Can NGOs Make a Difference?

The Challenge of Development Alternatives

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PART I

Critical Challenges

Introduction: Can NGOs Make a Difference?
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'Not another Manchester book on NGOs!' some bookstore browsers will comment on spotting this text. The short response, of course, is 'Yes, another one.' The longer response is this introductory chapter. In it we argue why this is once again a good moment to take the pulse of the NGO world. This time, though, we take the pulse not merely as a health check, which was the spirit of the three Manchester conferences: in 1992 to check their fitness to go to scale (Edwards and Hulme, 1992); in 1994 to check their fitness in the face of increased societal scrutiny (Edwards and Hulme, 1995; Hulme and Edwards, 1997); and in 1999 to check their fitness in the face of globalization (e.g. Eade and Ligteringen, 2001; Edwards and Gaventa, 2001; Lewis and Wallace, 2000). Instead, participants in a conference in 2005 took the pulse of NGOs to see whether the patient was still alive. The conviction underlying the book is that NGOs are only NGOs in any politically meaningful sense of the term if they are offering alternatives to dominant models, practices and ideas about development. The question that the book addresses is whether – in the face of neoliberalism, the poverty agenda in aid, the new security agenda, institutional maturation (if not senescence), and the simple imperatives of organizational survival – NGOs continue to constitute alternatives.

As the reader will see, the authors are far from certain about the health of the patient, though none of them is yet ready to write the certificate declaring the death of alternatives and the irrelevance of NGOs (an irrelevance that would somewhat invert the scales of Edwards's polemic in 1989 that declared development studies irrelevant to NGOs, the place where real development was being done: Edwards, 1989). There are serious doubts regarding how far NGOs in the North are able to do anything that

is especially alternative to their host countries' bilateral aid programmes. There is a sense that their room for manoeuvre has been seriously constrained by the security agenda, increasing political disenchantment with NGOs, the constraints of a poverty impact agenda that will only fund activities with measurable impacts on some material dimension of poverty, and also a sense in which 'alternatives' have been swallowed whole within the newly 'inclusive' mainstream. And there are just as serious questions about NGOs in the South, who, in addition to facing these constraints, transmitted to them through funding decisions and the ever more constraining conditionalities linked to them, have to operate in political-economic environments defined by both the ravages and the domesticating hands of neoliberalism as well as the never-ending struggle to secure the financial bases of organizational survival.

That said, these doubts do not lead the majority of the authors to conclude that 'there is no alternative' and that therefore there is no reason for NGOs to exist. Indeed, the strength of all the chapters – and, we hope, the primary contribution of this collection – is that each takes a hard-headed and theoretically informed look at the constraints on NGOs' ability to exist, speak and act as development alternatives, but then also explores the ways in which NGOs have either found points where the stitching of these straitjackets is coming unpicked, or found ways simply to reframe the debate, to say that the game they were previously playing is no longer interesting, and it is time to design a new one.

In this chapter we flesh out some of the themes that the book elaborates. We begin by elaborating the idea of 'alternatives' that runs through the book, and the ways in which it might relate to NGOs. We then use this framework to give a brief, historical discussion of NGOs and the differing ways in which they have sought to be alternative (both sections rely heavily on Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington 2007). The third section introduces the middle three sections of the book: a section focusing on the different ways in which NGO-led alternatives have come under increasing pressure in the last decade; a section exploring ways in which NGOs have continued to seek ways of fostering alternative forms of development; and a section that explores how far NGOs have sought ways to simply *be* alternative, and, in so *being*, to suggest that there are different ways in which the broader development enterprise might be thought about and engaged in. The closing section of this chapter then charts implications for the future both of NGOs and of the struggle to carve out development alternatives.

Conceptualizing Alternatives

D(d)evelopment/A(a)lternative(s)

In their history of 'doctrines of development', Cowen and Shenton (1996, 1998) distinguish between two meanings of the term 'development' that have been consistently confused: 'development as an immanent and unintentional process as in, for example, the "development of capitalism" and development as an intentional activity' (1998: 50). Hart (2001: 650) amends this distinction slightly to talk of 'little d' and 'big D' d/Development, whereby the former involves the 'geographically uneven, profoundly contradictory' set of processes underlying capitalist developments, while the latter refers to the 'project of intervention in the "third world" that emerged in a context of decolonization and the cold war'. This insistence on distinguishing between notions of intervention and of deeper forms of political, economic, structural change should not lead us to lose sight of the clear, if non-deterministic, relationships between these two dimensions of development. Rather, it offers a means of clarifying the relationship between development policy and practice and the underlying processes of uneven development that create exclusion and inequality for many just as they lead to enhanced opportunities for others.

The role of NGOs in promoting development alternatives can be thought of in relation to this distinction. Much discussion of alternatives has been in relation to 'big D' Development – NGOs have been seen as sources of alternative ways of arranging microfinance, project planning, service delivery and so on: that is, alternative ways of intervening. These are reformist notions of alternatives and, as Bolnick (this volume) argues, NGOs' location within the aid industry has influenced how such alternatives come to be constituted. However, alternatives can also be conceived in relation to the underlying processes of capitalist development, or 'little d' development. Here the emphasis is on alternative ways of organizing the economy, politics and social relationships in a society. The distinction, then, is between partial, reformist, intervention-specific alternatives, and more radical, systemic alternatives. Importantly, some of our contributors warn against drawing too sharp a distinction between these types of alternative. Both Chhotray and Guijt (this volume), for instance, draw attention to the links that NGOs can forge between apparently technocratic interventions such as service delivery and broader transformations in political development and social relations. Nonetheless, we argue here that one of the disappointments of NGOs has been their tendency to identify more readily with alternative forms of interventions than with more systemic changes, and that there are strong grounds for reversing this trend.

Civil society as an alternative to the state and market

The second element of our framework links these distinctions to a reflection on state, market and civil society. The tripartite division between these spheres is often used to understand and locate NGOs as civil society actors (Bebbington, 1997; Fowler, 2000b). Yet many of these renderings are problematic. First, the treatment of civil society is often excessively normative rather than analytical: it is seen as a source of 'good', distinct from a 'bad' imputed to the state and market. Such approaches understate the potential role of the state in fostering progressive change while also downplaying the extent to which civil society is also a realm of activity for racist organizations, business-sponsored research NGOs or other organizations that most of these authors would not consider benign (e.g. Stone, 2000).

Second, even if the need to understand the three spheres in relation to each other is often recognized, the relative fluidity of boundaries between the spheres, and the growing tendency for people to move back and forth between NGOs, government and occasionally business, have received less attention (see Racelis, this volume, for a discussion of some of these relationships in the Philippine context). Such movements have further problematized the understanding of NGOs as being an integral part of civil society, something already called into question by those who argue that NGOs can be more accurately seen as corporate entities acting according to the logic of the marketplace, albeit a marketplace in service provision (Stewart, 1997; Uphoff, 1995). Perhaps more important, though, is that NGOs are a relatively recent organizational form, particularly when compared to more deep-seated social arrangements such as religious institutions, political movements, government and transnational networks of various kinds. Why NGOs exist, what they do, what they say, who they relate to, can only be understood in terms of their relationship to more constitutive actors in society, as well as in terms of the relationships among these constitutive actors, and between them, state and market.

Civil society – and the place of NGOs within it – must therefore be treated carefully, historically, conceptually and relationally. Within development studies, civil society has been predominantly understood in two main ways, at each of two main levels (Bebbington and Hickey, 2006). At the level of ideology and theory, the notion of civil society has flourished most fruitfully within either the neoliberal school of thought that advocates a reduced role for the state or a post-Marxist/post-structural approach that emphasizes the transformative potential of social movements within civil society. At the conceptual level, civil society is usually treated in terms of associations (so-called civil society organizations), or as an arena within which ideas about the ordering of social life are debated and contested. Proponents of

both approaches often present civil society as offering a critical path towards what Aristotle described as 'the good society' (Edwards, 2004).

We work from a broadly Gramscian understanding of civil society as constituting an arena in which hegemonic ideas concerning the organization of economic and social life are both established and contested. Gramsci (1971) perceived state and civil society to be mutually constitutive rather than separate, autonomous entities, with both formed in relation to historical and structural forces akin to our processes of 'little d' development. He was centrally concerned with explaining the failures of both liberalism and socialism, and of the role that counter-hegemonic movements within civil society might play in promoting social and also revolutionary change. The resulting contestations, and the hegemonies which emerge and the roles (if any) that distinct NGOs play in this, must in turn be understood in terms of the relationships and struggles for power among the constitutive actors of society. Importantly, this also means that agents from within the state may join forces with civil society actors in forging counter-hegemonic alternatives as well as dominant hegemonies (see Chhotray, this volume).

These contestations over hegemony are thus closely related to our framing of 'alternatives'. One can imagine certain alternatives in the domain of 'big D' Development that challenge ideas that are dominant, but not foundational. For instance, dominant ideas about how health care ought to be organized might be contested and challenged by NGOs proposing distinct models of provision. Such alternatives, important though they may be in welfare terms, do not challenge the more basic arrangements that order society (as Bristow suggests in her chapter). Conversely, one can also imagine hegemonic ideas that are far more foundational – for instance, in the present moment, neoliberal ideas regarding how society and market ought to be governed; or ideas about property rights. These ideas thus require contestation in relation to alternatives that relate to the domain of 'little d' development – akin to what Escobar (1995) frames as 'alternatives to development' rather than 'development alternatives'.

Glocal NGOs

While concepts of global civil society may have their difficulties, there can be little doubt that, as the most potent force within late modernity, globalization has (re)shaped NGOs and ideas about NGOs. One effect has been that (at least some) NGOs have increasingly become a transnational community, itself overlapping with other transnational networks and institutions (Townsend, 1999). These linkages and networks disperse new forms of development discourse and modes of governance as well as resources throughout the global South; and some Southern NGOs have (albeit to a lesser extent) begun to gain their own footholds in the North with

their outposts in Brussels, Washington and elsewhere (see, for example, the Grameen Foundation, BRAC, Breadline Africa or the Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción – ALOP). Yet these transnationalizing tendencies, especially in the form of global advocacy networks and campaigns, may have also excluded certain actors and groups for whom engagement in such processes is harder (Chiriboga, 2001). Thus these moves to scale have simultaneously increased the distance between constituent parts of the sector and led to the emergence of international civil society elites who come to dominate the discourses and flows that are channelled through this transnational community. This raises serious questions as to *whose alternatives* gain greater visibility in these processes.

The transnationalizing of 'big D' interventions (e.g. structural adjustment and the subsequent phenomenon of poverty-reduction strategy papers, or PRSPs) reflects structural transformations in the workings of national and international capitalisms and the nature of organizations in capitalist society (Craig and Porter, 2006). These changes make it important for any alternative project (in a Gramscian sense) to work simultaneously at different points within these chains of intervention. The specific forms of intervention have also involved the increased channelling of (national and multilateral) state-controlled resources through NGOs – a channelling in which resources become bundled with particular rules and ideas regarding how they must be governed and contribute to the governing of others. This bundling has meant NGOs become increasingly faced with opportunities related to the dominant ideas and rules that travel with development finance – in particular in the current context, ideas related to neoliberalism and security. Acceptance of such opportunities has made life difficult for many northern NGOs, who in turn pass on these difficulties to their partners.

It is a short step to move from such observations to suggest that NGOs are becoming vehicles of neoliberal governmentality (e.g. Manji and O'Coill 2002; Townsend et al., 2002), disciplining local organizations and populations in much the same way as Development has done in the past (Escobar, 1995; also Duffield, 2001). Such a reading clearly has a significant degree of purchase and cannot be wished away. However, it also understates the extent to which such pressures are being resisted by some NGOs (Edwards and Gaventa, 2001; Townsend et al., 2004), and to which some NGOs might actively seek to advance progressive forms of globalization through promoting 'cosmopolitan' forms of politics (Yanacopulos and Smith, this volume). An NGO's ability to sustain a broader funding base can be a tool that helps it negotiate and rework some of these pressures, while the potential ability of NGOs to mobilize the broader networks and institutions within which they are embedded can also be a means of muting such disciplining effects. These networks, whose contribution to NGO activities is

exemplified by the studies of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and Jubilee 2000 (Edwards and Gaventa, 2001), can provide other resources and relationships of power on which the organization can draw – be these based in the Jesuit community, transnational corporate actors (who appear on a number of NGO boards), or underlying networks of power within the movements for social democracy, to name but a few.

Transnational NGO networks are not necessarily characterized by uneven North–South relations. As the more horizontal experience of Shack/Slum Dwellers International shows, the spatial reworking of development has increased opportunities for socially excluded groups themselves to speak, and some NGOs are working with such groups to increase the representation of these voices (Patel and Mitlin, 2002; Bolnick, this volume). Equally the reconstruction of ActionAid, from a Northern NGO with a UK headquarters to one based in Johannesburg with all country programmes being equally involved in determining the direction of the organization, reveals the lengths to which a Northern NGO can go in seeking to realize a progressive mission in the face of growing geopolitical inequalities.

Nonetheless, it remains essential to understand NGOs – as well as states, markets and civil societies – in the context of these transnational relations and flows. NGOs are *part of* while trying to be *apart from* the political economy – and the workings of this political economy are transnational in nature and global in reach. As such, we reiterate the point that, for NGOs to regain a sense of being and offering alternatives, it is critical that they (re)consider themselves in relation to struggles over 'little d' development as a foundational, underlying and increasingly globalized form of social change – and not simply in relation to the state or market, or to doing 'big D' development differently.

NGOs as 'Alternatives': A Brief History

Integral to reflections on NGOs for two decades, thinking about NGOs as alternatives has gone somewhat missing of late. The NGO literature has been voluminous since the 1980s, termed by some the 'NGO decade', with these new actors frequently lauded as the institutional alternative to existing development approaches (Hirschman, 1984; Korten, 1990). Critical voices at this point were largely muted, confined to expressing concern that NGOs might be an externally imposed phenomenon that, far from being alternative, heralded a new wave of imperialism (Tandon, 1991). Apparently inclined to offer the benefit of the doubt, much of the literature focused on locating the importance of NGOs as a key plank within the emerging 'New Policy Agenda', including a new role at the vanguard of donor agendas

on 'civil society' and 'democratization' (Robinson, 1995). However, as the
1980s and 1990s proceeded, NGOs came under closer and more critical
scrutiny, from both supporters and sceptics alike. 'Internal' debates looked
both ways. On the one hand were discussions of how to scale up NGO
activities (Edwards and Hulme, 1992), how to run NGOs more successfully
and ensure their sustainability as organizations (e.g. Fowler, 2000a; Lewis,
and Wallace, 2000), and how NGOs might better manage their relationships
(Robinson et al., 2000). On the other hand, commentators feared that close-
ness to the mainstream undermined their comparative advantage as agents
of alternative development, with particular attention falling on problems
of standardization and upwards accountability (Edwards and Hulme, 1996;
Wallace et al., 1997), on the effectiveness of NGOs in reaching the poorest
(Riddell and Robinson, 1995; Vivian, 1994), and on an apparent increased
tendency to employ 'radical' methods of empowerment as technical means
rather than as political ends in themselves. The apparently limited success of
NGOs as agents of democratization came under critique from within (e.g.
Fowler, 1993) and without (e.g. Marcussen, 1996; Mercer, 2002; Harvey,
2004), while the simmering debate re-emerged over NGOs as an externally
driven phenomenon that threatened the development of indigenous civil
society and distracted attention from more political organizations (e.g.
Hashemi, 1995; Mamdani, 1993). Such concerns culminated in a period of
millennial angst within the sector, with growing calls for Northern NGOs
in particular to devise new roles and rationales for themselves (Lewis and
Wallace, 2000) or risk becoming obsolete (Van Rooy, 2000). NGOs were
advised to reach beyond the aid system for alternative forms of funding
(Fowler, 2000b) while also lobbying for a fundamental restructuring of the
international aid system itself.

    However, and while the academic output on NGOs remains more diverse
than can be fully reviewed here, what has perhaps been most remarkable of
late is the extent to which these critical concerns have been allowed to pass
by in the academic literature with very little evidence that they have been
seriously addressed. We are arguably no clearer now concerning questions
of effectiveness, accountability and successful routes to scaling-up than we
were when these questions were raised over a decade ago, let alone concern-
ing the wider challenge of what being 'alternative' means at this juncture
(Tandon, 2001). And while some Northern NGOs have undergone profound
institutional changes (e.g. witness once more ActionAid's relocation to South
Africa), a sense of complacency concerning these and other key challenges
appears to have replaced the earlier sense of angst within Northern NGOs
about their future role. In countries in democratic transition, such as South
Africa or Chile, the NGO sector has been seeking to find a new role to
enable survival, and does not appear to be concerning itself with higher

order questions. It is perhaps a frustration with this as much as anything that encourages us to ask again whether and how NGOs might re-engage with their founding project of offering genuine 'alternatives'.

While the growth of NGOs has been well reviewed, Lewis (2005) argues that much of this analysis has lacked theoretical acuity. The next section therefore approaches this modern history of NGOs through the lens of our reflective framework and in a way that helps speak to our overall concern for the place of NGOs in fashioning alternative forms of development. We divide this abridged history into four main phases. Although aware that this omits the deeper history to which Lewis (2005) refers, our historical starting point and our concern for alternatives (Drabek, 1987) mean that we have placed particular emphasis on the last twenty years.

An abridged history of NGO a/Alternatives

Our *first period* (up to the mid- to late 1960s) is characterized by the long history of a limited number of small agencies seeking to respond to the needs of groups of people perceived as poor and who received little external professional support. These largely issue-based organizations combined both philanthropic action and advocacy – as for instance in the case of the abolition of slavery and promotion of peace (Charnovitz, 1997, cited in Lewis, 2005). Most were Northern based, but some had a Southern presence, and they were generally embedded both in broader movements (e.g. against slavery) and in networks that mobilized voluntary contributions. They were often linked to other organizations providing them with an institutional base and funding, and frequently linked to wider religious institutions and philanthropists; see, for example, the history of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (Crouch, 1993). There were also clear interactions with the state around legal reform as well as with the market which generated most of the resources then transferred through foundations (a model that of course continues through to today, on a far more massive scale). From the North, at least some such interventions emerged from the legacy of colonialism, such as volunteer programmes sending experts to 'under-capacitated' countries or organizations that derived from missionary interventions (Cooper, 1997). While some interventions were of organizations whose mission and/or staff recognized the need for structural reform, only rarely was such work alternative in any systemic sense, or in the sense that it sought to change the balance of hegemonic ideas, be these about the organization of society or the provision of services.

Such organizations continued their work (some closed down, others were created) during the 1960s and 1970s – broadly our *second phase*, through to 1980–85. Although they remained relatively small-scale, in some countries and some sectors this period marked the early stages of the later

acceleration in NGO growth. Critically this period seems to be catalysed
by the consolidation of NGO 'co-financing' programmes, whose creation
reflected a willingness of Northern states and societies to institutionalize
NGO projects within their national aid portfolios. Reflecting the geopolitical
moment, the sector became increasingly critical, engaging more fully with
the notion that it was imperative that NGOs elaborate and contribute to
alternative arrangements among state, market and civil society (generally on
a national rather than a transnational scale), and alternatives both within,
and to, capitalism. In this period development (as a project) was increasingly
scrutinized, reflecting the intersection between these NGOs and political
struggles around national independence and various socialisms, as well as
between these political projects and intellectual debates on dependency,
structuralist and broadly Marxian interpretations of the development process
(Watts, 2001). The notion of 'alternative development' itself emerged most
strongly in this era (e.g. Nerfin, 1977), and the publication of books such as
Small is Beautiful (Schumacher, 1973) is illustrative of this battle of ideas.

The sector was increasingly conscious of itself and of the need to build
collaborations with other non-governmental actors, particularly across
North–South boundaries. Numerous influences – awareness of the need for
local institutional development, reduction in the formal colonial presence,
and the contradictions inherent in the Northern NGO model – resulted in
a steady shift in this period from operational to funding roles for Northern
NGOs and the growth of a Southern NGO sector (Smillie and Helmich,
1993).

In the South, this was a period in which a growing number of NGOs,
in particular those embedded in institutions and networks of political and
religious lefts, consciously sought to shift state–market–civil society ar-
rangements through government policy. This was also a period in which
very many existing and newly formed NGOs negotiated space within and
alongside other political and social movements. This process was one of
collaboration among actors who recognized the benefits of the joint exist-
ence of movements, supportive institutions *and* NGOs within the struggle
against hegemonic and repressive structures manifested through the state
(e.g. Philippines, South Africa, El Salvador). On the part of such NGOs,
there was a recognized need for political change. Often, the relationships
between these actors ran deep, with NGO staff being simultaneously
active in political parties and movements (such as, for example, PlanAct
– established in 1985 – and the ANC in South Africa).

These were also the periods when European co-financing resources were
(often deliberately) given without many questions being asked, in order
to channel resources to oppositional movements via NGOs without any
explicit, traceable government knowledge. Meanwhile other governments

and conservative forces – most notably the USA – used a not dissimilar tactic to support elements of the hegemonic forces and ideas against which these NGOs and political movements were struggling (see Hulme, this volume). Indeed, in this phase and in later arguments over neoliberalism, the role of NGOs both in strategies of contesting hegemony as well as in other strategies aimed at consolidating it, was more than apparent. The non-governmental sector was one of the more important terrains in which dominance of civil society was being contested (c.f. Howell and Pearce, 2001) and in which the alternatives at stake were systemic as much as sectoral. However, we should recognize that the bulk of this contestation revolved around political rather than economic structures.

Our *third phase* is defined by the growth in recognition for NGOs and their work and the increasing interest in funding such activities, often in relationships with the state and development agencies. This phase began in the early 1980s, reflecting the link between this changing position of NGOs and more profound systemic shifts that also date from this period. This was the period of the NGO 'boom', a boom that can only be understood in terms of its own relationship to transformations in this period in the structures of capitalisms North, South and globally. Indeed, it remains one of the central contradictions concerning NGO alternatives that the huge increase in NGO activity during the 1980s was driven to a significant extent by the unfolding neoliberal agenda and the new roles it gave to NGOs – the very agenda that development alternatives have sought to critically engage. We would draw attention to three particular shifts in the broader relationships among state, market and civil society as being important in this regard: macroeconomic instability and crisis in a significant number of countries; political democratization, from both dictatorships and 'enlightened authoritarian' regimes towards more formally liberal democracies; and a shift in dominant development discourse, with concepts and practices such as 'civil society' and participation assuming great (discursive) centrality.

The structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s led to a series of demands – across the political spectrum – for NGO intervention as programme implementers, knowledge generators and activists, depending somewhat on the political origins of those demands. The model itself was not in question and certainly this source of support for NGOs did not help them contest it, even if they wished to. Those who opposed structural adjustment looked to NGOs to document the scale of suffering caused and to demonstrate the feasibility of coherent alternatives that also took account of the previous failure of government to deliver to the poor. Arguably NGOs were far more effective at the documentation of failure than the elaboration of alternatives. Much was expected of NGOs in this period but there was little to no space to pursue large-scale or system-questioning alternative projects. Yet the 1980s

were not entirely lost to systemic alternatives, particularly as some countries witnessed a resurgence of new social movements (Alvarez et al., 1998; Ballard et al., 2005). These movements suggested other pathways through which alternatives might be built, more slowly and systematically, around concepts of citizenship, identity and organization (see Escobar, 2001, 1995; and Dagnino this volume). These alternatives, in some countries, challenged dominant thinking on the social and political order, if not the economic. In other cases, NGOs emerged to support defensive actions against the expansion of market-led development. In Asia, widespread evictions resulted in the establishment of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights in 1988 and explicit attempts to create alliances between professionals and grassroots organization to address processes of exclusionary development.

Adjustment was also accompanied by political democratization, partly as the political correlate of neoliberalism, but also as a response to long years of organizing within civil society in which NGOs had played a role along with other actors. Ironically, this democratization brought further complications to NGOs. Once newly democratic state institutions took up alternatives for which NGOs had pushed, NGOs were left with the uncertainty of what to do next other than help the state make a success of these new orthodoxies. Indeed, many NGO staff and movement activists have moved into government precisely to try and help foster such success (Racelis, Dagnino, both this volume) – a process sometimes viewed as co-optation rather than success. If democratization marked a success in delivering a systemic alternative in which NGOs could claim some role, the alternative was incomplete and complex in two senses. First, while relationships between state and civil society were (at least partly) transformed, those between state and market were largely unaffected, and those between market and civil society appeared to further commodify social relations. Second, the growing closeness of NGOs to the 'big D' interventions moulded by national and multilateral organizations led to the concern that NGOs had become, in Edwards and Hulme's (1996) term, 'too close for comfort' to a range of other actors in a way that compromised their innovativeness, autonomy, legitimacy, accountability and ability to continue elaborating alternatives. The role of public service contractor was, if anything, stronger in the South than the North, where the move of NGO professionals into government was often accompanied by programmes (partly crafted by these same professionals) in which the NGOs became subcontracted service providers. This trend, also reinforced by donor demands and changing perceptions of the comparative advantages of the state, potentially put NGOs' more radical role at risk. For these and other reasons, authors from different regions argued that it had become increasingly difficult for NGOs to offer 'little d' development alternatives (Aldaba et al., 2000).

Not all shared the sense of pending institutional doom that was suggested by some of this literature – some NGO leaders questioned the tendency of Northern commentators to impute crises where they didn't exist. Indeed, a decade later it seems that stories of their imminent demise had been greatly exaggerated. Yet NGOs have hardly become more robust, and pressures over the last decade – our *fourth period* – present an additional set of health hazards, some more obvious, others less intuitive. This fourth period we date from the mid- to late 1990s with a persistent and public set of concerns about the practice, direction and focus of NGOs. It is a period in which NGOs have had to come to terms with their entry, at scale, into the reform agenda, as well as increasing diversification within the NGO sector and the apparent co-option of many 'alternatives' within the mainstream. There are three apparent trends in this period that impinge directly on NGOs and the scope for building either systemic or reformist alternatives: the continued deepening of the democratization-cum-neoliberalization agenda; the increasingly dominant poverty agenda in international aid; and the relatively more recent, hugely pernicious, security agenda, itself coupled in strange ways with the poverty agenda. We deal with these each in turn.

The current neoliberal order

With the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the neo-liberalization of social democracy, the end to global Communism, and the increasing tendency towards military enforcement of liberal democratic process, the joint project of liberal democracy and free trade seems to have become increasingly clear and consolidated in this latter period, making it ever more difficult for NGOs or other actors to think or act outside of this neoliberal box. This is particularly so because the box has incorporated much core NGO terminology around democracy, rights, empowerment, participation, poverty and livelihoods (Craig and Porter, 2006). At the same time there are incentives to engage with – indeed, become *part of* – hegemonic forms of 'little d' development, as these begin to look more attractive, or (perhaps more often) all that is possible, as with microfinance.

The shift towards democratization and building the role of civil society has likewise brought many NGOs closer to the operations of mainstream Development. Accompanied by the scaling up of the participatory turn, this shift has offered some NGOs unprecedented levels of access to at least part of the policy process, as for instance in relation to PRSPs. But it also brings challenges, particularly concerning the capacity and legitimacy of NGOs to act as pseudo-democratic representatives of 'the poor', and the risks of being associated with processes that may in themselves undermine broader democratic norms. There are real dangers that the participatory turn can and does obscure more legitimate and effective forms of democratic

representation (Brown, 2004). Some NGOs, keen to secure their seat at the new range of tables open to them within 'inclusive' policy processes, have been perhaps too keen to grasp and extend these channels, without thinking through the longer-term problems that this raises for public accountability in developing country contexts.

The poverty reduction agenda and related shifts in NGO financing

Closely related has been the new-found hegemony for 'poverty reduction' within international development. The (very considerable) resources flowing from bilateral and some multilateral agencies to NGOs are increasingly bundled with this poverty reduction agenda, placing increasing demands on these NGOs to deliver measurable achievements in poverty reduction. While it is hard to contest the worthiness of such goals, this emphasis – especially with increased insistence on measurement and indicators – has the potential not only to rein in but also to depoliticize the range of strategies open to NGOs in promoting development (Derksen and Verhallen, this volume). There is at least some evidence to suggest that as aid becomes far more oriented to measurable poverty reduction, it has led NGOs away from relations with social movements, and towards more narrowly drawn specific targeted development improvements. These changing donor priorities are also evident in South Africa where, since 1994, international funding has been orientated to the state and state funding to charitable activities rather than to social justice organizations, with the effect that NGOs have increasingly turned to contract work and fees for service (Planact, 2006).

These trends – the deepening of both democratization and the neoliberal economic agenda in developing countries, and the onset of the poverty agenda – have thus begun to shift the political economy of development funding in ways that strengthen some roles and create new dilemmas for NGOs. Both the desire by donors to have more of international development work focused on large-scale poverty reduction, and the advance of national government funding of poverty reduction programmes in Asia, Latin America and Africa, have led to a clear shift back towards the state. Here, NGOs become framed as public-service contractors, with donor interest in funding more innovative activities – including those oriented towards systemic alternatives and challenging hegemonic ideas – concomitantly reduced. Thus, even as foreign aid flows have risen, the scope for alternatives has narrowed.

In some cases, there is competition from the private sector for these funds, although there is some awareness of mixed results (e.g. the experiences with subsidized housing and shelter improvements in Latin America). Many argue that voluntary-sector organizations in North and South have suffered from

greater emphasis on cost recovery, charging for services, professionalized staff relationships, the dominance of competition and the rise of tenders (Townsend and Townsend, 2004). While this blurring between civil and market logics holds the potential to inject a stronger sense of the social within the corporate logic of the private sector and to provide greater resources for social programmes, there is perhaps greater potential for the reverse to predominate, such that the 'pro-market diversification of (NGO) relationships ... is an erosion of their potential as agents of systemic social and political change' (Fowler, 2005: 1).

A further contemporary trend in funding has been the switch to direct funding of NGOs in the South. While larger South-based NGOs and local offices of Northern NGOs have been successful in raising funds from these sources, smaller NGOs have less capacity to deal with the bureaucracy of donor agencies, suggesting that over time there will be more concentration in both the Northern and Southern NGO sectors. Some Southern NGOs complain that Northern NGOs are becoming more like bilateral agencies than non-governmental partners, and indeed some within these Northern NGOs feel the same. The same is also said by emerging NGOs in the South when they are funded through the capacity development programmes of big Southern NGOs. NGOs have struggled to adapt to this funding climate. Many spend considerable time chasing money that is not very useful to them. NGOs need considerable financial skills to manipulate this situation to their advantage, pursue an alternative agenda and still be seen as competent.

The 'new' security agenda

The third trend marking the most recent years has been the rise of the security agenda – not human or livelihood security but Western geopolitical security (Duffield, 2001). NGOs have long operated in the context of global conflicts, not only as humanitarian actors but also as active promoters of system change, often in ways related to the political and social justice movements onto which the NGOs mapped – think, for instance, of the conflicts in Central America. However, the issues raised by conflict have changed significantly since Edwards et al.'s (1999) comments concerning the roles that NGOs can and should play within conflict zones, not least because of the 'Global War on Terror'. The multiple challenges that this new context raises for NGO alternatives is explored in Alan Fowler's chapter, but what is most relevant for us to note here is the different positioning of Northern NGOs on this issue (Lister, 2004). While some have refused to work in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan or to accept bilateral funding from aggressor states to work therein, others have either applied a peg to their nose and followed what they perceive to be their mission despite opposing

the war on terror, or taken the view that their humanitarian aims are compatible with the new imperialism (Lister, 2004: 8). This range of positioning reveals not only the extent to which the political economy of aid, and NGO dependency on official flows, limits their room for manoeuvre, but also the immense differences among NGOs in how they understand and approach the notion of pursuing 'alternatives'. For those unable or unwilling to extract themselves from the vagaries of 'big D', the character of the latest nexus between security and development means that the result is complicity in a wider form of 'little d' that has little discernible link to a project of equity, social justice and political inclusion.

Mapping the Book's Contributions

With these conceptual and historical points of reference in mind, we have organized the chapters of the book into five main sections. The first section sets the stage, combining this chapter and one by Mike Edwards, a key player in all four of the 'Manchester' conferences. He offers a retrospective on the NGOs' conferences that began in 1991, and that have been repeated in 1994, 1999 and most recently in 2005. He argues that NGOs have taken insufficient heed of warnings to protect their integrity and that organizational self-interest has become too dominant. During the 1990s, NGOs became increasingly funded by official development assistance agencies, and the 1994 conference saw intense discussions on this theme. Whilst Edwards and Hulme (1995) suggested that NGOs faced choices, in the years that followed NGOs have failed to address real concerns about their accountability and are now vulnerable to criticism. The 1999 conference highlighted further themes with a vision to move beyond inequality and difference, and the promise of transnational organizing among NGO equals seeking systemic change – rather than NGOs having a secondary role within strategies shaped by continuing asymmetries of the foreign aid world.

   Since this date, there have been some examples of NGOs using 'development as leverage' (rather than 'delivery'). Such developments, combined by the ongoing process of reflection among NGOs, suggest to Edwards that NGOs have made positive contributions to development alternatives. As a first step, it is hard to argue that the world would have been a better place without NGOs. NGOs have helped to raise important issues and lay the foundations for progress. However, the rise in aid budgets, in part due to the security agenda, has weakened the incentive to innovate within the NGO sector. NGOs have contributed to raising awareness of the downside of globalization, cementing commitments to participation and human rights, and raising critical global issues such as Africa and global warming. But

NGOs have not done well in identifying ways of changing the systems that perpetuate poverty as well as discrimination by class, race and gender. Nor have they, notwithstanding exceptions, innovated in terms of their organizational relationships and greater downward accountability, perhaps because their organizational imperatives dominate over their development vision. Underlying this situation are two contrasting visions for the future: one in which NGOs participate in a modernization process now located within the 'war on terror', and the other of an international system with international laws and in which countries and their citizens negotiate solutions within a recognition of interdependency. If NGOs fail to commit to this second vision, then they can make only incremental contributions, Edwards concludes. However, if they are prepared to accept new relationships within civic action, then they may achieve much more.

The second, third and fourth sections are organized around three principles that emerged from these two background papers and the conference itself: the sense that the scope to pursue alternatives is under particular pressure in the contemporary period; the experiments that NGOs continue to pursue with different ways of engaging in social transformation and development; and the attempts of different NGOs, North and South, simply to be different, to organize themselves differently and stand for a different way of thinking about development. We discuss these three sections below. The final section then closes the book with a provocative and forward-thinking commentary from David Hulme, another stalwart of all four Manchester conferences.

Alternatives under pressure

The second section of this book is perhaps the most depressing – at least, it is that which gives most cause to worry that the scope for pursuing development alternatives, both in general and by NGOs in particular, has become steadily more constrained. The chapters in this section – by Evelina Dagnino, Kees Biekart, Alan Thomas and Alan Fowler – explore three main sources of pressure on these alternatives: the pressures of neoliberalism in the South; the pressures deriving from the increasingly technocratic, target-oriented and also neoliberal agenda of agencies that channel resources to NGOs; and the pressures of the new security agenda that has emerged since the later 1990s, though with far more force since 11 September 2001 and the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Taken as a whole, these pressures might be understood as the effect within the non-governmental sector of the two main geopolitical projects that have characterized the period since the first Manchester conference: the extension of neoliberal capitalism around the globe, consolidated not only in policies and institutional reforms but more importantly in taken-for-granted

discourses on society and development, as well as in the practices of those very agents who are ostensibly opposed to neoliberalism (the academic world included); and the expansion, through financial flows, militarization and the practices of intelligence, of a particular way of governing this phase of neoliberal capitalism. Geopolitics has always been part of aid, of course, and so this is nothing new. However, there is some sense in these chapters that particular Western muscles are being flexed more strongly today than in the past, and that this has – among other things – reined in the possibility that NGOs or other critics of the contemporary order might experiment with and give voice to the possibility of other orders.

Importantly, though each of these chapters is sombre in its different way, they all hold out hope (and in this sense offer a bridge to the third and fourth sections). There are varying dimensions to this hope: that aid for NGOs is not necessarily under the financial pressure that many believe to be the case; that, in some areas, resources for lobbying and political work seem in fact to have increased; that even under neoliberalism it has been possible to produce democracy-deepening experiences, such as Brazil's experiments with participatory budgeting and local governance; that even within the security- and impact-oriented conditionalities of the current aid agenda, it remains possible for NGOs to carve out space for change. In the search for this space, however, perhaps the most important theme of the chapters is the importance of NGOs and other civil society actors continuing to reflect on the reality of the contexts in which they operate. As later sections of the book suggest, such honest critical reflection can – when it is willing to risk all – give rise to significant innovation.

Evelina Dagnino argues that the policy and political context of much of Latin America can be characterized by what she calls a 'perverse confluence' between the broad tendencies of neoliberalism and efforts to deepen democratic practice. Central to this confluence is a process in which core concepts within this democracy-deepening project are assumed and given new meaning by the policies and political practices of neoliberalism. In particular, she notes how under neoliberalism 'participation' comes to mean involvement in programme implementation but not in policy design, 'civil society' becomes a third sector of nonprofit organizations rather than a domain in which ideas about development and society are struggled over, and 'citizenship' ceases to mean the 'right to have rights' and becomes the right to receive targeted subsidies from government poverty-reduction programmes. Neoliberalism, for Dagnino, takes the core concepts of alternative development and transforms them into ideas that help sustain the neoliberal political project. In the process, many NGOs become functional to neoliberalism, doing what the state used to do, and while some of them may realize and worry about this change in their roles, the implication is that they can

do little to sustain alternative societal projects and tend to become more distant from the social movements with which they were previously more organically linked. Dagnino does not paint a picture of complete pessimism and she evidently draws inspiration from some of Brazil's experiments with democracy deepening. However, her analysis suggests real pressures on the scope for alternatives and those NGOs ostensibly committed to them.

One of the most acutely felt pressures faced by many NGOs is financial – the constant search for resources to support their work. In some parts of the world, NGOs sense that this pressure has become more severe in recent years. Kees Biekart's chapter notes, for instance, how many Latin American organizations that received support from European donor NGOs fear that these agencies will gradually withdraw from the region, re-channelling funds to Africa and other (poorer) regions of the world. His chapter reports on recent research suggesting, however, that the situation is more nuanced, and not necessarily as dire as some suggest. The data show, instead, a concentration of NGO funding in a smaller set of countries, and with a more restricted group of partner organizations. This increased focus has been accompanied by a change in orientation of these resources. European agencies have moved away from areas such as rural development, agriculture and the environment, and have instead increased their attention for rights-based approaches combined with more integrated joint lobbying and advocacy work. This has generated a more political agenda on topics such as migration, conflict resolution, peace-building, and trade issues. These are likely to be key topics in the coming years, in which the 'creation and promotion of more synergies' among partners within the South, and between North and South, will be a central slogan in optimizing the use of available resources. Overall, then, Biekart suggests that a closer look at financial flows for NGO cooperation suggests that trends are not necessarily reducing scope for alternatives. Indeed, if anything, the shift towards more politicized approaches might even be opening new opportunities for innovative approaches to social and political change.

Even if – as Biekart suggests – NGO funding levels may be healthy, it might still be the case that the principles tied to that funding constrain NGOs' ability to be 'alternative'. This is the concern of Alan Thomas, for whom 'reciprocity' constitutes the organizing principle of NGOs and other civil society organizations (CSOs). Using UK Department for International Development (DFID) funding as an example, he then explores how far this support affects this defining principle. He suggests 'voice' and 'impact' are becoming the dominant reasons why DFID channels resources to NGOs, and in so doing they may be jeopardizing one of the important contributions of NGOs – to promote an alternative form of *relating* within a modern capitalist society with a major bureaucratic state sector. The

DFID increasingly recognizes the political role of NGOs in making the 'voice of the poor' heard so as to hold governments to account and ensure better pro-poor policies. At the same time, though, it also funds NGOs to supply services directly – seeing them simply as private actors filling gaps opened by inadequate state capacity. In these arrangements, NGOs are viewed as simply another private firm, and are expected to compete for donor contracts on the basis of efficiency and impact as measured against the Millennium Development Goals. Thomas does not naysay the importance of 'voice' and 'impact', but does suggest that to judge NGOs only by their direct results in these domains downplays other fundamental, value-based aspects of NGO work in development. These include solidarity, quality of personal relationships, partnership with local and national government agencies, the contributions of participatory service provision to broader processes of empowerment, and advocacy for forms of 'public action' in which NGOs contest the very definition of what is a public need while at the same time supplying that need. These values – which he subsumes into the principle of reciprocity – are, he concludes, being marginalized and need to be upheld against these donor pressures.

In the final chapter of this section, Fowler discusses one of the most difficult challenges facing NGOs today, namely the extent to which they can maintain a sense of autonomy and commitment to social justice while operating within the new security agenda. He outlines the range of 'counter terrorism measures' that Western governments, particularly the USA, have implemented and the ways in which these inhibit the freedom of NGOs to operate. For example, NGOs face far closer scrutiny concerning the southern organizations that they partner with, a move that threatens the progressive efforts to decentralize power and resources to local organizations. The costs of compliance with these new rigours also threaten the core funding that NGOs rely on in order to retain a degree of autonomy. Moreover, as the 'development for security' agenda dictates that development finance be redirected to different regions and for different purposes, NGOs face further dilemmas. What role (if any) can they play in rebuilding the 'failed states' that apparently provide the breeding ground for terrorists? Given that the securitization agenda combines humanitarian imperatives with the 'new imperialism', can NGOs maintain an alternative, even counter-hegemonic stance while working within war zones such as Iraq? Fowler concludes that while NGOs may need to accept that their room for manoeuvre is now more limited, he suggests that if they are able to innovate in their relationships, reformulate their self-understanding and purpose, and develop a strategic awareness of the long-term game being played, then they may still be able to operate within this agenda while aligning themselves with 'a messy "transformatory-reformism"'.

Pursuing alternatives: NGO strategies in practice

If the second section of the book leaves us with a sense that, even in a context of constraint, there is still scope for pursuing alternatives, the third section explores this pursuit in more detail. The NGOs discussed in this section are committed to alternatives in a variety of senses – alternatives to underlying processes of development, to big Development agencies and to the approaches offered by states. Although such approaches remain diverse and beyond easy summary, what seems more apparent is that their relative success or failure in these ventures is shaped not only by material factors relating to the political economy of aid, but also – and perhaps more strongly – by non-material factors, including the building of relationships with other actors, and, perhaps less obviously, a strong engagement with ideas, research and knowledge.

Several chapters here emphasize the importance of evidence and research. Such activities offer legitimacy to NGOs seeking to influence policy processes, although success here may depend more on the strategic use of the evidence than on its intrinsic quality (Pollard and Court, Chhotray). Importantly, ideas and concepts also matter here. How the social world is conceptualized and the nature of the ideological positions taken by NGOs remain critical (see Guijt on power analysis, and elsewhere in this volume Piálek on feminism). More broadly, this helps emphasize the importance of NGOs engaging with the public struggle for ideas and for influence over the direction of public thinking on development or the 'good society' (Bazán et al., and the final section of this chapter).

The success of NGOs in building relationships with a wide range of popular but also potentially elitist (e.g. research-based) elements of civil society is critical, particularly where such elements form part of wider movements (as in the case of Guijt's examples of women's movements in Uganda and Sri Lanka). Relationships with the state seem to be rather more controversial. For one contributor, the state's antipathy to critical and independent NGOs can present a significant obstacle (Racelis), whereas another argues that (given the legitimacy derived from popular support and acting within state-prescribed boundaries) some NGOs can develop a dual strategy of simultaneous critique of and engagement with the state (Chhotray).

Nonetheless, the political economy of aid still matters, and different modalities and tendencies within development finance can either enable (Guijt) or constrain (Bazán et al.) the pursuit of alternatives by NGOs. This is particularly the case in relation to the degree of autonomy that they have to pursue their own strategic directions, but also regarding the paucity of funds for thinking as opposed to acting. The tendency remains for donors to fund research related to specific policy ideas within Development rather than focusing on underlying processes of uneven development.

The chapter by Amy Pollard and Julius Court reviews the literature on how civil society organizations (CSOs), and particularly NGOs, aim to reform and transform policy processes. The authors suggest that CSOs seek to influence the policy process at four distinct stages – problem identification and agenda setting; formulation and adoption; implementation; and monitoring and evaluation – and that different strategies may be required for success at each stage. In the first place, the ways in which CSOs shape and frame issues can help bring them to the attention of publics and policymakers, thus influencing agendas and processes of debate even without directly influencing policy decision-makers. Once policies are being formulated and adopted, CSOs can facilitate the engagement of excluded groups within the debate through acting as representatives and presenting research findings on the problems faced by such groups. Having a strong informational base is increasingly important for those CSOs that are well integrated in the policy process. In terms of policy implementation, the authors look at experiences in technical assistance and service provision, as well as less direct strategies involving the promotion of community activities. The importance of evidence emerges less ambiguously here. Finally monitoring and evaluation processes appear to make repeated use of evidence as NGOs seek to support self-reflection. The conclusion emphasizes that, in terms of policy influence, it is often how evidence is used rather than the nature of the evidence itself that matters most.

Echoing Mike Edwards's chapter, Irene Guijt argues that challenging power relations is central to the success of NGOs, although Guijt is rather more optimistic than Edwards in arguing that this can occur within the current system of international cooperation. Drawing on a comparative research project, she examines how far the support given by four Dutch co-financing agencies has served to advance 'civil society participation' in Colombia, Guatemala, Guinea, Sri Lanka and Uganda. As such, the initiatives engage with a key form of underlying development concerning long-term processes of citizenship formation, and what used to be considered the 'alternative' agenda of participation and empowerment. For Guijt, there is both a discursive and a material basis for success in this area. In discursive terms, CSOs can only fully understand their role in promoting citizenship participation among marginal groups if they focus explicitly on the power relations that they are seeking to transform (echoing Hickey and Mohan, 2004). Guijt proposes a particular conceptual tool – the power cube (Gaventa, 2006) – which NGOs can operationalize to assist them in this. In material terms, however, the type and longevity of funding (in this case from bilateral agencies through Northern NGOs and on to Southern NGOs) is also critical; and, in this discussion, she picks up themes elaborated by Racelis, who discusses new forms of relationship between Northern and Southern

NGOs. Here, the Dutch government is urged to maintain its principles of co-financing, in which funding flows are based on the partners' strategy as opposed to project-specific funding, and are maintained over the long run (see also the chapter by Derksen and Verhallen). Investing in creating a participatory culture between CFAs and CSOs and within CSOs is also significant (a sensibility also stressed by Chhotray).

The chapter by Bazán et al. is a collective contribution from members of seven NGOs who undertook a two-year reflection on the role and evolution of NGOs engaged in knowledge-generation related to environment and development issues in Central America and Mexico. The chapter begins by conceptualizing the contribution of NGOs to knowledge production, and the ways in which they can contribute either to hegemonic discourses that serve to stabilize and naturalize capitalist systems of production and exchange, or to counter-hegemonic discourses that challenge and under-mine dominant ideologies. The discussion highlights a tension between the counter-hegemonic intent and direction of the NGOs and their ability to represent that intent in their everyday activities. There is a felt pressure (from various sources) to engage in the production of applied knowledge rather than knowledge that analyses the structural forces that create and maintain poverty, inequality and unsustainable environmental practices. Meanwhile donor orientation towards poverty reduction has meant more money for doing and less for thinking – and the NGOs in this collective have evolved diverse strategies to address this situation. In addition to influencing policy through the development of individual relationships, the NGOs have built up networks of influence through their alliances and also through educating future generations of decision-makers. They have also sought to create spaces for dialogue, enabling greater reflection and also fostering new avenues for grassroots organizations and social movements to influence policy directly. The chapter ends with a challenge to the development assistance community: if knowledge matters, then someone has to produce and fund it.

Mary Racelis addresses the criticism of NGO ineffectiveness in the search for pro-poor social change in a context of poverty and inequality in the Philippines. Although NGOs made a significant contribution to underlying processes of political development in the Philippines – through resisting the earlier period of authoritarian rule and playing an important role in the transition to democracy – the state has since tried to resist their pressure to reform state processes and secure redistribution. However, even without a continued focus on these deeper levels of change, Racelis argues that NGOs have been effective in what they are trying to do, particularly in terms of securing change at the local level and in relation to powerful Development institutions. For example, NGOs reformed the working practices of the

Asian Development Bank in ways that ensured greater openness in their collaborations with civil society. They also helped nurture new working relationships with international NGOs in order to improve funding choices and avoid excessive Southern NGO dependence on Northern NGOs. In Naga City, urban poor communities have managed to negotiate a favourable relationship with the city and a World Bank-funded slum-upgrading programme. The residents, organized into a federation, have been effective in controlling the contractors charged with improving the area, and have developed much stronger grassroots capacity through the process. Finally, some Philippine NGOs have sought to secure their autonomy and sustainability through moving 'beyond aid' via a programme of government bond purchases, which were then used to capitalize a local foundation.

Being alternative

Within any population there are vanguards, and this subsection represents the restless edge of NGOs, documenting experiences in which organizations have pushed the boundaries of their own comfort zones. In each of these contributions, NGOs are not content just to experiment with new activities; rather, they seek to reconstruct themselves through acting out, thinking through and envisioning alternatives. In this reconstruction, the NGOs embed themselves in new kinds of social relationships, which bring with them new pressures and new opportunities. Whilst 'being different' itself catalyses change, further changes are also triggered by the interactions between these efforts, forces that resist them and the constraints that derive from existing organizational forms.

The alternatives explored and documented in this section are not abstract and theoretical; rather, these are ideas that are realized through everyday practices and negotiated with everyday agencies, the same agencies that are sources of conservatism and many of the distortions (Dersken and Verhallen) in the current world of aid. These NGOs find their alternatives through engagement and negotiations but also by avoiding complacency and being willing to challenge development conventions and outcomes. This challenge often includes seeking new orientations towards and alliances with grassroots organizations. What emerges strongly from these and overlapping experiences (e.g. Bazán et al.) is that these are not NGOs that 'go it alone'. Rather, they build relationships, particularly with people's movements, offering citizen action at scale to provide a platform for challenging existing development approaches.

But these are, in their own ways, ideas in the making and ideologies under threat. There is no sense from any of these chapters that alternatives have been fully achieved or can be sustained. Rather, they are being inched forward, with the organizations often having to move sideways rather than

forward in attempts not to be overcome, and frequently being forced back. In this process, NGOs have to remake themselves, and become something different, constructing alternative identities. The path to being alternative has to be 'hacked out' of the present institutional landscape and, as such, these NGOs have few supportive structures within which to locate themselves. In being alternative, the challenge lies within, as well as outside, as they have to question ongoing practices, identities and perspectives, reforming themselves through the very experience of struggle. For example, the challenge of becoming alternative types of organization – as in Oxfam's efforts at gender mainstreaming that are discussed in Piálek's chapter – suggests that significant challenges remain. There is a sense both of ambition, and of often overwhelming odds against success.

In the first chapter in this section, Harry Derksen and Pim Verhallen, both from the Dutch Cofinancing Agency ICCO, give a refreshingly frank assessment of the perverse trends that have affected non-governmental aid in the North. Following a general discussion, they move quickly to consider how these trends have – coupled with certain national factors – steadily taken the heart out of the Dutch Cofinancing Programme, the programme through which tax resources are transferred to Dutch NGOs, who then transfer these to their partners in the South. Over the last decade this programme – and NGOs more generally – have come in for increasing criticism and scrutiny in the Netherlands. One effect of this has been to break up the concentration of CFP resources in four NGOs (CORDAID, HIVOS, ICCO and NOVIB). In large measure a welcome change, this has come accompanied, however, by such a demand for impact indicators and government scrutiny that the programme has become laden with ever more bureaucracy. When programme funds were tendered in 2006, 116 separate NGOs bid for them, each submitting some 'two kilogrammes of written material detailing, among others, what the results of their work would be in 2010'. In the realization that in the face of this increasing bureaucratization and conditionality ICCO was simply transmitting the same burdens to its partners in the South, the organization has slowly come to the view that it has to change radically the way in which it operates. The final section of the chapter discusses the early stages of this attempt to change – which began only in 2006. It illustrates how ICCO is attempting to rediscover its alternative roots, through a radical devolution of power to the South in order that policy and practice will largely be defined by some twelve regional councils based in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and no longer from the Netherlands. The change process is neither easy nor complete, and the chapter notes the resistance it has elicited among ICCO staff, fearful of losing their power and jobs, and among partners, fearful of losing funding. It is also still not clear

whether the Cofinancing Programme will allow ICCO to operate in this new way and still be eligible for cofinancing resources.

Katie Bristow's chapter explores the extent to which it is possible to 'be alternative' as an NGO working in health-care provision. Her starting point is that despite the rhetoric concerning the incorporation of alternative approaches to development, the present model of health care and development continues to be narrowly framed by neoliberalism and Western science and technology. She explains this in terms of four types of factor – what she calls ideological/philosophical, politico-economic, socio-cultural and pragmatic – and explores how these factors affect the work of two health-care NGOs in the Bolivian Andes. One of these NGOs, CÓDIGO, self-consciously seeks to be alternative through a systematic engagement with Andean health systems and knowledge, while the other delivers thoroughly modernized forms of health care. The emphasis of her analysis rests on the factors that undermine CÓDIGO's ability to sustain its alternative orientation. Two factors seem particularly important. First, while CÓDIGO aims to promote a culturally sensitive view of health-care knowledge and well-being in its training programmes, its promoters and clients live in a social context that emphasizes the superiority of modern medicine. CÓDIGO is simply unable to offset this effect. Second, CÓDIGO's insistence on alternative approaches makes it harder for it to gain financial support. Hence its ability to institutionalize its message, re-socialize its promoters and change the terms of public debate on health care are always limited. So too, then, is its *real* ability to be alternative itself.

In the third chapter, Vasudha Chhotray offers an in-depth history of the emergence and impact of a small indigenous NGO in India, and its role in securing empowerment for people within a marginal rural environment. Her analysis challenges the notion that NGOs must choose to become *either* development agents *or* political entrepreneurs. This argument derives from a close-grained analysis of Samaj Pragati Sahyog (SPS), an NGO working among tribals in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh over a decade. The NGO has sought to combine development work regarded as legitimate by the state with practices that resist state action, 'striving to create a new type of politics in its development work with the state'. SPS's experience reveals how 'engaging with both "small d" and "big D" development is integral for the articulation of transformative politics. Here, it is precisely the synergies between state and civil society, mainstream and alternative development and dominance and resistance that matter, not their segregation as is mistakenly believed'. A series of important findings for NGO alternatives flow from this. 'First, NGOs have the power to effect concrete changes in local power relations, as SPS did by overturning wage relations,

transforming common property access and challenging an exploitative anti-tribal coalition. Second, their power is often text-oriented. SPS relied on a correct reading of the laws and official guidelines of the Indian state to fuel its radical initiatives.' Finally, NGO power greatly depends on its ability to construct 'a continuous interface not only with government officials, but key actors within "political society" including political representatives, activists and local courts.'

Through an investigation of gender mainstreaming within Oxfam–Great Britain, Nicholas Piálek reveals the challenges involved in integrating this perspective within everyday development practice. For Piálek, gender mainstreaming is an inherently political process, tied up with the desire of NGOs to frame themselves as being alternative kinds of organization. The challenge here is for NGO actors to prove their own capacity to embrace alternative agendas, most notably the 'gender and development' approach, and the feminism that underpins it. However, and despite adopting a series of progressive measures in this direction, it has been difficult for NGOs such as Oxfam to move beyond the adoption of broad organizational norms and towards a deeper institutionalization of gendered perspectives. Although part of the problem lies with the challenge of personal change at the level of individuals – echoing Robert Chambers's focus on 'the primacy of the personal' – the study also reveals the failure of development organizations to take more radical and alternative perspectives on gender analysis seriously. This stems in part from the external orientation of NGOs, more concerned with solving problems 'out there' than closer to home, but also from a refusal to accept the role that feminism and feminists must play in such processes.

The chapter by Helen Yanacopoulos and Matt Baillie Smith explores the possibility that NGOs might be agents of a particular form of alternative development, termed here 'cosmopolitanism'. By virtue of their capacity to transmit progressive ideas and practices across multiple political spaces, NGOs offer the potential for deepening projects and commitments to social justice on a transnational scale, provided they avoid the neo-imperial tendencies that threaten to dominate relations based around the transfer of resources and ideas from 'North' to 'South'. The links between NGOs and cosmopolitanism are explored both in terms of theory and in more detail through the prism of two areas of NGO practice: development education and advocacy. Both reveal the ambiguity of the links between NGO praxis and cosmopolitanism. Although connected to 'cosmopolitan political formations and cosmopolitan democracy', development education also promotes difference to an extent that arguably undermines the universalism required to underpin assistance to 'distant strangers'. In terms of advocacy, the Make Poverty History (MPH) campaign also highlights

this ambivalence. At one level, MPH was global in focus and called for solidarity rather than charity. However, MPH could also be framed 'as an uneasy mix between democratic and "banal" cosmopolitanism', in that some supporters were unaware of the real issues underlying the campaign and 'wore the white band as a fashion statement rather than a political one'.

The experience of Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI), described by Joel Bolnick, explores the scope for alternative relationships between social movements and professional NGOs. SDI is an international movement that seeks to increase the provision of shelter for poor and very poor urban dwellers. Though SDI is international, its strength lies in its strong national members. In most countries these members combine federations of slum dwellers and NGOs that provide these federations with technical, advisory and other forms of support. The rationale for SDI, as explained by Bolnick, is that the normal pattern in efforts to provide shelter is that national elites – political or professional – dominate and determine the design of policies and programmes, and do so in ways that typically mis-specify the problem, generating solutions that tend to serve elite interests (through contract provision etc.) rather than the interests of the poor. In a way that resonates with Dagnino's project of participatory democracy, SDI seeks to reframe shelter provision as a citizenship issue – the right to have a right to shelter – and pushes the state and other actors to deliver on this. For this to succeed, SDI has to be led by the federations rather than by NGOs, and this is the constant struggle. The argument is clear: NGOs have a critical role to play in such a strategy – especially around financial management and capacity building – but must always be functional to the interests of the social movement as a whole. However, again echoing Dagnino (whose references to Brazil's recent past seem to call for similar types of NGO–movement relationship), this is easier said than done because of the many pressures particularly within Development that encourage NGOs to go it alone.

Thinking Forward

The book ends with a provocative intervention from David Hulme. His starting point is to question whether or not NGOs have played a significant role in the recent transition away from full-blooded neoliberalism towards a hybrid within which issues of poverty, rights and participation are increasingly central. He argues that NGOs have failed to take sufficient note of the key hegemonic actors in both the NGO world and in global power relations. Much should have been learned, he suggests, during those darker

years from the ways in which neoliberal think-tanks had shaped and were
shaping conservative thinking in both the UK and the USA, including US
government policy towards developing countries. And surely more must
be done to find ways of reshaping the way that US citizens and the US
media deal with these issues today? If that were not enough, engaging with
the new agenda-setting powers of China, India et al. is also essential, he
says, if NGOs are to maintain relevance within the emerging geopolitical
economy of development.

All the chapters in this book share the sense that to be alternative and
to pursue alternatives is central to the idea of being non-governmental.
To a greater or lesser extent, these are not authors who think of NGOs
in terms of a 'third sector' providing services that others do not. They see
them instead as part of a struggle, defined by relations of power. From
Mike Edwards's chapter on, the issues of power and struggle figure promi-
nently. Not that this is a book of hot-headed radicals. Rather, it brings
together a set of thinking, reflective authors who each see development as
a battleground and none of whom would accept the idea that 'we know
what development is, now all we have to do is do it'. As editors we would
venture that all our authors would argue that a large part of development
is the battle over which ideas about development will win out and end up
governing the ways societies organize themselves. It is in this battleground
that they locate NGOs, and seek to understand what they do, what they
are and what they have become.

We would also venture that all our authors would argue that, on this
battleground, NGOs are not a very powerful actor. Therefore they must take
care of, nurture carefully, and use strategically whatever sources of power
they have – be these sources their ideas, their values, their relationships,
their legitimacy. In this battlefield of ideas and practices, the main rules of
conquest are defined by others: by discursively dominant disciplines (such
as economics and public management), by particular imperial powers, by
local and national actors disposed to use physical violence, and by those
with preferential access to the means of communication. This constrains
the scope for alternatives: in some cases alternatives cannot be pursued for
lack of resources (above all money), in others by rules of public audit, in
others because they are simply too high risk for the actors involved, and
in others because the actors have so internalized the dominant rules of the
game that they find it difficult to think beyond them (one of the various
effects of the perverse convergence that Dagnino discusses).

So can we say that the chapters leave us with a way forward for those
– NGOs, academics, funders, citizens – who would want to engage in the
struggle to find alternatives? Here we cannot speak for our contributors. Still,
while it is impossible to synthesize the many nuanced contributions in this

volume into a bullet-pointed agenda for change, it seems to us that several
themes emerge with regularity, and on these we close the introduction.

The first of these themes is that while they all see scope for alternatives,
there is one important sense in which 'there is no alternative'. That is, in
the face of the analyses here, there can be no alternative but to change
the ways in which non-governmental aid chains currently work. Dersken
and Verhallen are the most blunt in this regard, but their co-contributors
are not far behind. We are reminded of a paper from the 1994 Manchester
conference by Zadek and Gatwood (1995) subtitled 'Transforming the
Transnationals'. In their presentation, Zadek and Gatwood painted an image
of large NGOs hurtling towards a wall, but refusing to recognize that it
was there. With that wall in mind they cast two images of the future:
one of large NGOs that had stuck to business as usual and had become
completely uninteresting and irrelevant; another of NGOs that had looked
deep within and changed themselves and become, if not as big, at least far
more relevant as forces for social change. This volume gives the sense that
the wall is now upon us.

But what changes do the contributors suggest? One is the importance
of NGOs reaching out far more assertively, openmindedly, but also criti-
cally, to social movements. Indeed the imperative seems to be for NGOs
to think consciously of themselves as part of a social movement in which
the different constituents are equally important, and therefore in which
relationships of power have to be thoroughly reworked and made more
horizontal. Such relationships are necessarily complex if they are embed-
ded within an alternative agenda, involving the sharing (and contestation)
of ideas, actions and practices in pursuit of agreed social goals. Words
are cheap of course – actions are far harder – and Bolnick's chapter from
Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) suggests just how hard it can be
to build these horizontal relationships. But that same chapter – along with
Dagnino's slightly poignant references back to the 1970s in Brazil – make
clear that these changes are possible, and also that some funding agencies
in the North will invest in them (if not yet become part of these reworked
relationships themselves). Derksen and Verhallen even suggest that, in the
Netherlands at least, there may be currents in government and parliament
that would support such changes. The point is that we don't know, but if
we don't try we may never know.

The reference to social movements points to a second domain of change
that is recurrent in the collection. One of the lessons of the social movement
literature (in which Dagnino herself has been a key contributor) is that the
most important role of 'social movements' is that they challenge hegemonic
ideas in society about 'how things should be'. Hegemony is an important
concept for this collection and for these conclusions. For while one might

want to say that NGOs need to engage with 'little d' development – that development that refers to the underlying political economy and the social structures in which it is embedded – there is clearly no way in which NGOs alone are going to change the ways in which capital is accumulated and distributed in society. It is far from clear that governments can do this (even if they wanted to), so NGOs have no chance. However, the concept of hegemony reminds us that so much of the organization of society depends on citizens acquiescing to the rules that govern that society, and that much of this acquiescence comes from internalizing taken-for-granted, dominant (and in this sense hegemonic) ideas about 'how things should be'. Destabilizing these ideas thus offers the scope for change in other structures that would otherwise seem impossible to change.

If this is so, then a second important change for NGOs committed to alternatives would be to engage much more consciously in public debates about how things should be. This can be done by research and debate, and also by action. In its own way, by embarking on its process of change ICCO is challenging taken-for-granted ideas about aid in the Netherlands, and its actions may end up not only speaking louder than words, but ultimately changing the defining words used to describe Dutch aid in the future. Had Oxfam thoroughly mainstreamed gender in the way that Piálek says it has so far failed to do, then it would have been making a similar challenge to taken-for-granted ideas about the ways in which gender is treated by NGOs (and others). But debate can also be engaged in through producing knowledge, and crafting different ways of thinking about society. The chapter crafted by the collective of Central American and Mexican NGOs argues strongly for the importance of this type of engagement. Recognizing the problems with how they have generated knowledge in the past, they are calling for more strategic, embedded forms of knowledge generation.

Hard heads will respond to these sorts of reflections – indeed they have done so – by saying that none of this helps children without schools, women walking miles to collect water, communities washed away by disasters, urban dwellers without shelter, or farmers without access to markets. And of course all this is true. But governments exist for a reason, and a large part of that reason is to provide services to citizens with these sorts of needs – that is, to plan and manage resource redistribution. The fact that they fail pitifully in doing so should not mean asking NGOs to do these jobs instead, which in any case risks undermining the critical role of the state over the long run. It should mean supporting NGOs that intervene strategically in political processes perhaps to shame governments publicly so that their citizens demand better government; and/or to contribute to public debates about how government might work differently and about the

ravages brought by corruption and authoritarianism. Of course, for those at the comfortable European and North American end of aid chains, or those sitting equally comfortably in their cosy embassies, this might all seem too sensitive, too difficult, and a foreign-relations nightmare. But we are talking of transformation: Dagnino talks of participatory democracy, Edwards and Guijt of power, Chhotray of minimum wages and anti-tribal coalitions, Racelis of holding construction contractors to account... and transformation *should* be a foreign relations nightmare. It should also challenge domestic comforts – taking the bull of power by its horns will make no friends with certain powerful actors. But if one message of this book is that development is all about building relationships, this is not necessarily synonymous with building friendships. Making a difference will involve NGOs making intelligent, critical and strategic engagements with d/Development over the long term, and particularly with processes that underpin continued problems of poverty and inequality.

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