorphous" character of the idea of civil society – that gives the concept such appeal: "[T]he key to its promise – its power as a sign that is as good to think and feel with as it is to act upon – lies in its very promiscuity, its polyvalence and protean incoherence". Civil society has become a buzzword because of its ability to mean anything to anyone. In Edwards' (2009: 3) view: "when the same phrase is used to justify […] radically different viewpoints it is certainly time to ask some deeper questions about what is going on. After all, an idea that means everything probably signifies nothing."

Alison Van Rooy (1998: 12ff) provides a useful deconstruction of the notion by delimiting six different facets of civil society. In her review of past and current understandings, she claims the concept can alternatively be seen as (a) the values of 'civility' (sometimes more specifically of Human Rights and democratisation); (b) a collective noun comprising a society's associations; (c) a public sphere for debate and action; (d) the historical moment when modernisation allows autonomous, liberal, rights-bearing individuals to come together voluntarily; (e) the anti-hegemony and anti-globalisation movement; and (f) an antidote to the State. In a slightly different vein, Fischer (2009: 5) points out that there exist conservative, liberal and radical understandings of civil society, linked to different understandings of its characteristics and functions.

In spite of the fact that such critical examination of the concept is fairly common in academic circles, a simplistic understanding of civil society seems to live on relatively undisturbed within the development sector (and in segments of academia). This understanding builds to a large extent on the liberal view of civil society, with fairly rosy ideas of the sector as the promoter of democratic values, without acknowledging the potential contradictions between the many meanings attached to the concept, and, as Grugel and Bishop (2014: 138) point out, with only a limited understanding of the workings of power. Based on such criticism, Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) and Eriksen (2001) suggest that the notion no longer has any use as an analytical concept. However, since the concept has considerable importance within the development apparatus, it still merits academic attention, but as an idea within the sphere of data rather than as a tool for analysis.

To my mind, this is going too far. Understood as a country's associational sphere – the organisational structures that make them up, as well as the 'space' they occupy – the civil society concept can still be useful for analytical purposes by focusing attention on central dimensions of state-society relations. In order to realise this potential, it is necessary to narrow down its definition. One main difficulty is the concept's normative, ideological and utopian character. If civil society is thought of as the sphere that promotes democracy, human rights, liberal values and the common good, how then do we deal with associations that may oppose those values? Should neo-Nazi or racist groups be included? Fundamentalist religious

organisations? If not, where do we draw the dividing line? Should all organisations we disagree with be excluded? It seems obvious that such a division cannot be drawn except in an ideologically and normatively subjective way. We need to delimit civil society in a way that avoids this conundrum.

We should avoid preconceived ideas of the various organisations of civil society or of their value orientation. Furthermore, we should keep in mind that the rifts and divisions between segments, groups, classes, ethnicities, genders, ideologies and religions within civil society may be just as deep as those relating to the state. Rather than seeing civil society as a unified force for democratisation, it is better conceptualised in Gramscian terms as a battleground for the struggle over power and hegemony.[1]

Civil society is often counterpoised to the institutions of the state, the market and the family. Analytically, this makes sense. In practice, we need to be aware that these spheres may not be easily delimited or separated, as there are areas of overlap and interpenetration. In addition, the relation to aid and donors must be included when analysing civil society in many developing countries. While the importance of this connection varies, it is of crucial importance in aid dependent countries like Nicaragua. In the following presentation, emphasis is placed on how civil society is an arena for the struggle between different political and value orientations, how boundaries between state and civil society are neither fixed nor absolute, and how aid structures civil society.

3. Nicaraguan civil society through three decades

The Nicaraguan state has experienced radical transformations over the past decades, including a socialist revolution in 1979 led by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), the replacement of the revolutionary regime by a series of liberal governments after 1990, and the return to power of the FSLN and the former revolutionary president Daniel Ortega in 2007. Civil society has undergone equally profound changes, linked to these political processes. These changes have involved the internal composition of civil society, as well as its relationships with the Nicaraguan state. An understanding of the characteristics and dynamics of civil society in Nicaragua presupposes an appreciation of this history.[2]

3.1 The 1980s – the revolutionary decade

During the pre-1979 Somoza dictatorship, critical expressions were repressed and civil society was weak, even though widespread discontent and revolutionary mobilisation before 1979 did lead to the emergence of new organisational forms (Velásquez Pereira 1986).

The 1980s was the period of popular organisation *par excellence* in Nicaraguan history. The FSLN goal of a revolutionary society built on popular participation meant that great efforts were made to organise the Nicaraguan people. The Sandinista mass organisations (women's, farmers', youth and workers' associations, plus the neighbourhood organisations) had a total membership of 8-900,000 (Ruchwager 1985; Vilas 1985). These movements formed the organisational backbone for many of the impressive revolutionary efforts within health and education, such as vaccination and literacy campaigns. Still, the Sandinista vanguardist ideology, which saw the party as the legitimate leader of the revolutionary process, meant that these mass organisations were subordinated to the FSLN. Leaders of the organisations were elected by the party, and the mass organisations served to channel party orders towards its members rather than to represent the interests of the membership. The primary objective of these organisations became defending the revolution. Thus, in the corporative Sandinista model, the lines between state, party and mass organisations were blurred, while authority lay unquestioningly with the party and its centralised decision-making structure (Velásquez Pereira 1986).

The national NGO sector was small, and, with the hegemonic role of the large Sandinista organisations, the number of autonomous organisations established was limited. The international NGOs with offices in Nicaragua thus probably outnumbered their Nicaraguan counterparts throughout the eighties. International aid during the period was overwhelmingly given in solidarity with the Revolution and channelled through the institutions of the state or the Sandinista organisations. In the revolutionary fervour, as well as in the polarised setting when the Contra war escalated from the middle of the decade, organisational work outside of the FSLN project was viewed with suspicion. The few oppositional organisations still in existence remained fairly isolated in the overall associational landscape. As the main organisational expression of opposition was armed, based abroad, and heavily financed by another state, the

dominant logic within Nicaragua was very much 'either you are for the Revolution or against it'. In this spirit, organised mobs – the so-called *turbas divinas* – were used by the Sandinistas to quell oppositional street demonstrations.

As the war and the economic crisis took its toll in the latter half of the decade, revolutionary enthusiasm abated considerably. Participation in the mass organisations declined, and the establishment of new NGOs by people with a revolutionary history reflected disillusionment with the FSLN project. While the founders maintained a leftist political identity, many of the new organisations represented different orientations from the Sandinista policies. Thus, new women's organisations could be seen as expressions of dissatisfaction with the way the Sandinista women's organisation had put specific (and potentially divisive) women's issues as secondary to its number one priority of defending the revolution, while, through their work, ecologically oriented agricultural NGOs implicitly supported alternatives to the mainstream Sandinista agricultural policies.

3.2 The period from 1990–2006: 16 years of liberal presidents

Two days after the Sandinistas lost the 1990 elections in Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega admitted defeat and announced that the party would respect the result. But he added that the FSLN would continue to fight and 'govern from below'. Time has shown that, through its extensive organisational apparatus, the Sandinista party was able to maintain considerable influence during the 16 years of liberal rule. Although FSLN-affiliated organisations were weakened after the electoral loss, the party retained control over the strongest unions, the organisations of farmers, cooperatives and farm workers, and among students. Moreover, the large FSLN representation in the National Assembly throughout the period was important for Sandinista influence. In particular, the infamous 'Pact' made in 1999 with the right-wing president Arnoldo Alemán ensured continued Sandinista power. Through their majority, the two parties were able to change the rules to their favour in a number of ways, ensuring joint control over key institutions such as the Supreme Court, the Supreme Electoral Council and the Office of the Auditor General. The FSLN remained a key force in Nicaraguan politics by nimbly combining its parliamentary influence with the organization of strikes and tumultuous street protests.

However, the Sandinista mass organisations were rapidly weakened. Without access to the government funding that had previously sustained them, and with a new government which saw them as political enemies rather than allies and supporters, they experienced reductions in staff and activity levels, and they lost their dominant position within Nicaraguan civil society.

From 1990 and onwards, the organisational landscape of Nicaragua also experienced another fundamental change: the explosion in the number of NGOs. Their number more than doubled in 1990 and continued to grow rapidly in the following years. Several factors contributed to the rapid growth:

- *Available qualified people*: Many lost their jobs in the state sector in this period. Partly these were people who were expelled because they were considered Sandinistas, partly because structural adjustment programs reduced the state apparatus.
- *Opportunity for pursuing idealistic causes*: NGO work promised the continuation of a form of revolutionary identity.
- *Available donor funds*: Many donors had been attracted to Nicaragua by the revolution. With a new government in place, and drastic reductions in the social programme of the state, it was logical for many donors to transfer their support to the NGO sector.
- *Withdrawal of state services created needs*: The new NGOs responded to demands for social, health, educational, economic, financial and other services.
- *Initial small NGO-sector*: Nicaragua had an underdeveloped NGO-sector in relation to the international aid system and the reigning development ideology. The rapid growth of organisations can be seen as a response to a demand within the donor system.

The state was also reconfigured. The large Sandinista state of the 1980s was rolled back, as state companies were privatised, market regulations abolished and services within the health, education and social sectors cut. On the one hand this has resulted in a larger and more autonomous market sphere. On the other hand, many of the people previously employed in the state continued to do similar work, now within NGOs, as part of civil society, and still financed by the same donors.

The liberal period is also a struggle over how the country's recent liberal-democratic political system is to be shaped and institutionalised. This process has to a great extent been guided by short-term, partisan or personal interests of the main political forces, and resulted in frequent constitutional changes, the recourse to ad-hoc solutions to overcome political crises or inhibit political competitors – and to the Pact referred to above. Thus, the Nicaraguan political system remains weakly institutionalised. In this setting, the ability to mobilise large groups of people for street demonstrations – which the Sandinistas were able to do through their grassroots links – was a powerful instrument.

The state in the liberal period was not simply reduced but also more clearly separated from civil society than during the previous regime, when the lines dividing state, party and mass organisations were highly blurred. The emergent liberal state is far from penetrating civil society to the same extent. In general there is a relatively enabling environment for organisational activities; there is freedom of association and expression, a critical press and a plethora of radio and TV-stations. During the presidency of Alemán, there were attempts to put restrictions on aid-financed and left-wing NGOs (radical women's organisations were especially targeted), but due to donor pressure the attempts came to nothing. Conversely, NGO campaigning and donors' insistence on government consultation with civil society resulted in the establishment of a system of councils for state-society dialogue, from the national level to the municipal. This meant new spaces for cooperation between state institutions and representatives of civil society during the latter part of the liberal period.

Among civil society organisations not stemming from the Sandinista tradition, and not considering themselves on the left side of the spectrum, the private sector associations were well organised, represented powerful segments of Nicaraguan society, and had privileged access to the government. A handful of new NGOs representing the political spectrum from the centre to the right were also formed. Still, it is quite clear that the organisations with roots on the right side of the political spectrum remained a minority among Nicaraguan organisations. The majority of organisations had their roots in the revolution, even if both formal and informal links to the FSLN were being weakened or cut. Increasingly, a rift arose between those organisations loyal to the party and Daniel Ortega,

and those that wished to distance themselves from what they perceived as a hierarchic and undemocratic structure. The FSLN itself split, and relations between these two left-leaning groups with their roots in the revolution have become increasingly polarised. It may be fair to say that, since the 1990s, the most significant cleavage in civil society has been within the left.

In this period, Nicaragua's civil society has often been referred to as 'NGOised', as the NGOs were strong, visible, and relatively well-funded, and consequently tended to dominate the public sphere. In contrast, other segments of civil society appeared weaker, less active or less occupied with broader social and political issues. Unions were fragmented, the private sector organisations focused on sector demands, social movements were weak or non-existent, and community-based organisations tended to focus on local concerns. Between 1991 and 2007, Nicaragua has been among the top receivers of aid per capita, reportedly the number one country from 1999 to 2006 (Borchgrevink, forthcoming). Large parts of this aid have been for civil society, and have favoured the NGO sector over other segments of civil society.

The characterisation as of an NGOised civil society draws attention to weaknesses of this civil society: namely, that the organisations are not membership-based and therefore not really representative; that they base their activities on the work of salaried professional staff rather than activists who do voluntary work because they believe in it; and that they are dependent on aid and are thus primarily accountable to donors. These are valid points, but must be seen in relation to the strengths of this type of civil society. Many of these NGOs were highly professional organisations, efficient not only in implementing development projects, but also capable of engaging the government in technical discussion of complex development issues, or in promoting and developing better and more rights-oriented legal instruments. Through these capacities, the organisations were able to have considerable impact on legislation, on the opening of new institutionalised spaces for state-civil society consultations, and on emergency response coordination, such as after the Mitch hurricane in 1998. A few NGOs, including the *Red Nacional de Defensa de los Consumidores* (RNDC – the National Network in Defense of the Consumers), also managed to spearhead broad popular mobilisations against unpopular

government policies, such as the privatisation of public water and electricity services. Thus, the NGOised civil society did achieve significant results.

In sum, Nicaraguan civil society was dominated by the left throughout the liberal period, but by a divided left. Generalising broadly, one could say that while the FSLN retained the *'poder de convocatoria'* – the control over grassroots activists that allowed mobilisation for street demonstrations – 'the other left' dominated the more formal spheres, through media-savvy NGOs with professional expertise, high visibility in Managua and good access to donor funding.

3.3 From 2007 to the present – the return of the FSLN and Daniel Ortega

In 2007, Ortega returned to the presidency. While some of the old rhetoric of the left is intact – such as when he is condemning global capitalism and US foreign policy – he has softened his national politics considerably, in particular appeasing business and religious sectors. Economic policies are developed in consultation with the private sector organisations and assessed favourably by the IMF. Ortega has also gone to lengths to emphasise his religious credentials, for instance voting in favour of a restrictive law on abortion. Financed by generous support from Venezuela, his government has implemented extensive social programmes for housing, credit, agricultural inputs, nutrition, schooling and health. Throughout the presidential term, the FSLN's hold on power was strengthened, both by tightening control over electoral institutions and by attempting to extend its hold over civil society. In 2011, amid charges of widespread fraud, Ortega won 62% of the vote giving him his third term as president from January 2012.

There has been little love lost between Ortega and most of the NGOs, which had explicitly expressed positions against Ortega and the FSLN (Cannon/Hume 2012). As president, Ortega has maintained an aggressive tone against the NGOs, in speeches characterising them as 'conspirators' and 'traitors' 'funded by the Empire's intelligence services' (Valle Orozco 2010: 165). This hostile rhetoric has been followed up by various attempts at undercutting the aid on which these organisations depend. The government has sought to introduce new regulations for channelling funds to

civil society organisations, regulations which, it was alleged, would place strict limitations on international funding for activities related to democracy and governance (Valle Orozco 2010: 167). The new Unit of Financial Analysis (UAF), established by law in 2012 to combat money laundering, is given wide authority to investigate NGOs. The accusation of money laundering was used in 2008 and 2009, when charges were brought against the oppositional organisations *Autonomous Women's Movement* (MAM) and *Centro de la Investigación de la Comunicación* (CINCO) as well as the international NGOs Oxfam UK and Forum Syd. While nothing came out of the cases in the end, the organisations experienced considerable harassment. The government has also tried to reduce aid for the sector by pressuring donors.

As an alternative to what Ortega has labelled a false and unrepresentative civil society, he has sought to establish what he argues is a more genuine one. One of his first decrees created the *Consejos de Poder Ciudadano* (CPC), a structure of councils from the neighbourhood level up to the national to promote participatory democracy. These councils have quasi-administrative functions in the government's welfare programmes and mobilise volunteers for health campaigns (Valle Orozco 2010: 176). Ortega is in line with a general trend of the Latin American left: the search for models for increased popular participation and a deepening of democracy. But, as pointed out by Kirby and Cannon (2012), there are inherent dilemmas within state-led forms of popular participation. For Ortega's critics, the CPC are nothing more than an attempt at entrenching the FSLN's political power by creating a party-controlled structure that distributes benefits for clientilistic purposes. Studies of the CPC confirm that they are largely controlled by the party and serve to promote its interests, even if the welfare benefits distributed are normally not restricted just to party members or sympathisers (Stuart Almendárez 2009; Bay-Meyer 2013). The CPCs have sidelined and in practice replaced the Development Committees that had been established a few years earlier to ensure civil society participation in planning at municipal and higher levels (Prado/Mejía 2009; Valle Orozco 2010: 166). Thus, establishing the CPC has both given the governing party a direct hold over parts of civil society, and simultaneously reduced the influence and importance of the segments of civil society outside party control.

More ominously, there are also informal practices for inhibiting oppositional activity within civil society. Valle Orozco describes the systematic use of intimidation and violence in connection with public demonstrations and protests. During the Ortega period, there have been strikes and protests from different groups – transport workers, doctors, teachers, civil society organisations and political parties. Generally, these legal demonstrations have been met by counter-demonstrations by FSLN sympathisers prone to initiate violence with fists, sticks, stones and even homemade explosives. The police have done little to intervene and stop this violence. Furthermore, leaders of mobilisations against government policies have experienced threats, vandalism and violence before or after the protests (Valle Orozco 2010: 172-175). Thus, there are attempts at stifling protest through the creation of a climate of fear, reminiscent of the *turbas divinas* of the 1980s.

The case of the consumer organisation RNDC may serve to illustrate another change for civil society. The organisation was successful in mobilising large groups of people for protests against privatisation under president Bolaños. Led by the outspoken Ruth Selma Herrera, the RNDC did not identify with any party and maintained critical distance from the FSLN. Yet, there were common interests between the two. RNDC was, for instance, highly successful in mobilising people for demonstrations against electricity privatisation, as it could draw on the grassroots activists of the FSLN. This 'strategic alliance' gave the RNDC a mobilising capacity and an agenda-setting impact it would not have had on its own. Since the change of government, however, the RNDC has had to give up public campaigns and mass demonstrations. A representative explained to me that, since Ortega's election, the RNDC can no longer draw on the Sandinista grassroots structures for popular mobilisation. "The irony", he said, "is that while the current government is more supportive [of consumers] than the previous ones, this still leaves them with less possibility to mobilise and protest."[3]

Instead, the organisation decided that its best chance of wielding influence was by developing legal and technical proposals for ministries and the National Assembly party benches. The RNDC has, for instance, elaborated proposals for new laws on micro-credit and regulating the use of credit cards. While the laws have not been adopted, there have been

tangible results, such as new regulations on the interest rates that credit card companies are allowed to charge. A main issue for the RNDC during the former government had been to protest against the privatisation of electricity distribution. Now, the focus shifted to acquiring professional expertise and studying the current institutional, legislative and economic arrangements of the electricity sector, as a basis for coming up with proposals for an improved regulatory framework. "We are today the organisation with the deepest knowledge of how Nicaragua's energy system and electricity market functions", I was told in 2011. This shift in organisational strategy was also reflected in its staff. New, young and professional people were hired. At the same time, former key staff left, including Ruth Selma Herrera, who was given 'an offer she couldn't refuse', as director of the Nicaraguan Water and Sanitation Enterprise. Additionally, other employees were recruited into government positions. Whether this reflected a strategy of the new regime to co-opt critical voices – as some have alleged – or was simply a way of recruiting qualified people, the net effect has been that organisations like the RNDC have lost experienced staff members.

As with many Nicaraguan NGOs, the RNDC has been highly dependent on aid funding. Since 2007, however, almost all the European bilateral donors, including Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the UK, have closed down or dramatically reduced their aid programmes. In terms of state-to-state aid, Nicaragua has been more than compensated by the new support from Venezuela. However, for Nicaraguan NGOs, there has been a drastic drop in available funding, and competition for what is left is becoming increasingly hard. Many organisations have had to reduce their activity, lay off staff, and sometimes stop operating completely. This was the fate of the RNDC. According to its former coordinator, the organisation had been struggling financially since 2009, and had to close down in January 2012 (El Nuevo Diario, 30.3.2012).

While being a special case, the transformation and fall of the RNDC can be seen as emblematic for some of the changes that Nicaraguan civil society has undergone. The organisation lost its mobilising capacity, a number of its key people, and eventually its funding, and had to close down. The net effect is that the current regime has been quite successful in curbing civil society protests. Grassroots activist structures previously

supplying manpower to turbulent mass demonstrations have largely been transformed into the neighbourhood committees (CPC) that perform local administrative functions. The visibility and influence of the many Managua-based and outspoken critical NGOs, on the other hand, has waned as donor funds have become greatly reduced and they are facing increasing formal and informal restrictions. The surviving NGOs have reduced their activity levels and/or shifted their work from lobbying and awareness-raising towards more service-delivery type programmes. Currently it makes less sense to talk of NGOisation, while state penetration of and control over civil society has increased.

4. Concluding remarks

The above condensation of 30-40 years of history is of course an oversimplification. Important distinctions and processes have been left out. I have, for instance, not been able to present the role of the media or the churches. However, this sketched history of civil society is useful for offering a perspective through which to understand and assess the changes, and for showing how the concept of civil society can be most usefully employed. By way of conclusion, I will draw out some lessons.

Firstly, the case shows how a focus on civil society can be useful for understanding evolving state-society relations. The fact that Nicaragua is such a special case – where dramatic regime changes have taken place over a relatively short time period, and where development aid has played such an important role – makes it particularly relevant. In order to capture these changes, it has been necessary to operate with a more analytic concept of civil society than the fuzzy understanding that dominates within development circles. In particular, the idea of civil society as inherently representing certain values, such as democracy and human rights, needs to be discarded. Likewise, the related notion of civil society as harmonious, with all its associations pulling in the same direction, is a myth. By looking at civil society without any such presuppositions, we can empirically investigate the contradictions within, and the evolving relations to, the state.

Secondly, the case shows that the dividing lines between state, civil society and markets are not fixed and eternal. In the transition to the

neoliberal period, state functions were transferred to civil society. At the same time, the market expanded through the privatisation of state companies and the abandonment of price controls and other regulations. The transition after Ortega returned to power has maintained the border between state and market, but relations between state and civil society have shifted considerably. Analytically, perhaps the greatest change is the way that the Ortega government has attempted to 'penetrate' civil society through the creation of the party-controlled CPC. This implies a blurring of the boundary between state and civil society, echoing the situation during the 1980s.

Thirdly, the example of Nicaragua illustrates the important role of aid in structuring civil society. There is a direct effect in the formation of a new segment of civil society 'created in the image of development aid' – that is, the NGO sector of largely Managua-based organisations staffed with middle class professionals mastering the development jargon and capable of fulfilling the planning and reporting requirements of the donors. While there are strengths to such an NGOised civil society, some of its vulnerabilities become very evident when funding becomes scarcer after Ortega returns to the presidency. By pushing for and supporting structural adjustment and a reduced state during the liberal period, aid also contributed to the shifting of functions from the state to civil society.

Fourthly, while it makes analytic sense to distinguish the spheres of state, civil society, and market, it is often impossible to empirically draw any well-defined separating lines between them. Some civil society organisations operate according to market logics and fulfil state functions, thus embodying aspects of three of the analytical spheres. In particular, the way the two Sandinista regimes have sought to dominate civil society – ideologically as well as organisationally – imply a form of penetration that is challenging to deal with analytically. Similarly, while development cooperation can be seen as another analytical sector, outside civil society and against which it must be defined, we see that its logic becomes internalised within aid-dependent segments of civil society – another form of penetration. Thus, an empirical investigation must be attuned to the way that the interfaces between spheres are constituted, and to the fact that clear dividing lines cannot be assumed.

1 Gramsci's notion of civil society as a site of ideological struggle is useful as a counterweight to notions of a harmonious civil society. This does not mean that the present article builds on Gramsci's full social theory.
2 Empirically, the article builds on close to 30 years engagement with Nicaragua and its civil society. Six weeks of data collection in 2005, and two field periods of two weeks each, in October-November 2011 and April 2012, were used for targeted data collection on civil society issues. The two following subsections, on the period up to 2006, are largely based on Borchgrevink (2006), where I give a more detailed description and a wider set of references.
3 Giovanny Gonzalez, interviewed in the office of RNDC, 3 November 2011.

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Abstracts

While the term 'civil society' is frequently used in academic writings and development discourses, there is a tendency to conflate different and potentially conflicting meanings of the concept. This article uses a historical analysis of Nicaragua to develop a more useful understanding of civil society. Nicaragua has undergone dramatic political changes over the past 35 years, including significant changes to its civil society. I argue that assumptions of civil society's value orientation must be discarded; that boundaries between civil society and the state are neither fixed nor absolute; and that development cooperation has important structuring effects for civil society in aid-dependent countries.

‚Zivilgesellschaft' ist im wissenschaftlichen und entwicklungspolitischen Diskurs ein häufig verwendeter Begriff. Doch es gibt die Tendenz, verschiedene und potenziell widersprüchliche Bedeutungen des Konzeptes

zu vermengen. Am Beispiel einer historischen Analyse Nicaraguas möchte dieser Artikel ein nützlicheres Verständnis von Zivilgesellschaft entwickeln. Dort gab es während der letzten 35 Jahre dramatische politische Verschiebungen mit signifikanten zivilgesellschaftlichen Auswirkungen. Es wird argumentiert, dass auf Annahmen über die Werteorientierung einer Zivilgesellschaft verzichtet werden sollte, dass die Grenzen zwischen Zivilgesellschaft und Staat weder fixiert noch absolut sind und dass Entwicklungszusammenarbeit wichtige strukturierende Einflüsse auf die Zivilgesellschaft in von Entwicklungshilfe abhängigen Empfängerländern hat.

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Journal für Entwicklungspolitik XXXI 1-2015, S. 48–64

NGOs, Aid Withdrawal and Exit Strategies

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1. Introduction

Civil society is being profoundly affected by a rapidly changing global environment, where economic recession in some parts of the world and economic growth in others is transforming the aid landscape and the nature of partnerships between northern and southern organisations. However, contradictions are also emerging. Civil society organisations have negotiated new roles in dialogue over development issues at the global level, such as the post-2015 framework, and development effectiveness. Several major donors are producing policies to enhance how they support civil society in development, demonstrating its recognised value (Hayman 2012). Development assistance channelled through or by non-governmental organisations continues to grow (OECD 2013a; RoA 2014). Yet, civil society organisations and activists in many countries are experiencing repression from government authorities (CIVICUS 2013; RoA 2014). In many developed countries, organisations are facing two concurrent challenges: cuts in public and private funding, and pressure to demonstrate tangible results.

Within this changing global aid and development dynamic, the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC) began to observe that many international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) were ending projects, programmes and partnerships in some countries. While INGOs are constantly restructuring and adapting, shifting in response to development needs, strategic priorities, and funding opportunities, there appeared to be a marked increase in exit processes. INGOs are actively seeking examples of good practice and knowledge on how to plan their exit, including such issues as: how to prepare partners and staff; principles to apply; ensuring sustainability of partners, interventions and activi-

ties; knowing when is the right time to withdraw support; monitoring exit processes; and building capacity prior to exit. INGOs are keen to discuss and share knowledge on this topic in safe spaces. Nevertheless, few are analysing or documenting experiences of exit internally, and fewer still are sharing those experiences externally by publishing or disseminating findings openly, so that lessons can be learned. Moreover, INGOs rarely seem to be aware of existing research or publicly available materials on aid exit.

Reflections on the future of aid and international development at the global level, as well as empirical studies on specific INGOs, recognise how INGOs are caught up in changes to development policy and financing. However, there is a lack of studies analysing aid withdrawal in relation to INGOs. This article starts addressing this gap. It draws on data gathered since 2012 through observational and participatory research with INGOs, including data on exit patterns and processes from 17 European INGOs. It firstly explores where the INGOs are withdrawing from and why, then interrogates the processes of exit used by INGOs and the challenges they face, including the sharing of knowledge and experience within the sector. The paucity of research on this topic between macro-level debates and individual studies represents a significant gap in our understanding of how NGOs are adapting to global shifts.

2. Background, methodology and findings

2.1 Aid withdrawal, NGOs and exit strategies in the international development context

International aid has been going through considerable changes in the last decade, in line with shifts in the global political economy (Severino/Ray 2009, 2010; Kanbur/Sumner 2012; Kharas/Rogerson 2012; Thomas 2013; RoA 2014; Alonso et al. 2014). Overall amounts of development financing have increased; however, the actors, channels, forms, functions and recipients have undergone major transformations. Notable trends of relevance to this piece are debates around aid to middle income countries (Kanbur/Sumner 2012; Thomas 2013; Herbert 2013), debates around support for poor countries or poor people (Wood/Tiwari 2012; Sumner 2013), and fragmentation of aid, with many new actors playing a greater

role in development activities. Civil society actors and organisations, including INGOs, have been caught up in these changes. INGOs are important conduits of both public and private aid, and although accurate statistics are not available, both the total number of NGOs worldwide and the volume of finance they channel are considered to be rising (Sianes 2013; OECD 2013a; Tomlinson 2014).

However, the greater involvement of a wider pool of actors in international development, including private foundations, the private sector, and NGOs based in the global south, has created competition for INGOs. Many that receive a considerable proportion of their funding from traditional donor agencies have been affected by cuts to public aid funds, decisions by aid agencies to widen the actors they engage with, and reductions in aid to emerging economies. In addition to funding, INGOs have faced challenges over accountability, effectiveness and legitimacy (Pratt 2009; Dubochet 2012; Popplewell 2013; Sianes 2013; RoA 2014; Elbers/Schulpen 2015).

Several studies have explored how particular INGOs are adapting to the changing context, analysing the processes that INGOs go through in order to adjust to meet new demands from donors, publics and partners (see Dubochet 2012; Elbers 2012; Elbers/Schulpen 2015). These studies bring depth to the global debates on the future of aid, highlighting the lived realities of organisations facing major change. In this environment, INGOs have to make decisions about where they are working and how. To get from where they are now to where they either want to be or need to be requires them to halt some activities and relationships.

Although there is a substantial body of literature on the purpose and impacts (positive and negative) of aid delivered by global institutions, the governments of developed countries, and international NGOs, much of this does not engage with the issue of exit strategies or withdrawal processes in practice. Authors that do discuss aid exit explicitly (see Easterly 2006; Moyo 2009; Fee 2012) rarely engage with the practical side of withdrawal, but tend to focus on arguments for an end to aid because of its distortive or dependency-inducing effects. They do not discuss *how* aid should be withdrawn, the intertwined systems that need to be dismantled, the impact of that process on the people and organisations involved, and the consequences that withdrawal might have for the sustainability of development activities in the short to medium-term.

A second strand of literature contributes useful insights into processes of aid exit with reference to specific countries, donors and cases. Research includes reflections on the politics of withdrawal (Davis/Sankar 2006; Slob/Jerve 2008), as well as practical guidance for donors and NGOs (Levinger/McLeod 2002; Roger/Macias 2004a, 2004b; Gardner et al. 2005; Kvinna till Kvinna 2011). This literature provides valuable insights into the reasons for aid withdrawal in specific cases as well as approaches to developing exit strategies. However, there are few recent studies in this pool, and none that engage with broader patterns of withdrawal.

Finally, literature on partnership and relationships between northern and southern-based NGOs often touches on aid withdrawal (James 1994; Fowler 2000a, 2000b; Brehm 2001; Eriksson Baaz 2005; Keystone Accountability 2011; Elbers 2012). Issues examined include capacity building of local organisations as a prerequisite for partners to become self-sufficient, and interrogations of the power dynamics behind the idea of partnership when relationships rest upon funding. This literature also explores relationships beyond aid and provides important guidance on dilemmas facing INGOs. This article builds particularly on the latter two bodies of work and in doing so seeks to address the gap in the more macro-level political economy analyses.

2.2 Study methodology and findings

In 2009, researchers at INTRAC began writing about the impact of shifts in the global environment on civil society dynamics, observing how these were affecting countries reaching middle income or lower middle income status (Pratt 2009, 2010). This was further debated at a conference in December 2011 attended by nearly 100 representatives of civil society organisations, international NGOs, donor agencies, and civil society support organisations. Here, NGOs raised the challenge of the process of exit from partnerships in the emerging context (INTRAC 2011). Since then, aid withdrawal and how it relates to broader developments in the global political economy have become increasingly salient amongst NGOs. Ever more NGOs and private foundations are contacting INTRAC to discuss approaches to exit and how to ensure sustainability of local partners and development interventions.

In 2012, the INTRAC research team, funded by several INGOs,[1] was tasked with providing further reflection on several key lines of enquiry: to review existing work on exit strategies; explore aid withdrawal challenges facing northern NGOs as budgets and portfolios change; understand the perspective from southern partners; and examine creative ways of redefining partnerships. During initial discussions, the INGOs involved recognised that this was not a new topic, but they were concerned about an apparent wave of withdrawals, insufficient understanding of this phenomenon, and a paucity of tools to deal with this. The data presented here focus on what is happening amongst northern-based INGOs.

In an initial survey in 2012, eight European-based INGOs listed 21 countries which they had already withdrawn from in the years between 2007 and 2012, or were planning to withdraw from imminently. These were: Angola, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cameroon, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), East Timor, Ecuador, Eritrea, Honduras, India, Kenya, Laos, Nepal, Peru, Philippines, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Uganda. Of these, the following countries were experiencing withdrawal from more than one INGO: Angola, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, India, Honduras, Laos, Nepal, Philippines, and South Africa (INTRAC 2012a).

Further exploration was carried out at a workshop in November 2012 attended by representatives of 22 different European INGOs, NGO networks and associations, amongst which were seven of the original eight. These were mainly medium-sized or large INGOs, providing multiple programmes across development and humanitarian sectors, but the list also included more issues-based, smaller INGOs and networks. Participating INGOs were asked about the countries from which they were withdrawing. 16 provided this information: they described 62 cases of programme, project or partnerships closure covering 49 countries and regions (INTRAC 2012b). Additional data were subsequently provided by several of these INGOs, and by May 2013 we had a dataset covering 86 cases of withdrawal by 17 INGOs from 49 countries and regions.[2] Within this dataset, five organisations were exiting from India, five from the Philippines, and four from Cambodia. Amongst the 17 INGOs were several that were withdrawing from more than five countries, with one agency withdrawing from 14 in total.

The INGOs that provided these data were self-selecting, and there are many limitations in the research. We were unable to probe deeply into the responses but only asked simple questions around where INGOs were exiting from, why and how. We did not interrogate sufficiently *what* INGOs were withdrawing from, i.e. what types of programmes or projects, whether they were short-term or long-term interventions with rolling funding or short-term contracts, and with what forms of local presence or partnerships.

However, the initial mapping exercise highlights some important issues. While we had expected emerging economies to be prime candidates for withdrawal (e.g. India, the Philippines, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico and Angola), the list included many examples of withdrawal from low-income countries or lower-middle income countries with ongoing high development challenges, such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos and Nepal. Moreover, there are countries which constitute difficult political environments for NGOs to work in, but which are amongst the poorest in the world, such as DRC and Rwanda. The list also included several post-communist countries which saw a large inflow of NGOs in the mid-1990s, but have experienced gradual pull-back since the mid-2000s (Buxton 2011). We had anticipated more concentration of countries and were surprised by the range of countries.

At the November 2012 workshop further questions were posed around reasons for withdrawal, the process of exit and subsequent relationships. The reasons can be grouped into six categories; most respondents gave at least two reasons for their decision to withdraw:

- Funding: in 28 cases (out of the 62 cases offered at the workshop) withdrawal was due to cuts in the overall budget of the INGO or cuts in specific programme budgets.
- Strategic: 32 cases were described as being in response to changes in strategic direction at an organisational level, de-prioritisation of countries or the closure of isolated projects.
- Country progress: in 14 cases, exit was based on an analysis of the rate of economic growth or poverty reduction in the country, and an assessment of whether continued support was required.
- Political: this category included withdrawal because of corruption, forced exit and shrinking political space for civil society to operate in,

thereby affecting the ability of the INGO to function. This was given as the reason for withdrawal in two cases.
- Added value: in three cases, the work of the organisation was assessed as no longer having clear added value, or other organisations were doing similar work to greater effect in the same location.
- Cost effectiveness: in four cases, high operating costs (e.g. Angola and DRC), poor value for money, poor efficiency, lack of progress and poor results underpinned the withdrawal.

Strategic and funding reasons provided the main explanations. These were interlinked in the INGO narratives. Funding squeezes have been profound for some NGOs, but funding was rarely given as the only explanation. The financial climate was considered by many participants to have been a catalyst for reviewing priorities, activities and relationships in order to lead to better programmes, more targeted activities, more strategic partnerships, and better results.

As regards processes of exit, most organisations phased their exit over a period of 18 months to three years. This was often coupled with capacity building (specified for 14 cases), and in five cases fundraising support was mentioned. In four cases, the INGO reached out to others within their own networks, such as the Act Alliance or Caritas, to take over support for particular partners.

In 31 cases the relationship after withdrawal was described as 'ended'. However, a few have or intended to retain relationships with former partners. One organisation had maintained a small funding window so that it could continue to provide ad-hoc support to some strategic partners in countries from which it had exited. Others had shifted to an advocacy-based relationship, or maintained a formal connection, such as through the INGO remaining on a partner's advisory board. For many, a more informal relationship remained, primarily through INGO networks and alliances.

3. Discussion: interrogating the 'why' and the 'how'

The study started from the perception that economic crises in several European countries were leading to withdrawal from primarily middle-income countries. What emerged was a more complex picture that

reflects many of the broader trends in aid debates, and the study thus only scratched the surface. Concentrating on withdrawal from *countries* often masked nuances within country programmes where it was only particular partnerships that were ending, but where INGOs were in fact strengthening collaboration with other partners in the same country. Some of the INGOs in our pool of participants were starting up work in new countries. Furthermore, there are distinct differences between INGOs that are closing a local office, those that are ending projects and programmes that may have been finite, and those that are ending financial support to a long-term local partner.

3.1 Why

Three trends provide explanations for the findings and patterns: aid shifts; different needs in emerging economies; and aid effectiveness. Firstly, economic downturn in OECD countries is often the key explanation for large-scale aid programme reductions by governments, e.g. Ireland, Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal. However, other countries less affected by financial difficulties have also made considerable cuts to international development budgets, e.g. Belgium and the Netherlands (OECD 2012, 2013b). Political change has led to a restructuring of development assistance, for example with the merging of foreign ministries and development cooperation portfolios in countries such as Canada and Australia, and to an enhanced connection between aid, security and trade, as has happened in the Netherlands. This reflects the re-emergence of more strategic aid, away from the rights-based, poverty-focused approach that dominated the 1990s and 2000s (RoA 2012). In several countries, moreover, government policies with regard to civil society are changing. In the Netherlands, for example, INGOs have long relied for a very high proportion of their income on public resources, and will face major cuts in the coming years (private communications; RoA 2012: 236). The European Commission, as well as Denmark and Norway, have developed new civil society policies and strategies which have placed the funding arrangements of INGOs into the spotlight, and which demonstrate how donors are considering alternative ways of funding civil society in developing countries (Norad 2008; Fällman 2012; Giffen 2013). These shifts have considerable knock-on effects for INGOs which receive a high proportion of their funding from govern-

ments, leading to tough choices being made about programme sizes and staffing. Economic crisis also affects private donations. In Ireland, reductions in donations from the public, as well as the government, to international development have been considerable (Popplewell 2013).

Secondly, economic growth in middle and lower middle income countries is providing a catalyst for the reduction in programme and project aid to these countries, or to a move to more technical assistance and soft loans (DFID 2012; OECD 2013b; Thomas 2013; Herbert 2013; Tomlinson 2014). This is sparking considerable debate about where aid should be concentrated, including amongst larger INGOs, many of which are reviewing whether or not they should be working in middle income countries and, if so, with what types of support and in what types of relationships (Kanbur/Sumner 2012; Thomas 2013).

Finally, there is pressure in many OECD countries for demonstrable evidence of the impact of aid. Among the reasons for withdrawal listed by our sample were organisations' inability to articulate the added value of their support and its cost effectiveness. Since the early 2000s there has been much debate in the development sector around the effectiveness and efficiency of development interventions and aid (Hayman 2012), which has led to growing pressure on INGOs to demonstrate results from their work (Du Toit 2012; Sianes 2013). The effectiveness agenda has stimulated reflection on numbers of projects and partners, arguably leading to a more rational distribution of resources. Our sample included examples where the INGO provided isolated support to one partner in an entire country based on long-term historical ties, but with an unclear rationale in relation to the wider goals of the INGO. Of greater concern is where pressure to be efficient and cost-effective leads INGOs to withdraw from fragile contexts which are expensive to work in, where insecurity is high, and where impact may be harder to demonstrate because of the environment, for example DRC and Eritrea.

3.2 How

Interrogating the process by which programmes are closed and partnerships ended reveals a pattern of weak knowledge sharing and organisational angst, set against a backdrop of a growing awareness that the global aid system is changing and the role of INGOs is in flux. Most of the organ-

isations in our sample had a phased process of exit which involved support for partners to find alternative funders or to build capacity for sustainability. However, most also emphasised admitted weaknesses in their planning and internal principles and strategies for exit.

In theory, good practice would dictate that when establishing projects or working relationships, INGOs and their southern partners should build an exit strategy into the design, incorporating the capacity building of partners. There should be a clear rationale for beginning a funding-based partnership and a clear path towards the end of the relationship, enabling transparency and avoiding dependency (Levinger/McLeod 2002; Roger/Macias 2004a, 2004b; Gardner at al. 2005). However, this is hard to achieve in reality, as the needs of projects evolve over time and as mitigating circumstances upset linear trajectories towards specified objectives. Development seldom follows the plan. In practice, the process is rarely simple, and numerous partnerships and projects have no exit strategy in place; even if they did, the strategy would often be irrelevant at the time the decisions on final exit were made because of modifications in activities over time (Brehm 2001).

The INGOs in our study were all building exit strategies as they were faced with withdrawal, but many lacked clear internal guidelines. The reason for aid withdrawal tended to strongly affect the process. Withdrawal on account of economic constraints can quickly undermine the ideal exit process. Within our sample was an example of a planned three-year phased process, which was progressively cut back because the financial situation became more constricted. Although the final closure was positively portrayed in public, internally the process was more contentious. A structured review process, with strong partner engagement in the decisions and designs for withdrawal, was more likely to be a positive experience. However, many of the participants explained that, although partners would ideally be consulted, and certainly informed about exit processes, very often the design was a top-down imperative from headquarters or country offices. Furthermore, a long-term partnership or programme of work with exit built in can be easily upset by deeper strategic decisions about the structure and objectives of an INGO. Amongst our participants were INGOs which were going through major re-organisations that were resulting in exit processes, for example Everychild, and country chapters of Save the Children and Oxfam.

While often there is a desire to evaluate the impact of exit at a subsequent date, very few INGOs manage to do this; fewer still publicly share the results of such exercises. An exception is the Swedish INGO Kvinna till Kvinna (2011), which withdrew from Croatia in 2006 after 13 years. Withdrawal was based on an assessment of the success of the programme, and therefore a reduction in need. The women's groups supported were considered strong enough to stand alone. Kvinna till Kvinna reviewed their withdrawal after two years. Partners struggled in the first year, partly because they had not sufficiently grasped what withdrawal would mean. This indicated a weakness in discussion and communication on both sides. There were debates about whether the withdrawing partner should take responsibility for finding new donors for partners, or whether the responsibility was rather to ensure that partners had the competencies to access new resources. Kvinna till Kvinna came to accept that not all former partners would continue to exist. Organisations that knew what they wanted and had the strongest capacity were the most sustainable. The downsides of withdrawal were that regional networks weakened, as it was hard to fund cross-national interaction; activities became more localised and inward looking. Women's groups also became quieter in their watchdog role, as they were more dependent on national funds (Kvinna till Kvinna 2011; INTRAC 2012b). Similar dynamics are evident in other cases.

4. Conclusion

Debates about when to plan for exit and how to do it continually arise in international development. Likewise, re-strategising, realignment and reorientation are part of a regular cycle for INGOs. However, there has been a growing interest among European-based INGOs in aid withdrawal and exit issues since about 2011, which is reflective of an increase in official development aid being withdrawn from a number of countries as part of changes in the financing of development. Our research started from a simplistic hypothesis about economic decline in some parts of the world and growth in others leading to aid exit by NGOs, and a questioning of the absence of data about these patterns. The data gathered reflect wider trends in international development: uncertainties about the future of INGOs,

the future of their activities in countries they have long supported through partnerships, networks and local offices, and the wider sustainability of civil society. As several civil society analysts have been warning INGOs for some time (see Fowler/Malunga 2010; Tandon/Brown 2013), the changes in the international development environment will have significant consequences for the sector both in the north and the south.

Aid exit creates existential dilemmas within INGOs about the rhetoric and reality of their partnerships, their added value into the future, and practical challenges around where to work, how and why. Even where phase-out, hand-over or exit is built in from the outset, the process will never be straightforward or non-contentious as there are myriad interests at stake, including those of local staff. All too often, exit is not inherently built into the programme, project or partnership, or at least not in a way that is relevant when exit becomes an imminent reality; numerous practical issues need to be addressed, which can be difficult and often demoralising. INGOs want to be responsible partners, to ensure sustainability of their partners or work, but struggle to know how to do this; and many would like to know about the impact of withdrawal but rarely manage to evaluate the process.

While some literature exists to support INGOs, many organisations are either unaware of or are not working with this. The individuals or teams within INGOs who are grappling with aid withdrawal processes feel that they are scrabbling around in the dark. It begs the question of why there is limited sharing of knowledge to date on the experiences of aid exit, and why INGOs do not appear aware of existing knowledge. Despite a desire to share and learn, very few INGOs have put their data into the public domain or documented exit processes. This compounds the weak evidence base about the scale and impact of exit, and the fuller picture of how global aid dynamics are affecting INGOs and the local organisations they work with.

Our research to date has focused on withdrawal by the giver. There remain substantial gaps in publicly available empirical evidence on the experience of withdrawal from the recipient perspective. A greater commitment amongst INGOs to document and publicly share their experiences would go some way to creating a knowledge base from which evidence can be derived, and which would enable INGOs to build more account-

able and coherent exit strategies into their ethos and practice. This is vital if INGOs are to play a strong role in the complex future of development financing, if they are going to change how they engage with partners, how they deliver aid interventions, and how they provide support in order to strengthen local civil society, ensure sustainability, reduce dependence, and allow for painless and smooth exit processes when the time is right.

1 The initial research was funded by INTRAC's NGO Research Programme, with support from Broederlijk Delen, Concern Worldwide, Cordaid, DanChurch Aid, ICCO, Norwegian Church Aid, and Save the Children Denmark.

2 Participating INGOs had headquarters in a number of European countries, including the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Norway and Austria.

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Abstracts

Within the changing global economic and political environment for civil society and international development, a growing number of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) appear to be withdrawing from projects, programmes, and partners in developing countries.

However, there is little publicly available evidence about this phenomenon and its impact on both INGOs and their civil society partners. Drawing on data gathered through participatory research and exchange with INGOs based in several European countries, this article highlights the range of countries and regions affected by aid exit, some reasons behind withdrawal, approaches taken, and various challenges and dilemmas that INGOs face. It questions the contradiction between a desire amongst INGOs to learn from others about exit strategies, and the lack of accessible documentation and data made available by INGOs about their own experiences for others to use.

Angesichts des sich wandelnden politischen und ökonomischen Umfelds von Zivilgesellschaft und internationaler Entwicklung scheint sich eine wachsende Zahl internationaler Nichtregierungsorganisationen (INROs) aus Projekten, Programmen und Partnerschaften in Entwicklungsländern zurückzuziehen. Es gibt jedoch wenig öffentlich zugängliche Informationen, wie sich dieses Phänomen sowohl auf die INROs als auch auf deren zivilgesellschaftliche Partnerorganisationen auswirkt. Dieser Artikel präsentiert Erkenntnisse, die durch teilhabende Forschung mit und die Untersuchung von INROs in mehreren Ländern Europas gewonnen wurden. Er zeigt regionale Schwerpunkte, Gründe sowie unterschiedliche Ansätze des Ausstiegs aus der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit auf und verweist auf Herausforderungen und Dilemmata, mit denen INROs konfrontiert sind. Er thematisiert auch den Widerspruch, dass INROs zwar daran interessiert sind, von den Ausstiegsstrategien anderer Organisationen zu lernen, dass sie aber zugleich ihre eigenen Erfahrungen nicht dokumentieren und anderen nicht zur Verfügung stellen.

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Journal für Entwicklungspolitik XXXI 1-2015, S. 65–82

Ethical, Managerial and Methodological Perspectives in Knowledge Creation in Two Finnish Civil Society Organisations

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1. Introduction

The knowledge creation achieved through monitoring and evaluation in development civil society organisations (CSOs) has gained increasing attention in recent years. The literature has engaged with the questions of multiple accountabilities (Ebrahim 2007; Jordan/van Tuijl 2007), the need for more transparent knowledge production (Horton/Roche 2010), the power relations between Western expert and indigenous knowledge (Swai 2010; Dar 2014), the dilemmas between managerial control needs and value-based partnership aspirations (Wallace et al 2006), and between the pressure to measure tangible outcomes and efforts for aiming at long-term societal transformation (Mitlin et al. 2007). Today, CSOs in development face increasing challenges in regard to knowledge creation, not least as a result of three prominent trends in the international institutional field of development (Tvedt 2006). These include results-based management (RBM), evidence-based policy-making, and the human rights-based approach (HRBA). The RBM emphasises the need for accurate and systematic knowledge collection within development interventions. The evidence-based drive, inspired by different academic disciplines, has extended the debate to include a variety of methodological approaches to impact assessment. HRBA, for its part, has for decades provided an entire paradigm for development cooperation, and was explicitly adapted also in the development policy of Finland in 2012 (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2012).

In principle, HRBA has been considered a shift away from the needs-based and charity-based approaches to development (OHCHR 2010: 10; Katsui 2012). It suggests that the focus in development practice should

be on supporting the process of realising the rights of rights-holders by increasing the capacity of both rights-holders and duty-bearers. In this process, the notions of empowerment and participation have been prevalent. Consequently, there is a growing body of guidelines on how to mainstream the HRBA (e.g. Kirkeman/Martin 2007; UNDG 2003; UNDP 2006; UNESCAP 2012) and much advice on its monitoring and evaluation is available (e.g. OHCHR 2007). However, the application of HRBA at the level of individual organisational management practices is an ongoing process, and requires novel ways of knowledge creation. These new approaches require a successful combination of knowledge perspectives of management, methodology and ethics (Holma/Kontinen 2012; Jauhola/Kontinen 2014), which all set slightly different standards for what is considered relevant and adequate 'knowledge'.

The very notions of monitoring and evaluation are part and parcel of the *management perspective* typically realised through project cycle management (Biggs/Smith 2003). This perspective considers the best ways information can be collected, analysed and reported in order to keep on track in development projects and programmes. The focus is on activities conducted, resources spent, and the extent to which the planned objectives have been achieved. The knowledge perspective of management is often framed by the general aid-effectiveness debate, and guided by, for example, OECD/DAC (1991) evaluation guidelines. Different standardised tools, with widely acknowledged acronyms such as Logical Framework (LFA), Outcome Mapping (OM), or Most Significant Change (MSC) are typical of this perspective (see for example World Bank 2005; Outcome Mapping n/y; Monitoring and Evaluation News n/y). The management perspective stresses the need to turn the complex reality into a 'manageable' one (Davies 2004, 2005). This translation (Mosse 2005) typically leads to a tendency to describe the multi-faceted, often politically messy situations in technical terms, in order to enable intervention designs (Ferguson 1994). At a more practical level of CSO partnerships, the notion of multiple accountabilities is central. Whilst knowledge creation is closely tied to money transfers, control and upward accountability are essential parts of the practice (Townsend/Townsend 2004; Johnson 2001). Less space is left for learning and identification of alternative ways of conducting and evaluating interventions (Johnson et al. 2012; Guijt/Roche 2014).

The *methodological perspective* considers knowledge creation designs in order to ensure validity. A proper design requires an explicit understanding of the nature of change to be measured, and an established way with which to attribute the observed change with the intervention conducted (Roche 2010). The methodological debates on randomised trials (White 2011; Banerjee 2007), often challenged by advocates of participatory approaches (Chambers 2008, 2014), as well as the conversation about the complexity of change (Ramalingam 2013; Davies 2004), have echoed the general methodological debates in social sciences. The criteria for objectivity and validity in randomised trials align with those attached to positivist epistemology, whilst the participatory approach comes close to the principles of social constructionism. However, the hermeneutics and narrative epistemologies (see Bruner 1986; Gadamer 1975), as well as the feminist and postcolonial epistemologies (Harding 2006) prevalent in academia, have not yet, to a great extent, affected the monitoring and evaluation debate (see Davis 2011).

The *ethical* conundrums in development are multi-faceted (Gasper 2004), but in regard to knowledge practices three sets of questions are exceptionally important. First, ethical arguments related to the right to receive information are presented (Horton/Roche 2010). The donors, taxpayers, general public and individual citizens, notwithstanding their legal position, claim the ethical right to know how CSOs have used the money donated. Second, the participatory approach argues that the beneficiaries have an ethical right to participate in the knowledge creation concerning their lives, instead of merely being objects of knowledge production conducted by so-called experts (Chambers 2008; Powell 2006). Third, there is the question of the purposes of knowledge production and the consequent use of knowledge acquired (Johnson et al. 2012). The question of ethics applies especially when problems, flaws and mistakes are revealed. This can, on the one hand, be used for improvement and learning, but on the other, can provide arguments for ceasing the funding allocations.

Finally, when examining the managerial, methodological and ethical knowledge perspectives, the intersectional power relations (Collins 2000) characteristic of the development institution should be acknowledged. First, the historically constructed economic and knowledge-related asymmetries between global North and South play a central role in deciding

how and to what purposes knowledge is created. Both the donor-receiver types of accountability, and the postcolonial legacy of paternalism, of 'knowing what is best for the others', affect the knowledge practices in the CSO partnerships (Ebrahim 2003a, 2003b; Eriksson Baaz 2005). Second, the HRBA and the related concepts of empowerment and participation inherently consider change in existing power relations in specific contexts (Katsui et al. 2014). Gender relationships and women's empowerment have been among the main focuses in development CSOs (Kabeer 1999). However, the power relations addressed in interventions also include those between different economic positions, hierarchical statuses, classes, castes, ethnic and religious groups, disability statuses and political affiliations. Therefore, when monitoring and evaluating, there is an increasing need to create knowledge about the changes in social relationships (Davies 2005).

To conclude, the combination of different knowledge perspectives leads to a variety of dilemmas in knowledge practices in development (Green 2012). Individual CSOs face a demanding task in responding to the variety of challenges and initiating new organisational practices. The aim of this article is to analyse how, and through what kinds of dilemmas, the above-mentioned three knowledge perspectives emerged in two Finnish civil society organisations, in their efforts to improve monitoring and evaluation practices.

2. The case organisations: World Vision Finland and Abilis Foundation

The research material was collected during two sets of research collaborations with Finnish CSOs in 2012–2013. The organisations, *World Vision Finland* and *Abilis Foundation*, aimed to develop new knowledge creation measures to address issues of empowerment and participation. World Vision Finland, established in 1983, engages with child sponsorship, development programmes, emergency aid, and advocacy. The organisation has approximately 30 staff members located in Finland. Its yearly budget is around nine million euros, of which nearly 50 percent comes from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' aid budget. In 2013, it supported 19 community development programmes in Africa, Latin America and Asia. World

Vision Finland is a member of the federative network of World Vision International, which operates in over 100 countries. The overall objective of the network is to contribute to the well-being of children all over the world. For World Vision Finland, the international network provides targets, methods for community development, and templates for programme planning and reporting. World Vision Finland functions as a support office working in partnership with the World Vision offices in programme countries. It channels contributions from individual sponsors and the governmental funds into community development programmes implemented locally. World Vision Finland communicates with its partners mainly through emails, reports, and, additionally, face-to-face meetings during short monitoring trips.

The Abilis Foundation, for its part, was established by a group of Finnish persons with disabilities in 1998, as a grant maker targeting groups and organisations of persons with disabilities in the global South. Its annual budget is around three million euros, most of which comes from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Abilis has 14 staff members based in Finland and 13 partner organisations in as many countries. The partner organisations in the respective countries have a review board consisting of several representatives of local organisations of persons with disabilities (DPOs). The review board reviews and recommends projects to be approved by the Abilis board in the headquarters. Abilis facilitators belong to the partner organisations and are local persons with disabilities who play major roles in grant-making processes through peer-reviews and support. In 2013, Abilis approved 179 new projects and had 270 ongoing projects in 40 countries, 51% of which were in Africa and 46% in Asia. More than half of the projects are income-generating activities for persons with disabilities, while organisational capacity-building and human rights projects are also popular.

The organisations experienced two different needs: World Vision Finland sought for a method for monitoring empowerment in order to complement the existing exhaustive indicators used in its everyday work, and Abilis required more inclusive indicators that would better reflect the changes in the realities of persons with disabilities. In the case of World Vision Finland, as a result of the above-mentioned collaboration with researchers, a method for monitoring empowerment, *Pathways of Empow-*

erment, was initiated (Kontinen/Robinson-Moncada 2014). In Abilis, new sets of indicators for monitoring and evaluation, particularly meant for persons with disabilities in the global South, were created. The data collection methods in both organisations included workshops and interviews, and a survey in the case of Abilis. In World Vision, the research participants were staff of the Finnish organisation and its selected partners in Africa and Asia. In Abilis, almost all the research participants in participatory processes in diverse contexts were persons with disabilities in different countries, such as Bangladesh, Tajikistan and Uganda[1]. In what follows, we describe in detail the dilemmas manifested in regard to the three knowledge perspectives discussed above during these particular processes.

3. Dilemmas in three knowledge perspectives in World Vision Finland and Abilis Foundation

3.1 Ethics: Whose knowledge, whose purposes?

CSOs are typically value-based communities that seek ethical conduct. World Vision's organisational values are based on Christianity, and it is committed to promoting the well-being of all children, their families, and communities. The Abilis Foundation, for its part, focuses on disability rights, to be realised by persons themselves with disabilities. Both organisations are committed to participation and empowerment. The ethical perspectives in regard to knowledge creation revolve around the dilemmas related to the 'right to know' and the 'right to participate'.

The ethical conduit to realising the 'right to know' was shown in the organisations' accountability duties. In World Vision Finland, the right of the individual sponsors and governmental donors to learn about the results was continuously articulated. However, it was also critically observed that the 'right to know' easily turned into a 'right to know about a success'. The emphasis of monitoring was on proving success, whereas the challenges and unintended changes tended not to be considered to the same extent. This, again, hindered deep understanding and learning about the complex processes of empowerment, and resulted in quite simplistic accounts of the perceived changes, and their attribution to the interventions conducted

by the NGO. The emphasis on success was also intertwined with ethical considerations about the consequences of the knowledge created. The need to show success partly resulted from the well-known fear of cuts in funding as a consequence of reporting challenges.

The ethical issues related to the 'right to be heard' are apparent in both organisations' normative commitments. The underlying ethical idea is that those not holding positions of power should be actively involved in knowledge creation. In Abilis, the development of new indicators took into account the ethical aspect of the knowledge creation process. For instance, when one of the new indicators which identified causes of exclusion was asked, it was an empowering experience for many interviewees who participated in the testing phase. One Central Asian woman with a physical disability said, "Previously, I thought I could not participate in anything and that was my destiny. But after being asked that question, I feel I am entitled to participate in different things."

The ethical commitments, however, faced challenges in practice. In Abilis, those with restricted communication abilities had often been previously marginalised from knowledge creation. In World Vision, there was an aspiration to actively include children, women, persons with disabilities, and members of the lower castes. The staff in the programme country offices was often successful in enabling their participation, but was also confronted with resource constraints, and sometimes a reluctance to participate. Building a trusting relationship in encouraging the participation of those not used to being heard, or creating distance from those with the habit of being vocal, is a long process, which includes making changes in the attitudes on the ground. One of the African interviewees illustrated a slow change in gendered participation in a project: "Sometimes, in the first meetings, the women did not come. Just men came. We talked, talked and talked, and the men would say no, women have a lot of work, they cannot come. After many things, they gave us an opportunity to talk to the women. Then, the women were afraid to talk, if you asked their name, they were afraid to tell you. After many training programs, many awareness classes, now the women are coming forward and talking."

3.2 Methodology and management: Keeping on the track of change

Not surprisingly, the management perspective was prevalent in the case organisations, while the in-depth methodological questions were mainly tackled indirectly. The main dilemmas identified in these knowledge perspectives were related to the notions of complexity, validity, and voices.

A dilemma between the needed clarity and complex reality

The management tools used in the case organisations, such as LFA, emphasise clear project models and well-defined indicators to facilitate monitoring at each hierarchical level. However, the recent critical literature has pointed out the complexity of change, unintended consequences, subtle psychological changes, and the realisation that changes are results of many intertwining factors (see Vogel 2012). In the process of discussing the variety of empowerment processes in communities in the World Vision workshops, the participants acknowledged how difficult it was to speak about the processes in other than LFA-terminology, as an excerpt from a workshop discussion in India illustrates: "One problem is, see, we write this in the log-frame language […]. Yeah, we structure the things as in LFA, oh, and now they are asking us to take away our jargon [laughter], the world is full of that jargon".

The critical observations are even more valid in regard to HRBA, where the impact should be seen in the increasing capacity of right-holders to claim their rights and that of duty-bearers to protect, respect and fulfil rights, usually resulting from long-term and complex processes (see Katsui 2012). The notion of empowerment, which was central to both organisations, is itself a complex phenomenon that is difficult to define and therefore it is hard to measure its progress (Alsop/Heinsohn 2005; Ibrahim/Alkire 2007). The partners shared this idea, as illustrated by an African interviewee in the World Vision case: "I think it's very complex, because it has different perspectives. What we call empowerment in our water project will be very different from what I call empowerment in an education project. So I think it's a complicated subject that might need a lot of thought."

In World Vision Finland, the notion of empowerment was used simultaneously in reference to the inner strength of individuals, to a feature of a community, and to a change in the structures of the societal environment. The internationally defined *Child Wellbeing Outcomes and Targets* and an Excel-based *Compendium of Indicators,* with over 100 possible indicators, were considered as useful tools for systematic information collection and programme monitoring in regard to the increase in child wellbeing. According to the interviewees, the relatively new compendium was a good attempt to harmonise indicators at a global level: "Of course, it is not intended to use the entire long list in every programme. There are certain main indicators, but also space left for local, context-specific indicators", stated on of the Finnish interviewees. However, the organisational emphasis on empowerment (World Vision Finland 2012) called for contextual, programme-specific definitions and flexible means of measurement for this specific phenomenon. Moreover, as the complexity increased when it came to the long-term outcomes, the monitoring was often conducted at the level of activities rather than results or outcomes, which seemed to be partly due to the existing tools. A participant in a workshop in World Vision Finland stated: "Of course our questions guide towards the activities, we should not blame the partners for what we require them to do", and an Indian interviewee told : "Among project level empowerment indicator, according to our log-frame, is a number of self-help groups, for example."

Consequently, the method produced in collaboration with the staff concentrated on identification of processes of empowerment. The method starts with searching for a joint definition of empowerment, and identification of intended pathways of empowerment specific to each individual programme, and only thereafter proceeds to identify relevant events showing progress in empowerment (Kontinen/Robinson-Moncada 2014). In Abilis, the complexity of changes in regard to poverty and disability, and the need for multidimensional indicators, was acknowledged. Many interviewees described the difficulty of measuring psychological change in individuals, even though this is the foundation for many visible changes to follow. One of the newly established indicators is related to peer support, since many interviewees mentioned that having such support or a role model were important, even though concrete means of such empowerment had not previously appeared in mainstream indicators.

Dilemmas related to validity and voices

A dilemma related to the methodological perspective was that there seemed to be parallel, and sometimes even contradictory ideas concerning the validity of knowledge created in monitoring and evaluation. The existing measurable indicators, which had wide coverage, were seen as a way to capture objective and valid data to be used in knowledge creation. At the same time, the ability of indicators to ensure validity was questioned, and approaches stressing subjective experiences as criteria for appropriate knowledge were praised. In World Vision Finland, the drafting of indicators in many programmes seemed to have contained some problems with consequences for their ability to create valid knowledge. The Finnish staff stated that sometimes the indicators did not match well with the programme objectives; it was as if the "objectives were bananas that were supposed to be measured by apples". The limited ability of indicators to produce valid knowledge about long-term impacts was also reflected upon. For example, an Indian workshop participant stated: "In the indicator tracking we have only numbers. It is easy for us to do. But how can we capture the impact in our indicator tracking system?"

Additional dilemmas in both organisations resulted from the increasing need to incorporate the quantitative indicators with the qualitative ones, and to produce knowledge about the very process of empowerment. In World Vision, there had been some efforts to use beneficiary life-stories in the framework of the Most Significant Change (Davies/Dart 2005). However, the method was often carried out by presenting one success story to be added to the annual reports. As illustrated by a representative of a Southern partner: "Yes, we collect them, we ask mobilizers if there is any significant change, and we ask them to provide only one story from the particular division. They go and find the best story and give it to us. By collecting all these things we provide one story for the support office." This practice does not provide in-depth knowledge about the variety of changes in people's lives, a result which would require compiling and contrasting different kinds of narratives. The same argument applies to Abilis's final report narratives and the life stories book (Abilis Foundation 2014) which contains 50 life stories. The narratives are not necessarily 'representative' voices of the grantees: they represent the more advantaged ones and thus make empowerment perhaps more visible than is the reality

for many others on the ground. In order to tackle these biases, the method developed in World Vision also gave special attention to the analysis of side-tracking, dead-ends and obstacles in order to highlight the importance of not-so-successful stories for learning purposes. The Abilis Foundation thus created indicators of individual impact beyond organisational ones. In the latter set of indicators, leaders and/or more powerful persons tended to represent the groups, and to focus on success. Today, in the new monitoring and evaluation system, it is, rather than the project leaders, the aforementioned Abilis facilitators – who are local persons with disabilities – who collect personal changes and impacts. In this way, the previously unheard voices of individual project participants are heard on different kinds of changes.

Thus, the bias in narratives used in the monitoring and evaluation was related to power relationships: the donor-recipient relationship, as shown in the need to show success, and the power relationship within the beneficiary communities. The dilemmas in the inclusion of different voices revealed not only differences in the leaders-others positions, but also between genders and within genders, as well as within different forms of disabilities. Two interviewees in India illustrated occasions where relationships between women hindered participation: "the low caste women and the high caste women, they won't sit together. They don't want their food to be cooked together. We are struggling with that and to convince them to get to know each other, to believe each other, to accept each other", and further "the mother-in-law plays a wide role. She's almost dictating to the daughter-in-law, even how often she should eat, and what type of clothes she should wear".

Similar dilemmas in listening to different voices were also apparent in the specific occasions of monitoring trips conducted by the Finnish staff to programme and project countries. Both World Vision and Abilis Foundation considered that indicators and reporting could not substitute for the personal experience achieved during these trips. However, the intention to listen to a wide variety of voices was often hampered by lack of time. While it is taken for granted that the visitors should meet with the community leaders and participate in the official celebrations, the limited time to be spent in the villages led to the ignoring of the points of view of those not in central positions. At the same time, in Abilis a substantial amount of

time was allocated for discussions with the beneficiaries. However, due to the group dynamics, often the more powerful persons tended to dominate discussions, even when efforts were made to create space for other project participants. For instance, women with psychosocial and/or multiple disabilities were too often disproportionally under-represented.

4. Conclusions

We have analysed how three knowledge perspectives and related dilemmas were shown in two Finnish CSOs, as seen in their efforts to develop new monitoring and evaluation methods to capture the phenomena of empowerment and participation. We acknowledged that the CSOs perceive knowledge creation from a strong ethical knowledge perspective, which, however, is often hampered by the realities in practice, and the knowledge demands posed by the international system. Furthermore, we identified a constant dilemma between the need for clarity, as posed by the management perspective, and the complexity of change, as suggested by the methodological discussions and everyday experience. Moreover, the dilemmas between parallel notions of validity, and challenges to the inclusion of voices, were shown.

Our findings indicate that, in their attempts to improve knowledge creation, CSOs relate to all three perspectives in a more or less successful attempt to combine management needs with methodological quality and ethical commitments. Whilst in both organisations, indicators presented a way to produce valid and objective knowledge, there were challenges in regard to these indicators. In a few cases, the indicators did not measure what they were supposed to measure, or, they did not address the issues that were essential for the empowerment processes on the ground. As such, they served more 'tick-the-box' reporting needs than knowledge creation. Second, the experimented narrative approaches easily fell into the pitfall of the selection of a few success stories told by the most powerful beneficiaries. Consequently, they could not capture the rich variety of empowerment processes and their obstacles, and were not beneficial from the point of view of quality knowledge creation. Third, whilst knowledge creation was considered important in the CSOs, its quality was often impaired

by constraints of time, money, skills and/or other resources. The CSOs emphasised the participation of the marginalised, but often in practice ended up interacting mainly with the not-so-marginalised ones, due to busy working schedules of the NGO staff and limited means of reaching the most disadvantaged people and address the root causes for the lack of their participation.

The practical dilemmas related to each of the knowledge perspectives echo the intersectional power relations in both the North-South relationships, and in the working environments of the CSOs. The power relations characteristic of the international aid system affect the ways in which accountability is understood, whose knowledge counts, and who participates in the knowledge creation. In the current context, the need for systemic, accurate and rigorous knowledge creation regarding results, outcomes and impact as suggested by results-based management, and the focus on supporting the realisation of rights in complex processes of exercising citizenship as required by the human rights-based approach, have to be combined in organisational knowledge practices. A search for producing simple knowledge under conditions of increasing complexity, the pressure to show success, and dealing with multi-layered power relations, pose a real challenge for contemporary CSOs. More research is needed on the practical ways the CSO staff deal with these dilemmas in their everyday activities, in which the organisational guidelines have to deal with and adapt to all the intertwining challenges on the ground.

Acknowledgements

The research in World Vision Finland was supported by the Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation-Tekes (grant no. 40489/11) in 2012–2013.

1 The data for the case of World Vision was collected in 2012 and 2013. It includes organisational workshops (n= 7), interviews with the staff of World Vision Finland (n=10) and its selected partner World Visions in Africa and East-Asia (n=26). The data for the case of Abilis Foundation was collected between 2012 and 2013. It includes a focus group discussion of Indian disability NGOs (n=10), interviews with the staff members of Abilis Foundation (n=7), survey of selected partner organisations (n=5) and its selected grantees' staff members and project participants in Cen-

tral and Southern Asia and African countries (n=64). The direct quotes presented in the text are illustrative examples of the data revolving around the selected themes. When interviewed, the interviewees were guaranteed anonymity. Therefore, we do not provide detailed characterisations of the individuals quoted.

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Abstracts

The recent drives for implementation of results-based management and human rights-based approaches in international development have increased pressures to improve and modify monitoring and evaluation systems in CSOs. On the basis of an analysis of two Finnish civil society

organisations (CSOs) committed to participation and empowerment, the article examines dilemmas in practical efforts to develop new approaches to meet the variety of needs. In this context, the ethical, methodological and managerial perspectives on knowledge creation in CSOs are identified and the dilemmas in knowledge practices related to monitoring and evaluation are examined.

Die in letzter Zeit zunehmenden Vorgaben, in der internationalen Entwicklungszusammenarbeit eine ergebnisgeleitete Verwaltung (*results based management* – RBM) sowie menschenrechtsbasierte Ansätze zu implementieren, hat den Druck auf zivilgesellschaftliche Organisationen verstärkt, ihre Monitoring- und Evaluierungsmethoden entsprechend anzupassen. Dieser Beitrag analysiert die Auswirkungen auf zwei finnische Nichtregierungsorganisationen (NROs), deren Schwerpunkt auf Partizipation und Empowerment liegt. Er untersucht die Dilemmata, die in der praktischen Umsetzung der neuen Ansätze und im Bestreben, den verschiedenen Anforderungen gerecht zu werden, entstehen. In diesem Kontext werden auch die ethischen, methodologischen und administrativen Perspektiven auf Wissensproduktion in NROs sowie die Herausforderungen und praktischen Widersprüche, die mit den neuen Formen von Monitoring und Evaluierung einhergehen, untersucht.

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Journal für Entwicklungspolitik XXXI 1-2015, S. 83–99

The Role of the Diaspora in the Civil Society Development of Somalia/Somaliland: Reflections on the Finland-based Somali Diaspora

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1. Introduction

Since the early 1990s and the end of the Cold War, civil society has been perceived as relevant for strengthening development and democracy (Lewis 2002: 569). It became a much used concept in development cooperation, linked to the discourse of 'good governance', in the hope of progressing democratisation and as an answer to poverty and marginalisation (Lewis 2002; Salamon/Sokolowski 2004). Recently, the idea of strengthening civil society as a path to sustainable democratic development has coincided with the discussion of migrants being potential agents of development in their countries of origin; this is a discourse articulated both in academia and in international and regional organisations such as the United Nations, the European Union and the African Union. The term 'diaspora', referring to people living outside of their country of origin, has become a buzzword in these instances (Horst et al. 2010; Turner/Kleist 2013; Sinatti/Horst 2014). Often, the concrete funding schemes supporting the diaspora's role in development work are framed around the civil society sphere, as is the case with the collaboration between the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) and the Somali diaspora. Somalis in Finland have actively set up voluntary associations through which they carry out development projects in their areas of origin, in the process placing the diaspora as an actor in the civil society of Somalia/Somaliland (Horst et al. 2010; Pirkkalainen 2013).

Despite this boost on the policy level, not much research exists on the role of the diaspora in civil society development that analyses different functions of civil society and the diaspora's role in those functions. This

article explores how the diaspora 'fits in', and relates to the civil society in Somalia/Somaliland, particularly in the context of the collapse of the state, prolonged conflict and massive poverty. More specifically, this article assesses the role of the Finnish Somali diaspora from two perspectives: firstly, concerning civil society as an important means of service provision in the context of conflict-ridden areas and extreme poverty; and secondly, concerning civil society insofar as it contributes to democracy.

Firstly, the empirical data and methods, and then secondly the situation in Somalia – particularly in relation to its civil society – are presented. Thirdly, the Somali diaspora, in particular in Finland, and its engagements in Somalia are described. Fourthly, realities in the diaspora's civil society engagement are analysed regarding three issues: the position of the diaspora in the civil society of Somalia/Somaliland, ways of contributing to civil society, and local perceptions of these engagements. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

2. Empirical data and methods

This article is based on empirical data collected for my PhD from multiple sites in Finland and Somaliland (cf. Marcus 1995; Falzon 2009) over a period of four years (2008–2011)[1]. The data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, observations and the gathering of relevant documents. In Finland I interviewed 42 Somalis who were active in voluntary associations. The majority of the interviewees (in total 38) were male, which reflects the fact that most Somali associations in Finland are male-led. The interviewees were between the ages of 23 and 66, well educated, and possessed Finnish citizenship. Most of them were employed in Finland and had lived in Finland since the early 1990s. I also included multiple perspectives in the empirical data, meaning that in addition to representatives of Somali associations I also talked with 'key informants', which involved conducting 17 interviews with representatives of the Finnish authorities from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior, as well as representatives of Finnish development NGOs working in Somalia/Somaliland.

The fieldwork in northern Somalia, in self-proclaimed Somaliland[2], took place in January 2011. I spent a month in the capital city of Hargeisa interviewing Somalis who had returned to Somaliland from various countries, including Finland. I also visited development project sites of Finnish Somalis and interviewed the partner organisations of Finland-based Somali associations. In total I carried out 27 semi-structured interviews with Somalis (eight female, 19 male), and with three key informants of non-Somali origin representing international organisations. Six of the interviewees were Somalis from Finland. The rest of the interviewees were diaspora returnees or visitors from Canada, Sweden, Germany, the USA and Saudi Arabia, or locals. The interviewees were from 20 to over 60 years old, and had at least a BA degree level of education.

For the purposes of this article, analysis of the interviews was carried out through thematising the data: from the interviews, themes relating to civil society engagement, activities of associations, and perceptions of the role of the diaspora were collected and analysed.

3. Civil society in a fragile state

Civil society by definition is often situated outside government control, being non-profit making, self-governing, voluntarily constituted, and outside family life (Salamon/Sokolowski 2004: 66; for a further debate see the articles by Datzberger and Borchgrevink in this issue). This kind of definition of the third sector model is based on the specific historical development of the concept, much influenced by Alexis de Tocqueville (1951 [1835, 1840]), who emphasised the role of associations in balancing the power of the state. Much of the current debate on civil society as a solution to different problems has built on this, by assuming that associations have mediating functions in markets and states, and "are thus key to a number of democratic potentials" (Warren 2001: 58). This perspective refers to the stance of seeing civil society as a form of "prescriptive universalism" (Lewis 2002: 575). It is in differentiated societies that associations are free from economic and political functions, but can have a mediating role in those spheres (Warren 2001: 59).

In the Somali case a few 'problems' arise when civil society is perceived from this 'prescriptive universalist' perspective. The first tricky issue concerning civil society relates to the state. Even if civil society by nature is distinct from the state, it has been argued that a strong civil society requires a strong state (Keane 1998: 68; Salamon/Sokolowski 2004: 70). In the absence of a strong Somali state, civil society actors play the role of service providers and thus are also important actors in development cooperation. On the other hand, when it comes to political forces in Somalia, the troubling aspect for the civil society actors is the existence of violent groups, such as the radical Islamists who target civil society actors (Menkhaus et al. 2010: 325).

The second issue relates to markets and civil society. By definition, civil society associations and their relations are coordinated not on the basis of money but rather on the basis of associative relations. However, in the Somali case, civil society organisations need to generate revenue in order to keep projects running. Moreover, especially in the 1990s, the rise of support for NGOs by funding institutions led to the situation where forming an NGO became a profitable business, leading to the "mushrooming of new 'local NGOs'", which were often clan- or sub-clan based, and which competed for funding (Menkhaus et al. 2010: 329). Many non-profit organisations have thus become indistinguishable from business for profit, and this 'NGO business' is sometimes perceived as elitist by locals (Tiilikainen/Mohamed 2013: 41).

The third issue concerns the voluntary nature of participation in civil society and pluralism in terms of arenas of participation, where there is also "the possibility of exit" (Warren 2001: 59). In the Somali case, much of the political and social life is organised along clan lines, which also characterise the civil society in the Somali context. This raises questions about the voluntary nature of participation: if one is born into a group, it is not a voluntary decision. Moreover, if relations within associations are mediated through clan relations involving trust and mutual dependency, civil society does not easily lead to pluralism or a democratic process in politics.

However, in order to use civil society as an analytical concept in non-western contexts, sensitivities to particular history and context have to be taken into account. In an African context the concept should not be limited to include only formal organisations, but also refer to activities taking place outside formal organisations, and should not focus only on

advocacy and rights, but also on self-help groups that get organised for personal and economic ends. It should also be widened to include kinship and involuntary membership relations (Lewis 2002; Maina 1998). In addition, consideration should be given to the historical processes that have shaped civil society, which in the African context would include taking into account the legacy of colonialism (ibid.).

In the Somali case the colonial period (from 1827 to 1960), during which France, Britain and Italy colonialised Somali regions, has left its imprint on politics. During the colonial times the repressive politics of the colonial powers and the limited capacity of local people to get organised led to very limited formal organising in civil society (Menkhaus et al. 2010: 328). Processes of formal organising became even more restricted during the decades of Siad Barre's regime (1969–1991), which was characterised by forms of oppression such as human rights abuses, widespread corruption and manipulation of clannism, control over people's associations, and lack of freedom of speech (Bradbury 2008: 37). The civil war, which started in 1988, led to the state's collapse in 1991 and has continued since then, is affecting much of the civil society in the Somali context. The early years of the 1990s in particular saw a massive out-migration from conflict areas, and increasing security challenges led to very limited formal local organising. The UN operations in the early 1990s changed the scene, as the UN needed local partners to assist with implementing humanitarian interventions. This led to a boost in the formation of NGOs, which however were often short-lived (Menkhaus et al. 2010: 329-330). From the mid-1990s until around 2006 many areas of south-central Somalia developed local governance structures, which in some areas were relatively peaceful. However, in parts of the country conflict continued. During this time, civil society, including actors such as Islamic NGOs and diaspora organisations, took an increasingly important role in service provision and at times in governance structures (Menkhaus et al. 2010: 331-333). In 2006 the umbrella group of different Islamic groups, called Islamic Court Union (ICU), took control of many parts of south-central areas and gained wide support. Later, however, the ICU lost this power, as it was defeated by the Transitional Federal Government forces (who in turn were supported by outside powers, such as Ethiopia). This eventually led to protracted violent attacks, a humanitarian catastrophe, new refugee flows, and the rise of

radical Islamist groups. From this period on, civil society associations and their leaders continued to be targeted, not only by hard-line Islamists, but also by the TFG forces, to the extent that by the summer of 2008 most of these leaders were either keeping a low profile or had fled the country (Menkhaus et al. 2010: 324-325). Conflict continued, and the humanitarian crisis deepened, and in 2011 a famine was declared in parts of Somalia. Positive political changes took place in 2012, when the first formal parliament in more than 20 years was formed and Hassan Sheikh Mohamed, a civil society activist, was elected as the new president. However, the continuing potency of Al-Shabab and several other issues persist and restrict the work of the government, as well as that of Somalia's civil society actors (Hammond 2013: 188-192).

Defined from this historical perspective, current civil society in the Somali context is composed of actors such as large development NGOs, small community-based organisations, informal self-help groups, professional associations, traditional clan elders, businesspeople and many Islamic organisations and charities (Menkhaus et al. 2010: 326). Diaspora members are also part of the civil society, sometimes returning to work in organisations or more commonly supporting development projects in their areas of origin. In the context of continuing conflict, a fragile state, and extreme poverty, all these civil society actors carry out an important role in providing services, and certainly function as counter-voices to conflicting parties by representing 'civility' and promoting the use of non-violent means to achieve their aims. Thus, civil society in a Somali context can be defined as those actors who do not use violence as a means of being heard, and civil society figures frequently distinguish themselves from warlords or radical Islamists who engage in violent conflict (Lewis 2002: 583-584).

4. The Somali diaspora and development cooperation through voluntary associations in Finland

There are over one million Somalis living outside the borders of Somalia. Migration history from Somalia dates back to colonial times when a number of people left for Italy and the UK to study and work (Griffiths 2002: 77-83). Later, during the 1970s and 1980s, many Somali men

migrated to the Gulf countries to work in the oil industry (Healy 2010: 379). The largest numbers of Somalis have fled the country because of the civil war, which started in 1988 and is still going on in parts of the country. Most Somalis who fled the war became internally displaced or settled in refugee camps in neighbouring countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia, where large camps still exist today (UNHCR 2011).

Since the late 1980s, Somalis have increasingly sought asylum in Western countries, and in the early 1990s they found their way to Finland through the former Soviet Union. In 2013 there were nearly 16,000 Somali mother tongue speakers in Finland, out of which almost 7,500 were Somali nationals (Statistics Finland 2014). In Finland, Somalis are the first and largest group of migrants coming from Africa and the third largest group of all foreign language speakers (Statistics Finland 2013).

The Somali diaspora worldwide actively engages in transnational activities towards the country of origin in various ways: sending remittances to family members, investing, and participating in politics and civil society affairs. Estimates on current remittance flows, including both private and collective remittances, range from US$130 to 200 million annually (Hammond et al. 2011; Sheikh/Healy 2009; Lindley 2009). Remittances are a lifeline to many people in Somalia, and are mostly used for meeting basic needs. At times remittances are also invested in land, housing, and business development. Diaspora members are also politically engaged, taking up government positions or supporting and carrying out lobbying from abroad.

In the case of Finland, the Somali diaspora, in addition to private remittances and political engagement, has been active in setting up voluntary associations, which aim at contributing to development and humanitarian activities in the areas of origin. According to representatives of Somali diaspora associations in Finland, constructive political involvement in Somalia is rather difficult because of the prolonged conflict, and many people have instead engaged in homeland matters in the fields of development and humanitarian relief through the diaspora associations (see in the case of Somalis in Denmark Kleist 2007: 207). One Somali man active in an association registered in Finland and carrying out development projects in Northern part of Somalia stated: "We work at grassroots level. We tell people that you don't have to believe everything that politicians and war

lords say; that you should look for information by yourself. I don't want to engage in politics, because I like to help people directly" (interviewed in Helsinki, 29 September 2010).

In fact, here the question of 'what is political' is relevant. Particularly in the contexts of conflicts, politics are often seen as violent, dirty and corrupt, and many diaspora members do not want to identify with violence and corruption. Therefore, the distinction between humanitarian activities and direct political activities is useful. According to the Somalis interviewed, the discourse on humanitarian activities, as opposed to politics, involves characteristics such as neutrality and non-violence. The use of this discourse of humanitarian activities by many diaspora members situates them within the civil society of Somalia/Somaliland, where one way of defining the various civil society actors is through the separation between violent and non-violent means of action (see previous section).

Diaspora Somalis feel the responsibility to contribute money, services, materials, skills and know-how, as there is a lack of basically everything in Somalia/Somaliland, as was described by a Somali man living in Finland, who has been involved in Somali politics and a community organisation in Finland: "Diaspora, if we don't send, people die. We try to help them. The diaspora is a resource, one of the most important resources for all of Somalia" (interviewed in Espoo on 20 October 2009).

In Finland there are various diaspora associations that are engaged in setting up different projects in Somalia/Somaliland, mainly in the fields of education, health, youth work, orphan and disabled support, women's empowerment, and the environment. Funding of these projects is mainly through money pooling and fund raising among members, which in many cases also take place transnationally (i.e. in association with members or supporters in several Western countries). Some projects by Somali associations have also managed to access funding from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), through the budget line of NGO support. According to the MFA, the first development project carried out by a Somali association received funding in 2000. In 2014, a total of 20 Finnish NGOs were carrying out 37 development cooperation projects in Somalia/Somaliland, with MFA funding. Sixteen of these NGOs had diaspora members on board or were fully operated by diaspora Somalis. These 16 NGOs carried out 22 different projects in various parts of Somalia/Somaliland[3].

In addition to the service provision role of associations, representatives of Somali diaspora associations expressed their vision of helping to end the conflict, achieving peace and contributing to democracy. One active Somali man running an association in Finland and doing development work in Somalia stated that: "Civil society organisations have an important role in peace building [in Somalia], they need to 'civilize' people, and provide education. They have a role in waking people up to think. Because a dangerous thing is that during a prolonged war, bad things become normal. If you see people killing each other, it becomes normal. Human beings are quite strange sometimes, and how they adjust to the environment, so here there is a lot of work to do to wake people up" (interviewed in Helsinki on 19 September 2008).

In the context of ongoing conflicts and the fragile peace, development projects were often seen as having a peacebuilding aspect by the diaspora members. For example, those representatives of associations who were running school projects perceived their peacebuilding function as offering young people schooling, which would mean a meaningful daytime routine and having future prospects, and would thus reduce their risk of being recruited by the warring parties. Moreover, representatives of associations argued that they would like to contribute to Somalia/Somaliland by 'teaching' and training their local partners about organisation and particular issues such as accountability and transparency in project work; these were things that they had learned in Finland. This is in line with the official aim of MFA NGO funding, which, in addition to promoting the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), emphasises strengthening the developing countries' own civil societies. The MFA NGO funding line also requires a local partner organisation to implement a funded project. The ultimate aim is that "the developing countries' own organisations can better take care of such basic tasks as service provision, policy dialogue and information" (MFA 2013).

In the following part I will critically assess the position of the Somali diaspora in the civil society of Somalia/Somaliland, and interactions and relations between the diaspora Somalis, their associations, and actors in Somalia/Somaliland. These issues are analysed from the point of view of two possible functions of civil society: service provision and democratic development.

5. Realities of civil society engagement on the ground

When the members of the diaspora engage with civil society in the areas of origin, they are bound by very challenging structures. The prolonged conflict is a challenge for the diaspora to cope with and in fact a few Somali associations are not able to carry out long-term development projects in Somalia because of the poor security situation. In recent years, humanitarian actors and civil society figures have become targets of conflicting forces, and Al-Shabab has banned international humanitarian organisations from operating in areas it controls. This is how a Somali man involved in an organisation running a health project in Central part of Somalia, described the situation in 2010: "Those whose suffer in the current conflict are those who have built the peace, supported education, universities and hospitals. This is what I represent: we support hospitals in Somalia. We, who do this work, are the victims of the crisis" (interviewed in Helsinki, 4 February 2010).

To complicate the picture, the changing nature of conflict in Somalia continuously affects the Somali diaspora associations' ways of doing development work, and their access to specific areas in Somalia. In the regions with relative stability, such as Somaliland, the context for engagement is slightly different for the diaspora. However, these areas are not free from problems. Self-proclaimed Somaliland is an exceptional case because of the lack of international recognition. For that reason it cannot get any bilateral development aid from any states. Thus, many states contribute to development in the country via NGOs, making this field very important for the poor state and its people. In some cases with large international funding, NGOs can provide jobs, and thus the NGO sector has become increasingly competitive in the context of a general absence of paid jobs. However, it is also worth noting that setting up an association or organisation in Somaliland does not in itself secure any income. In some cases, people in associations finance their collective activities through engaging in businesses.

In order for diaspora associations to safely access conflict-ridden areas, and to carry out long-term activities in all areas, they need close networks and trusted relations with locals. Security and access were often mentioned as key challenges by respondents, and it was often explained that project sites were selected because of the clan relations offering safe access (Pirkka-

lainen 2009: 79-80). Such trusted relations are essential to ensure activities can go ahead, and to avoid being suspected, as was expressed by one Somali male running an association in Finland through which a school project has been set up in Southern Somalia: "In Somalia you have to have knowledge of the area you are working in. If I go to the area of another clan than my own, there might be suspicions about why I am there, and it may lead to misunderstandings. It is so much easier to work in your own clan's area, and it's so much safer" (interviewed in Helsinki, 23 October 2009).

The clan connections often provide access and trusted positions in certain areas for the diaspora members, but they do not always automatically provide legitimation to all kinds of diaspora activities. The type of engagement and action also affect whether the diaspora's contributions are recognised or rejected by locals (Abdile/Pirkkalainen 2011: 57). Diaspora contributions[4] are an important resource, and when the diaspora set up critical services, such as health and education facilities, they are well perceived by locals, as they contribute to bringing in otherwise lacking essential services. Thus, the service provision role of the diaspora is often well recognised by locals. However, when the diaspora members return and take up positions in Somalia – in NGOs, politics or businesses – locals may have a more critical perception of them. The diaspora returning to the country is perceived, especially among unemployed and educated locals, as straining local resources and increasing competition for already scarce resources and positions, as was argued by a diaspora returnee from Canada to Northern Somalia, who is working for a government agency in Somaliland: "When people from the diaspora come up with great ideas, locals, many of whom are illiterate, might see it as a threat. In the public sector there are lot of diaspora returnees. Also, in the projects supported by the international community the diaspora come in and people graduating from local universities become the second choice" (interviewed in Hargeisa, 18 January 2011).

At times, diaspora returnees are perceived as being too westernised and thus culturally different; they are seen as being out of touch with reality, as not having experienced suffering from the dire conflict, and as thus imposing their own fantasies, thereby contributing to the conflict (Abdile/Pirkkalainen 2011: 59-62). In some cases, due to the lack of trust shown toward diaspora members and their motives, the new ideas and values

brought by the diaspora are critically perceived and sometimes rejected by locals. Especially criticised are ideas perceived as 'Western', such as gender equality.

It is a reality on the ground that the diaspora often engages in civil society in areas of Somalia by using the mediating sphere of a clan, and is thus able to engage in a specific location. In this situation the diaspora is certainly an important actor as a service provider, but the possibility for it to contribute to wider, structural and state-level democratic processes is very limited, as was described critically by a local Somali male working as a researcher in Hargeisa, Northern Somalia: "The diaspora has the same problems as Somalia has: clan lineages, personal interests, everyone is concerned about their own clans and own interests. Strategic and objective planning, a big plan for how the diaspora should contribute is lacking and it makes it difficult to contribute. Now there are these small projects and the diaspora gets tired" (interviewed in Hargeisa, 4 January 2011).

6. Conclusions

Among funding institutions in development cooperation, there has been a growing belief in the contribution civil society can make to a sustainable peace, and to development and democratic processes. There has also been a growing enthusiasm concerning the diaspora's potential for developing the civil society of their countries of origin, and for being the bridge builders between the South and the North. This perspective is based on the specific normative understanding of the civil society as being a mediating sphere vis-a-vis the state and the market. In societies that have not followed a similar path to modern state formation as Western countries, this understanding of civil society is problematic. Thus, more nuanced approaches to civil society are needed in order to reveal challenges and critical aspects concerning a diaspora's role and potential in civil society development.

In the Somali context, i.e. in a country characterised by a fragile state, prolonged conflict and extreme poverty, civil society includes many different groups of people, as well as formal and informal groupings that do not engage in violent activities and thus stand out from, and oppose, the conflicting parties. The Finnish Somalis, who have been active in setting

up associations in Finland and in carrying out development projects in different parts of Somalia/Somaliland through them, perceive themselves as belonging to this sphere. The Finnish Somalis active in associations identify themselves as humanitarian actors at the grassroots level.

Those Somali associations that have accessed funding for development projects from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland NGO development cooperation budget line are bound by the Finnish development policy and the guidelines of the funding instrument. This NGO development cooperation budget line requires a local partner organisation in the field to implement the funded project, and thus aims at strengthening civil society in developing countries. However, due to the complex context in Somalia, the Finnish Somali diaspora are limited in what they can do regarding the development of civil society in Somalia/Somaliland.

The diaspora certainly is an important humanitarian actor in Somalia. Somali diaspora associations, by setting up projects in areas of health and education in particular, do contribute significantly to service provision, which in the case of Somalia is totally in the hands of civil society, due to the fragile and weak state.

Nevertheless, critical issues remain. Firstly, the diaspora in the current political situation in Somalia is limited in how it can contribute to democratic state-building processes. Because of the fragile and fragmented state and ongoing conflict in parts of the country, the diaspora can be active only in very specific locations. Often, the contacts and collaborations are formed through clan relations, which provide an important social and political structure in Somalia, and thus safe access to certain areas. This has led to the fragmentation and duplication of diaspora engagement: many small projects exist in several different areas, but they have not managed to build up large-scale structures or institutions. Secondly, the role of the diaspora in contributing to civil society in terms of peacebuilding and democratic development is challenging. The local legitimacy of the diaspora's engagements and activities is not automatic and their contributions can also be rejected. In general, locals consider the role of a service and resource provider as legitimate for the diaspora. If the diaspora members return to take positions, or try to bring ideas, values and norms learnt from the West, locals may not accept them. Poverty and unemployment exist in all parts of the country and in this context unemployed locals

may see the diaspora members as a threat, since they may take their jobs. Moreover, cultural gaps remain in cases where diaspora members have lived outside Somalia for decades. Sometimes, local people perceive the diaspora as being too westernised and do not easily trust it and its motives for becoming engaged. Thirdly, the situation in Somalia in recent years has been exacerbated by the rise of the radical Islamist group Al-shabab, which is very hostile towards what I have here called 'civil society'. This is not only problematic security-wise for the diaspora members and their projects in Somalia, but also reflects on the situation of Somalis in the West. Because of the terrorist fear in the Western countries, ordinary Somalis have become targets of suspicious attitudes and surveillance. Western countries are increasingly cautious with regard to money transfers to the Horn of Africa, and various measures have been put in place restricting the remittance companies, for fear of money being sent to terrorist groups. This, coupled with the diaspora community's own fear of not wanting to be labelled as terrorist supporters, may have significant implications for the volume and means of engagements. This, in turn, may endanger the essential role of the diaspora as a humanitarian actor and service provider at the grassroots level in Somalia/Somaliland.

1 I defended my PhD, entitled Transnational Responsibilities and Multi-sited Strategies: Voluntary Associations of Somali Diaspora in Finland, in December 2013.
2 The decision to gather the empirical data from Somaliland, and not from other parts of Somalia, was made based on the security of that region and thus its accessibility. In this article 'Somalia' is used to refer to the official borders of the Republic of Somalia. It is however acknowledged that currently there are different autonomous areas in Somalia, such as the self-proclaimed Somaliland and semi-autonomous Puntland. At times, when it is relevant to emphasise the relative stability of Somaliland, 'Somalia/Somaliland' or 'Somaliland' is used, referring to the region of North-West Somalia. The author however does not wish to take any stance on the political recognition of Somaliland.
3 Figures were provided by a staff member of the NGO development cooperation unit at the MFA in April 2014.
4 Often locals' perceptions of the diaspora refer to Somali people in the West (and in some cases in Gulf countries), who are seen as wealthy and who are thus expected to contribute (see also Kleist 2007: 220-221).

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Abstracts

The diaspora in different parts of Somalia, a country that has suffered from prolonged conflict, and state collapse since 1991, and in which widespread poverty is a reality, has an essential role in concretely helping people. There is also a growing enthusiasm about the diaspora's potential for developing the civil society in Somalia. However, in the case of Somalia the definition of civil society is difficult to establish since the context is characterised by complex political problems, state collapse and the fact that NGO development cooperation has become a booming business. In this context it is relevant to critically assess the role of the Somali diaspora in Somalia/Somaliland's civil society development. This article analyses in particular what kind of developmental potential the diaspora might have for civil society in the Somali context. The article is based on data collected using multi-sited and mixed methods in Finland and Somaliland in the period 2008–2011.

Die Diaspora spielt eine wesentliche Rolle in der Unterstützung von Menschen in verschiedenen Teilen Somalias – einem Land, das seit 1991 von einem andauernden Konflikt, dem Zusammenbruch des Staates und von Armut geprägt ist. In das Potenzial der Diaspora für die Entwicklung der Zivilgesellschaft werden in diesem Kontext zunehmend hohe Erwartungen gesetzt. Eine Definition von Zivilgesellschaft ist jedoch im Fall von Somalia aufgrund der komplexen politischen Probleme, dem Zusammenbruch des Staates sowie einer Situation, in der die Aktivitäten nichtstaatlicher Entwicklungsorganisationen ein blühendes Geschäft geworden sind, nicht einfach. In diesem Kontext ist es wichtig, die Rolle der Diaspora für die Entwicklung der Zivilgesellschaft in Somalia/Somaliland kritisch zu betrachten. Basieren auf Daten, die in Finnland und Somaliland zwischen 2008 und 2011 erhoben wurden, untersucht dieser Artikel die möglichen Entwicklungspotenziale der Diaspora für die Zivilgesellschaft.

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Journal für Entwicklungspolitik XXXI 1-2015, S. 100–116

Caught in the Funding Game: The Challenges of NGO Research within Development Aid

Sirpa Rovaniemi

1. Introduction

This article reflects upon the methodological challenges I encountered during my ethnographic case study on the cooperation between two particular NGOs. As many scholars of aid practice have testified (Edelman 2009; Hilhorst 2003; Mosse 2005), actors within development aid tend to influence data collection and analyses in certain ways. My fieldwork experiences shed more light on the kind of environment that development aid creates for NGOs. On the basis of my data, I suggest that increased NGO funding has had several impacts on Indian civil society, a major one being that it ties the NGOs to a fierce funding game. According to my understanding, this phenomenon consists of elements such as (1) competition for aid funds; (2) increasing opportunism; (3) fragmentation of social movements into NGOs, i.e. a NGOisation of civil society; (4) change in the accountability relations; and (5) the need to produce success stories. In what follows, I will focus on the elements of increased competition and the need to produce success stories, especially in the implications of both of these for the practice of research on development aid. The funding game is a structural feature of development aid, which has important consequences for research, as it draws the researcher's assessment of the success of the cooperation he/she is studying into the game and often turns studies on development aid into a battleground for divergent interests and logics.

Practitioners of development aid, as well as researchers, have different interests and 'logics' (as analysed by Olivier de Sardan 2005: 31-32, 137-138, 149-151, 198-201) concerning the production of knowledge on aid projects, as suggested by Edelman (2009), Hilhorst (2003) and Mosse (2005, 2011,

2013). Furthermore, Olivier de Sardan (2005: 199) crystallises these differences in the following phrase: "knowledge doubts while action needs to believe". Some scholars argue (Gould 2014[1]; Li 2013) that the logics of the production of knowledge in the frames of development aid and academic research are incompatible. In this article, I reflect on the manifestations of such incompatibility and on the practical solutions for resolving the epistemic, ideological and practical contradictions that I, like many others, have encountered.

Many scholars have encountered tensions during their research, tensions which relate to the different logics of research and practice within the sphere of development aid. These different logics often create long and painful (Mosse 2005; Hilhorst 2003) tensions and struggles for representation, which have mostly been dealt with as individual methodological problems. I argue that individual scholars have encountered these kinds of problems so many times that it is time to start analysing these experiences at a structural level.

In my PhD thesis (in progress) I explore, from an actor-centred perspective, the dynamics between what I call the developmentalist configuration and Indian civil society, asking how development aid has shaped Indian civil society. The theoretical aim of my study is to explore the social, political and discursive structures built around development aid. Scholars have conceptualised development aid in various ways that reflect the multidisciplinary character of development studies. From the various conceptualisations of development aid, I have abandoned the systemic and deterministic conceptualisations (Tvedt 2002; Escobar 1995). Instead, I have chosen to use Olivier de Sardan's (2005: 1) more actor-oriented concept of developmentalist configuration, namely a "complex set of institutions, flows and actors, for whom development constitutes a resource, a profession, a market, a stake or a strategy", in order to scrutinise the structures of development aid and how they influence and play out within the sphere of civil society in India.

I argue that we need to develop this conceptualisation concerning development aid further. One step in that direction would be to start gathering insights from various ethnographic studies on development aid in order to enrich the theoretical understanding of aid practices. Anthropologists are often inclined to stay within the limits of their case projects

in their analyses, and have gathered brilliant insights on the dynamics of development aid in specific locations. In this article, I analyse my fieldwork experiences, and scrutinise how they can contribute to the theoretical and practical understanding of development aid.

2. Aid practice as the object of research: critical events and methodological adjustments

My approach is vested in the tradition of the ethnographies of aid (Crewe/Harrison 1998) and development ethnographies (Arce/Long 2000; Escobar 1995; Gould/Marcussen 2004; Hilhorst 2003; Mosse 2004, 2005; Olivier de Sardan 2005, 2008), or 'aidnographies' (Mosse 2011). In my PhD thesis I explore some specific cooperation processes between NGOs, how development aid works, and what social relations and subjectivities the interventions of development aid bring into existence, aiming through this to analyse development interventions in all their complexity. In this article I concentrate on my research process and on the dynamics of the production of success in development aid, and what consequences it might have for research on development aid.

Development aid projects are complicated interfaces where different actors with heterogeneous resources, interests and strategies come together (Ebrahim 2003; Eriksson Baaz 2005; Hilhorst 2003; Mageli 2007; Mosse 2005; Olivier de Sardan 2005, 2008; Staples 2007). Anthropologists have demonstrated, through their analyses of various aid projects and NGOs, that an anthropological approach is important for gaining a better understanding of how aid projects operate. Whether or not such an understanding is desirable for the NGO actors is a question that also warrants some attention (Staples 2007).

I started my research with a detailed case study on the cooperation between a Finnish NGO foundation Juuri, and a North Indian political advocacy network, Janatan (the names have been changed). With this case study I aimed to examine how partnership between the organisations is constructed and negotiated, and to reflect on how the global structures of development aid play out in this cooperation. In the case study I combined ethnographic observation with a discursive approach; thus, my

data consists of records of the cooperation between the actors, along with taped interviews and discussions.

After I had followed and at times participated in the cooperation for many years, several internal power struggles started to unfold within Janatan. After becoming more and more entangled in the power struggles, I started to distance myself from the case study both positionally and methodologically. This was a demand from a Janatan leader as he was protesting against me participating in the Juuri decision-making. Although my case study has provided me with endless puzzles, problems and complicated and unexpected twists in the plot, I am grateful for the data it has provided me. During the research process I have shifted my focus from an in-depth case study to a multi-sited perspective, and simultaneously from an insider to an outsider position in relation to my case NGOs. My fieldwork experiences have illuminated some central structural traits of development aid, especially of the challenges related to academic research on aid practices.

The evaluation (in 2006) of the cooperation between Janatan and Juuri provided an interesting opportunity to become more familiar with the work of Janatan, and I participated in both the evaluation field visits and the writing process of the evaluation report. As Janatan was engaged in activities in different states in India, it was decided that I would concentrate, in the final report, on the NGO's work in the state of Uttarakhand. The activist group in Uttarakhand was called Andolan, and it was introduced and described as a thematic working group within Janatan. As most of the time during the evaluation field visit was spent in Uttarakhand familiarising myself with the work of Andolan, I decided to also focus on the activities in Uttarakhand in my PhD thesis. After the evaluation field visit I wanted to travel to Uttarakhand again to interview activists for my research, and the Janatan leader Akhil appointed a Janatan activist, Siddhart from Uttarakhand, to guide me. His father had been one of the leading figures of the Gandhian movement in Uttarakhand, and he had profound knowledge of the social movements and NGOs of the area, and therefore became an important informant and assistant for my research.

After the evaluation, I attended a meeting of the Juuri India group, where the Janatan report was on the agenda. I sent the project report to Andolan activists for their additions or comments, and this simple gesture caused an unexpected and complicated chain of events, which had

dramatic consequences for the course of my research. The report antagonised the fieldworkers and they started accusing Janatan of exploitation and criticised Janatan's decision-making processes, internal communication, and the relationships of the grassroots activists to the project structures. It turned out that Andolan activists had not received any funding from the Janatan coffers, nor were they aware that Janatan received funding for their activities. After discovering in the Janatan report how their voluntary work was reported to the donors, they started negotiating for a better position within the project.

Siddhart sent several emails to Juuri on behalf of the Andolan team, criticising Janatan for false reporting and for showcasing Andolan and other voluntary work in Janatan reports. There was not much discussion of Siddhart's critiques in the Juuri India group. They were mostly conceived as opportunism, although many of Siddhart's points were relevant and many of them were confirmed to me by some other Janatan activists. Thus, Siddhart had an instrumental role in the opposition camp within Janatan. He was therefore later expelled from Janatan. Akhil argued that his criticisms of Janatan were about gaining a position as leader in the Andolan team. These power struggles unfolding in front of my eyes were interpreted by some of the Finnish activists as struggles for resources or position, but I see them also as struggles linked to the reading of the situations and relations, and as struggles for representation or 'Truth'. "Representations of development NGOs have everything to do with power, and competing understandings often lead to conflicts" (Hilhorst 2003: 222).

In April 2008 a partners' meeting was planned with Juuri and its Indian partners. It was time to negotiate the new Janatan budget, for which the Andolan activists were anxiously waiting, since they had not received any funding since the beginning of the year. After their critical emails they received very little support from Janatan for four months at the end of the previous year. When the week long partners' meeting ended, they finally saw the budget for the first time, a budget which Janatan had sent to Juuri, and in which very limited support was projected for their work. After trying to negotiate better terms for the cooperation with Janatan (and waiting for five to seven days in vain in the office for a chance to talk with the Janatan leadership), Andolan finally decided to break away from the Janatan network and to continue independently. Although younger

Dalit activists told me that it was a unanimous decision, shortly after the meeting three higher caste activists announced that they would continue working with Janatan. Thus, there was a split within the Andolan team along caste lines.

This process had significant repercussions for my relationship with Janatan. The convenor of Janatan, Akhil, blamed me on several occasions for the split and for Andolan's withdrawal from the Janatan network, although on other occasions he argued that it had been a natural development within the team, in which Dalit activists were assuming control and leadership. Working exclusively with the case study turned problematic when these internal power struggles started playing out within Janatan. The whole process was personally difficult but academically enlightening. It was an interesting moment in my research when two logics collided; my logic for sending the report to the fieldworkers originated from Finnish organisational culture, where reports are shared within organisations and are public information. This clashed with the Janatan culture, where reports and applications are not shared within an organisation. It was an illuminating marker of how information was supposed (or not) to be circulated within Janatan.

Victor Turner (1957: 91-94) has used the notion of social drama as a "device for looking beneath the surface of social regularities into the hidden contradictions and eruptions of conflict." Mosse (2005: 235) points out that "in the competitive market for success it is difficult for dependent agencies not to portray their actions as achievements in terms of currently favoured models. The cost of breaking ranks is high and public disputes over meaning and interpretation are rare", but, as Mosse (ibid.) notes, "when they do occur, they are very informative".

There were many crucial moments when I had to make quick decisions, which at times had profound consequences. One was how to react to the accusations towards Janatan coming from the fieldworkers who had travelled with me and whose work was showcased to me. The options left for me were either to communicate exclusively with the leadership (which Janatan leaders expected from me, and which option most of the Finnish activists had chosen) or to listen to both sides of the conflict. I decided to listen to both sides. This is one instance where the academic practices and Janatan's interests collided, and my dual position as a researcher and

member of Juuri started to turn problematic. I had decided to travel to the partners' meeting with Juuri representatives. Andolan activists had sent several long complaints about Janatan practices to the Juuri India group, which had to take a decision on how to react to the accusations. In the India group's meeting it was decided to organise a discussion on the conflict during the partners' meeting, and the Juuri board named one board member to facilitate the discussion.

The whole process was marred by tensions and disagreements. Janatan adamantly refused to discuss the matter with Juuri, and argued that they would resolve the conflict on their own. Finally, after several rounds of heated emails and negotiations, it was agreed that a meeting could be organised, but Janatan leaders insisted that the conflict should not be discussed. The Janatan coordinator used the first three hours of the meeting to protest fiercely against the meeting itself.

At this stage, various versions of the conflict circulated. I therefore wanted to meet Andolan fieldworkers separately to hear their points of view. The Janatan leaders considered this to be a severe breach of trust. The coordinator of Janatan argued thus: "The way, interfering, I see that you are bypassing the Janatan in discussing with the local team. The process should be like this: there should be a discussion with Janatan and then it should come to the local team through the Janatan person" (Interview 2008)[2]. Meeting the fieldworkers separately was not considered appropriate. This comment also highlights Janatan's hopes for the communication process; relationships should remain mainly with the leaders, and fieldworkers should be met only in the presence of the leaders. This incident clearly illuminates the hierarchical practices of NGO partnerships. I was heavily criticised, and Janatan leaders started arguing that my research had negative impacts on their work. They tried to persuade me to focus more on their achievements. Anil, the coordinator of the Uttarakhand programme, criticised me for 'always going in the wrong direction' when I was asking questions about the internal conflict. Akhil tried to convince me that Janatan had succeeded in experimenting in novel and unique kinds of political advocacy work, and that my research should focus on documenting that.

After the partners' meeting, the support by Janatan was uncertain, although Akhil had given his explicit consent for my research. When David Mosse asked him about Janatan as my case study, Akhil replied

that he "had heard rumours about that". This happened at a conference in Finland, in which Akhil happened to participate. When I enquired whether they were still comfortable with me conducting research, I did not receive any clear answer. Akhil blamed me for the Andolan split and for not communicating enough. He asked me to promise in writing to keep them informed about my research, send drafts of my thesis for their comments and to write about them anonymously. This accusation during the conference happened in the middle of the night, as did the previous one during the partners' meeting. My arguments that I had only sent the report to them, and listened to their points of view, fell on deaf ears. This difficulty was familiar from several other occasions; some of the Juuri activists that Akhil had previously been accusing gave up at some point. They felt that it was impossible or useless to discuss the matter with Akhil.

Due to the uncertainty, I started shifting from the micro-level case study to a broader and more multi-sited perspective, gathering more data on other activists and CSOs about their experiences of development aid. As a result of this shift, part of my data was gathered from inside a project, and other parts from an outsider's position. This process shed much light on the data collection processes within aid projects, and on the specific role of the production of knowledge in aid projects and NGOs.

During this process I had to reflect thoroughly on my dual position as a researcher and as a member of the Finnish case organisation. It has been enlightening and relieving to read about other researchers' experiences with their case NGOs or projects. All of these different but somewhat similar experiences illuminate how the production of knowledge has a central role in helping to secure survival in the game of insecure and short-term development aid funding. Mosse's (2005: xi-xii) descriptions of how his ethnographic account "opened a rift between different epistemologies, meanings and views of responsibility, between the domains of managerial optimism and critical reflection", are frightening but illuminating. His former colleagues protested fiercely at his analyses and findings, made complaints about him to his university's ethical board, and tried their very best to prevent the publication of his research.

Dorothea Hilhorst (2003: 227-229) notes that, in a politicised environment, research becomes part of the political struggle. "Research and politics are both about representation, and lines of analysis are bound

to find their way into political arenas as statements of controversy, challenge, or support", she (ibid.) states. Hilhorst's (ibid.) case NGO "questioned the politics and ethics of her research, denounced her use of theory and ethnography, and charged her of having manipulated and abused her research subjects".

Both Mosse's (2005) and Hilhorst's (2003) research participants emphasised, in their critiques, the negative consequences of research on their organisations, as did Janatan activists in my research. Because the production of knowledge plays an essential role in legitimising funded projects, it very easily becomes a battleground for different interests. In applied research such as evaluations or commissioned studies the question about the consequences is mutually understood; it is painfully clear to everyone that the outcomes might influence future funding. Mosse (2005: 157-166) describes in graphic detail how controlled the evaluation visits are, and how time and expression is ordered during them. "This makes constructing a project story highly contentious, making it a matter of debate who is qualified to construct knowledge about a project and how it is to be done" (Phillips/Edwards 2000, quoted in Mosse 2005: 158). "In the end there is usually a shared need for an 'acceptable story' that mediates differences and buries contradictions in order to sustain relationships and the flow of resources".

3. Different logics of knowledge production in academic research and aid practice

During my research process I was constantly confronted by the fact that academic research and development aid practice have their own distinct logics concerning the production of knowledge on aid practices. That is one of the main reasons why the issues of cooperation and dialogue between academic research and development aid practice continue to pose a challenge. Many scholars (see Koponen 2008: 2; Olivier de Sardan 2005: 198-199; Tvedt 2002: 363) have criticised NGO research for being embedded in development aid's normative and rhetorical agendas, and have insisted on an academic and non-normative approach to development actions. "The more serious, empirically grounded and vigilant towards seductions

of ideologies that academic studies are, the more useful they can be to practices", Olivier de Sardan (2008: 327) argues.

Scholars are often driven by the search for detail, complexity and comprehensiveness, and "academic research involves probing beneath the surface, questioning appearances and asking uncomfortable questions", which may generate friction, as activists often present "overly coherent official narratives about their movements which may not have a solid basis" (Edelman 2009: 248-249). Sometimes researchers reproduce and propagate those narratives and "photo-shop out dimensions of practice that conflict with the official picture or line", but Edelman (ibid.) poses the question of whether this really serves the needs of social movements.

The time frames of academic and movement-based researchers are different; activist researchers want quick results to serve political needs (Edelman 2009: 251-253). The differences of pace, style, perceptions, and audience between activists and academics can cause tensions. "Another problem that arises from the academic-activist relations is the activists' fear that the academic might be gathering intelligence or functioning as an agent provocateur, or that the data gathered or the reports published might find their way into the wrong hands or strengthen the analytical capabilities of their antagonists" (ibid.). Due to these different orientations behind academic research and aid practice, researchers often face competing duties, obligations and conflicts of interest, and they need to make implicit or explicit choices between the values and interests of different individuals and groups.

These different logics were manifested during my research in the constant pressure from Janatan leaders on me to focus on success and ignore difficult issues and internal power struggles, and in the pressure to communicate through the leaders.

3.1 The role of knowledge production in development aid

"Aid chains deliver and gather information and transmit it back up the chain. Resources down, information up: that is the essence of the circuit" (Sogge 2002: 87). Ebrahim (2003: 1), who analysed relationships between two big Indian NGOs and their international network of funders, describes how NGOs leverage funds by providing information on 'successful' projects, thereby enhancing the reputation of their funders. As

Mosse (2005) has elegantly explored, the production of success is a central structural feature in aid projects. The production and dissemination of information is closely related to the production of success and to securing organisational survival in the funding game in which the NGOs find themselves deeply entangled. Consequently, struggles over the shaping and use of information are central not only to the relationships between NGOs and their funders, but also between NGOs and scholars.

Development aid funding to NGOs is short term, and, in institutionalising themselves, NGOs soon find themselves caught in the funding game. Especially in countries such as India where aid funding has been decreasing dramatically and donors have been withdrawing, the competition for the aid funds has escalated to an intense level, making it even more vital for NGOs to demonstrate success in order to survive.

3.2 Production of success

Because information plays such a central role in demonstrating success and securing funds, the production of knowledge (applications, reports and evaluation documents, but also academic research) often becomes a battleground, reflecting different interests related to the research results. Research easily becomes part of the social system it aims to study (Mosse 2005: 165), as "development success is not objectively verifiable but socially produced" (ibid. 172). Therefore, "effective mechanisms for filtering and regulating the flow of information and stabilising representations are necessary for survival; staff withhold or reveal information strategically in order to secure reputations, conceal poor performance or to negotiate position in the organisation or with outsiders", Mosse (2005: 11-12) argues further: "Interventions in development are importantly about establishing, promoting and defending significant interpretations (of actions and events)" (ibid.: xi-xii).

My complications with Janatan were related to its need to demonstrate success, and Janatan staff tried to prevent me from getting information which could have been harmful to them, and instead tried to steer me constantly in the 'right direction'. This resulted sometimes in hilarious episodes, like when once a former (critical) coordinator of Janatan wanted to meet me, and one Janatan worker drove with me for hours round the ring road of Delhi in order to prevent me from meeting him.

Aid practitioners tend to have strong opinions about the purposes and outcomes of research. Commissioned studies and evaluations often include a negotiation process regarding what is said in the final report, and how. These negotiations often lead to downplaying the criticism and emphasising the positive outcomes. This was confirmed by various colleagues, who had been conducting evaluations. Evaluations are, much more than academic studies, subject to a tug-of-war of diverse interests when it comes to the research results. Both Mosse (2005, 2011) and Hilhorst (2003) have analysed how NGO actors strive to incorporate researchers socially and discursively in their group of 'believers'. Moreover, Hilhorst (2003: 219) describes "how contractual obligations are entangled with moral obligations, emotional rewards, friendly favours and ideological statements".

As Urban (1996) argues, communities are interested in things that help them to reproduce themselves, or, as Sogge (2002: 87) puts it, "aid's hard-core political constituency wants to keep things rolling, keep things quiet (if not secret), keep a united front in the face of criticism". Many at the receiving end also hold stakes in the status quo. "Those whose livelihoods and careers depend on continued funding defend themselves by filtering and colouring information going up the chain: dissembling games to keep the bosses and visiting delegations happy, the empty project facades for the English to see" (ibid.). Furthermore, "recipients dependent on aid will tend to prettify or conceal information about its effects, supplying only that information that matches outlooks and prejudices of those with powers to cut off flows of resources" (ibid: 98).

4. Reflection on my positions

Researchers' positions may vary from neutral to militant, and anywhere in between (Edelman 2009: 246), and the choice of positioning has several effects on the fieldwork and data collection. Many ethnographically inclined scholars have decided to situate themselves inside projects or NGOs, working or volunteering in the projects or NGOs they aim to study. This is an understandable choice, as the social processes of organisations are better understood from within. This internal positioning is thus often conceived as necessary in order to ensure access to information and

for the collection of data, but it often seems to lead to conflicting ideas about the nature of the knowledge produced. The production of knowledge (also academic research) becomes entangled with the organisational politics. Scholars working inside projects have encountered tensions between the loyalty to the organisation and the institutional need for positive image production on the one hand, and the aim to fulfil the academic criteria on the other. Edelman (2009: 247) notes that tensions between activists and academics tend to revolve around the research process and the purpose and methods of knowledge production and dissemination. He argues that, in the relations between researchers and activists, "tensions may always be present, in greater or lesser degrees and sometimes in subterranean forms" (2009: 246). Activists often expect that academic research will be immediately applicable to their struggles (ibid.).

Based on my own and other scholars' experiences, referred to above, it is clear that the position of researcher in relation to aid projects is very tricky in many ways, and that all one's diplomatic skills are needed to balance the goals of solid academic research on the one hand and the need (related to organisational survival) of positive image production on the other. NGOs and other actors in development aid often have their own agendas concerning the knowledge that will be produced about them, and activists often aim to influence the research outcomes for the sake of their organisational survival. Therefore, an important choice made by researchers when moving into the 'field' of development aid is that of how to position oneself: inside, sharing the normative claims and beliefs of the NGO/aid world, or outside, taking a critical distance and analysing aid practices from the academic perspective. This choice has important implications for the relationships with the objects/subjects of the research.

My experiences illustrate how easily researchers can become entangled in the organisational politics and in the savage competition for funds and organisational survival. Comparing my experiences as both an insider and an outsider I see that both positions have their benefits and shortcomings. Although interviews are criticised within anthropology for not being authentic communication situations, most of the interviews that I conducted with other CSOs were enlightening. The activists shared with me their analyses of Indian civil society and development aid in an open, thorough and analytical manner, although it might have been difficult

to get information about the organisational dynamics from the leading persons. My research journey has provided me with insights into how differing the data gathered from different positions can be, and how the position of respondents or informants strongly influences the kind of data it is possible to collect. Positioning inside projects gives access to rich data, but increases the risk of the researcher becoming part of the social system he/she aims to study (Mosse 2005: 165), and getting entangled in the organisational politics.

5. Conclusions

I have applied the idea of aid projects as arenas where different logics collide as an analytical tool in reflecting on my fieldwork. As my experiences reveal, the structural need within the developmentalist configuration to produce success stories may have multiple effects on the research process. The different logics of academic research and development practice (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 198-199; Edelman 2009) collided during my research, resulting in the constant appearance of ideological traps (cf. Olivier de Sardan 2008: 327). Most of the incidents during my fieldwork related to the question of how knowledge is produced and disseminated within NGOs, both internally and in relation to partner NGOs and scholars. They reveal differences in the organisational cultures, and show how different organisational and cultural contexts or logics (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 137-152) may create conflicts in NGO partnerships, and in research on NGOs.

Research can become a battleground reflecting divergent interests and logics, and the structural pressures within development aid to produce success stories have important implications for NGO researchers, sometimes making it difficult to position oneself purely academically. It is common for students and scholars to enter the field of development aid through NGOs or projects, often resulting in complications in the reconciliation of the different interests and logics related to the production of knowledge. I argue that it should be better acknowledged on a methodological level that actors in development aid aim to influence the data collection and analyses in specific ways – whether we are using participatory

methods or not. What this means for the practice of research on development aid has to be tackled by each scholar individually in the course of the research process, but should be acknowledged also in teaching and supervision before the fieldwork commences. These kinds of struggles for representation also provide important data on what kind of structures the developmentalist configuration creates for NGOs and other actors who access aid funding, in the process tying Southern NGOs and activists to a fierce funding game which includes competition for funding and the need to demonstrate success.

1 Jeremy Gould, personal communication, Helsinki 2014.
2 Interview with Janatan coordinator in Kausani, India, 2008.

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Abstracts

This article describes the methodological challenges I encountered during my ethnographic case study on the cooperation between two NGOs. My experiences show how the NGO actors strove to influence my data collection and analyses. This struggle for representation provides important insights into what kind of environment development aid creates

for Southern NGOs, tying them to a fierce funding game which includes competition for funding and the need to demonstrate success. My research became subject to the structural pressure within development aid to demonstrate success, and my study became a battleground for divergent interests and logics. It is common for students and scholars to enter the field of development aid through NGOs or projects, and this often results in complications in the reconciliation of different interests and logics related to the production of knowledge. This should also be acknowledged in teaching and supervision.

Der Artikel schildert die methodologischen Herausforderungen, mit denen ich während meiner ethnographischen Forschung über die Zusammenarbeit zweier NROs konfrontiert wurde. Die Erfahrungen dabei zeigen, wie die Akteure darum bemüht waren, meine Datenerhebung und -analyse zu beeinflussen. Dieser Wettbewerb um Repräsentation verdeutlicht, dass Entwicklungshilfe für NROs im globalen Süden ein Umfeld schafft, in dem sie einem heftigen Konkurrenzkampf um Fördergelder ausgesetzt sind und Erfolg vorweisen müssen. Meine Forschung wurde von diesen strukturellen Zwängen beeinflusst und zum Schauplatz für divergierende Interessen. Entwicklungshilfe wird von Studierenden und Wissenschaftlern häufig durch die Auseinandersetzung mit NROs oder Projekten untersucht. Dies führt immer wieder zu Schwierigkeiten, die unterschiedlichen Interessen und Formen der Wissensproduktion zusammenzubringen. Diese Einsicht sollte auch in der Lehre und Supervision berücksichtigt werden.

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Ulrich van der Heyden, GDR International Development Policy Involvement. Doctrine and Strategies between Illusions and Reality 1960–1990. The example (South) Africa. Münster: LIT 2013, 316 Seiten.

Entwicklungspolitik der DDR? Welches der gängigen Kompendien zu „Entwicklungspolitik" gibt darüber Auskunft? Keines. So bleibt es Arbeiten wie dem vorliegenden Buch vorbehalten, in Erinnerung zu rufen, dass die Entwicklungspolitik der BRD ein realsozialistisches Pendant hatte. Ulrich van der Heyden gehört zu der kleinen, aber expandierenden Forschungsgemeinde, welche die realsozialistischen Entwicklungspraktiken als Objekt globalhistorischer Forschung aus dem Vergessen holt, in das sie mit dem Zusammenbruch der Systeme, deren Teil sie waren, geraten sind. Diesem Zweck dienen auch Publikationen wie die von van der Heyden im LIT-Verlag herausgegebene Buchreihe *Die DDR und die Dritte Welt*.

Auch das „sozialistische Weltsystem" reichte nach Asien, Afrika und Lateinamerika, und die Beziehungen der DDR zu den Staaten dieser Regionen sind als eine spezielle Form von „Entwicklungspolitik" beschreibbar. Zwar wurde der Begriff „Entwicklungsländer" vermieden, jedoch nicht konsequent. Und auch die Probleme ungleicher Wirtschaftsbeziehungen traten auf. Die DDR hatte auf wirtschaftlichem Gebiet Maschinen, Technologie und Expertise zu exportieren, die Länder, die ihr auf dem „sozialistischen" oder zumindest „nichtkapitalistischen Entwicklungsweg" folgen wollten, boten Rohstoffe, Kaffee, Zucker und Arbeitskräfte.

Der Autor konzentriert sich auf das Institutionengeflecht der Entwicklungspolitik der DDR, auf ihre Ansprüche, Umsetzungsstrategien und Instrumente. Die im Untertitel genannte Spannung zwischen *Illusions* und *Reality* wird als Differenz zwischen hohen ideologischen Ansprüchen und den inadäquaten ökonomischen Möglichkeiten der DDR thematisiert. Die konkrete Umsetzung vor Ort kommt weniger zur Sprache.

Zum Ausdruck kommt in dem Buch das Bedürfnis, die Entwicklungspolitik der DDR zu rehabilitieren. Diese Absicht ist angesichts der heute in Deutschland vorherrschenden Sichtweise auf die DDR verständlich, doch beeinträchtigt sie den Erkenntnisrahmen der Studie. Sie unterstellt der DDR

altruistische Motive für ihre Beziehungen zu Staaten Afrikas, Asiens und Lateinamerikas, wo dieser Staat solche Motive gar nicht selber reklamierte. Die DDR beanspruchte nicht, dass ihre Beziehungen zu diesen Ländern uneigennützig waren, und es wäre auch unrealistisch, das zu erwarten. Die wirtschaftlichen und politischen Beziehungen sollten – so über weite Strecken der Anspruch der DDR-Entwicklungspolitik – zum „gegenseitigen Vorteil" und nur zum geringeren Teil dem einseitigen Ressourcentransfer dienen. Dieser „gegenseitige Vorteil" sollte in Tauschhandelsgeschäften unter Umgehung des Devisensektors des Weltmarkts realisiert werden. Das war ein interessanter Ansatz, der eine ausgewogene Analyse verdienen würde statt Urteile von Lobpreis oder Verdammung. Wie in der Forschung zur „Entwicklungshilfe" des Konkurrenzsystems erweist sich ein Zugang, der einer Ex-post-Evaluierung gleicht, als wenig produktiv für historische Erkenntnis. HistorikerInnen produzieren andere Textsorten als EvaluierungsspezialistInnen. Während Evaluierer Fragen zu beantworten versuchen, die ihnen von ihren Auftraggebern zum Zweck einer Handlungsanleitung für die zukünftige Praxis gestellt wurden, versuchen HistorikerInnen vergangene Handlungsfelder sowie die Handlungsmotive und -interessen der Akteure anhand der Spuren zu beschreiben, die diese hinterlassen haben. Die Entwicklungspolitik der DDR ist Vergangenheit. Sie wurde mit dem Staat, der sie hervorgebracht hatte, von der westdeutschen Konkurrenz geschluckt. Aber sie hat Spuren hinterlassen. Da war die Unterstützung von Befreiungsbewegungen im südlichen Afrika, in Angola und Moçambique, so des ANC in Südafrika und der SWAPO in Namibia, die für deren Erfolg mitentscheidend war. Als Spuren ihrer Tätigkeit lesbar sind auch ausgebildetes Personal, Erfahrungen sowie die politischen Kontroversen über die untergegangene DDR, die bis heute einen unvoreingenommenen analytischen Zugang erschweren. Wenn ein erster Schritt darin besteht, diese Kontroversen etwas weniger einseitig darzustellen, dann markiert van der Heydens Buch und sein durch langjährige Forschung akkumuliertes Fachwissen einen Fortschritt auf dem Weg zur Historisierung der Entwicklungspolitik der DDR.

Berthold Unfried

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GEFÖRDERT DURCH DIE
ÖSTERREICHISCHE
ENTWICKLUNGS
ZUSAMMENARBEIT

2015
Europäisches Jahr
für Entwicklung

Journal für Entwicklungspolitik (JEP)
ISSN 0258-2384, Erscheinungsweise: vierteljährlich
Heft XXXI, 1-2015, ISBN 978-3-902996-05-3
Preis des Einzelhefts: Euro 11,90
Preis des Jahresabonnements: Euro 42,00 (Österreich);
Euro 52,00 (Europa); 62,00 (Welt). Weitere Informationen:
www.mattersburgerkreis.at/jep/bestellen.php
Abonnementbezug über die Redaktion:
Journal für Entwicklungspolitik, Sensengasse 3, A-1090 Wien,
office@mattersburgerkreis.at, www.mattersburgerkreis.at/jep
Das Abonnement kann unter Einhaltung einer dreimonatigen
Kündigungsfrist zum Jahresende gekündigt werden.

1. Auflage 2015

Satz: Weiderand Kommunikationsdesign, www.weiderand.net, Wien
Druck: Interpress, Budapest

Offenlegung nach § 25 Mediengesetz
Medieninhaber: Mattersburger Kreis für Entwicklungspolitik an den
österreichischen Universitäten, Sensengasse 3, A-1090 Wien
Grundlegende Richtung des JEP: Wissenschaftliche Analysen und
Diskussionen von entwicklungspolitischen Fragestellungen und Berichte
über die entwicklungspolitische Praxis. Verantwortlich für Inhalt und
Korrekturen sind die AutorInnen bzw. die Redaktion.