

# Can NGOs Make a Difference?

*The Challenge of Development Alternatives*

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**edited by Anthony J. Bebbington,  
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## Development and the New Security Agenda: W(h)ither(ing) NGO Alternatives?

**Alan Fowler**

In the space of some twenty years, non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs) have established a distinct, influential position within the international arena. While improvement is always possible, there are many areas and scales where NGDOs have brought positive change in people's lives, in societies and in the workings of national and international institutions (e.g. Fowler, 2000; Edwards, this volume; Batliwala and Brown, 2006). However, as other chapters argue, success has been accompanied by shadow sides.

The evolution of NGDO-ism has itself worked against the achievement of 'alternative development' in the sense expressed in the mid-1980s: a distinct philosophy and theory of change allied to effective, people-centred development practices (Drabek, 1987: x). Examples of NGDO shadows are: compromise in self-determination, growing dependency on official finance, semi-detachment from the mass of civil society formations, and adopting apolitical state-centric development agendas while claiming to operate according to a distinctive, autonomous logic. In the 1980s, some of these challenges were already anticipated. Others emerged in response to the major discontinuity in the world order caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

This chapter does not dwell on the many – both just and unjust – critiques of NGO-ism in terms of these and other shortcomings as self-generated constraints on being 'alternative' (e.g. Lewis and Wallace, 2000; Katsui and Wamai, 2006). Rather, the task is to approach the issue of limitations on NGDOs as development alternatives from the direction of a significant reframing of the aid system, broadly labelled 'securitization' (e.g. Duffield, 2002; Fowler, 2005; Howell, 2006).

Within the competitive geopolitics of the Cold War and a modernization perspective, development and security have always been intertwined as a mutually reinforcing reciprocity in a particular sense. Security creates the predictable conditions required for investment to translate into economic growth, which, in its turn, feeds the expansion of human well-being that reinforces the value of stability and hence of security. Until the Soviet collapse, the notion of NGOs as development alternatives was premised on their application of distinct competencies and comparative advantages to serve this virtuous circularity.

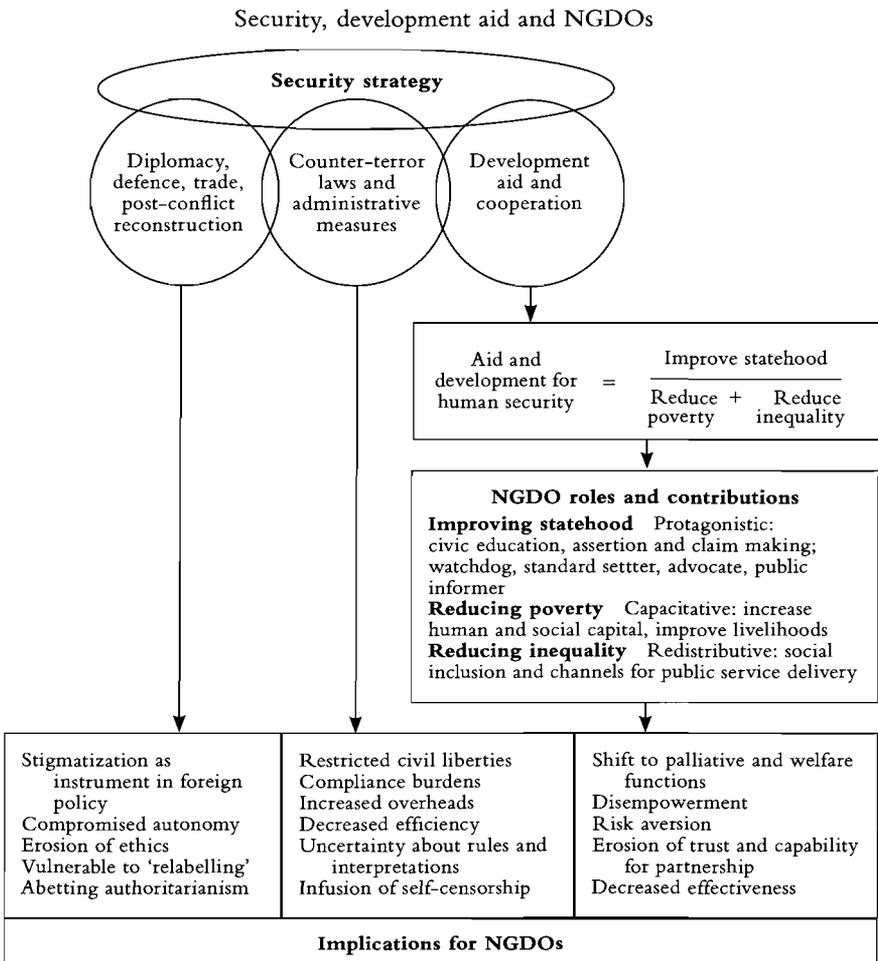
Post-Cold War, the supposedly reluctant but necessary American hegemonic pursuit of a particular type of world order argued for by Mallaby (2002), with its monotheistic undertones lamented by Lal (2004), have invited increasingly violent reactions and the emergence of international insecurity with a new, complex configuration. While perhaps elevated to global consciousness by the terror of al-Qaeda, contemporary insecurity is not simply arising from a supposed clash of cultures, beliefs or civilizations. Insecurity also stems from deeper and wider responses against the dysfunctions – in change-driven anxiety, in environmental unsustainability, in inequality, in injustice – of an enforced globalization of free-market capitalism to which there is, apparently, no alternative either possible or to be tolerated. At a world level at least, the relationship between growth in wealth and national and human security appears not virtuous but inherently destabilizing (Hardt and Negri, 2000). The quest for economic equilibrium on an increasing scale contains forces for disequilibrium (Harvey, 2003). The global system requires active control and management through global governance that may not be up to the task but in any event stubbornly favours the interests of those already empowered.

In this contrary context, NGDOs – within the contending concepts and concomitant agency of civil society – face substantive questions about what ‘alternative’ means and entails in theory, strategy and practice. In light of the ever deepening reliance of NGDOs on official forms of aid, serious questions arise from the growing integration of overseas development assistance (ODA) into a comprehensive security strategy for the West. Such a strategy is not uniformly employed by each donor country within the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Nevertheless, the contours of an emerging development for security agenda (DfS) seem likely to shape the possibility of NGDOs either offering or becoming alternatives.

The following section establishes an analytical framework for understanding this problematic. It does so by sketching the major domains of policy and action that donors can deploy to operationalize their foreign relations in an era where domestic security is seen as dependent on the (preventive)

development of countries overseas (Beall et al., 2006). Subsequent analysis concentrates on a security-premised official aid system. The anticipated roles of NGOs are investigated in terms of conditions that militate for or against behaviours or as ‘alternatives’ in this security for development triad. The concluding section draws the optics together in a discussion of what alternatives might mean and the extent to which the imperatives of NGO-ism predispose towards particular choices and possibilities.

**Figure 6.1** Overview of potential NGO limitations due to aid in a security strategy



### **International Security: A Strategic Framework**

Figure 6.1 sets out one perspective on the overall strategy towards international security being deployed by 'traditional' donor countries of the industrialized West. It contains three overlapping domains with components that are applied in different combinations depending on the geopolitics in play for any particular donor. The first focuses on dilemmas that can act as constraints on (humanitarian) NGDOs involved in security-related reconstruction. Second are limitations faced by NGDOs arising from the introduction of and compliance with counter-terrorism and related legislation and administrative measures (CTMs). The third lens places NGDOs within a development-for-security imperative to stabilize, strengthen or prevent the falling apart of states considered to be failed, weak or simply unable to govern effectively. Here, the major tasks of aid are substantively to reduce poverty and inequality while simultaneously redressing inadequate statehood, understood as conditions of poor governance. Each domain brings implications for NGDOs either directly through a financing relationship or indirectly by the ways in which operating environments are shaped through security-premised interactions within and between countries.

The aim is to analyse the implications for NGDO alternatives that emerge from the growing emphasis on each of the three domains of action outlined above, namely: post-conflict reconstruction; counter-terrorism measures; and the securitization of the development agenda. Given the recent nature of the shifts we are discussing, and the contested character of the implications, such an analysis is necessarily contingent and to some extent speculative. Nonetheless, there are initial signs that the evolving security agenda has started to make life even more difficult for NGDOs seeking to forge meaningful alternatives in this new geopolitical context.

### **Taking Sides in the War on Terror: Sharpening the Dilemmas of Complicity in Managing Imperialism**

The Global War on Terror (GWOT) was sold as a pledge to eventually ensure stability and security for all the world's citizens. Thus, perversely justified military force, lacking in UN legitimacy, was applied to protect the interests and extend the influence of the existing political and economic power holders in today's imperial hierarchy. The premiss underlying the pledge is a long-standing belief in the universalism of Western values and political-economy that informed colonialism and orientalism (Wallerstein, 2006). Today, this conviction is pursued through the peaceful assertion of diplomacy, trade and negotiation in international institutions. But, when (violently) challenged, it is imposed and managed using force and favour.

However, hard military power has limits. In the aftermath of violence the 'soft power' of mobilizing public support is necessary to create the conditions required for stabilization of a new order. A key soft power element of the security agenda is provision of aid for post-conflict reconstruction, particularly as witnessed in Afghanistan and Iraq.

One outflow is a role for the military in 'armed social work' to win hearts and minds through reconstruction while maintaining order by force of arms (Kukis, 2006). For example, through the US Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI) and Department of Defence Directive 3000.05, of 28 November 2005, America has probably gone furthest in its policy and practice of integrating military functions with aid efforts.

Stability operations are conducted to help establish order that advances U.S. interests and values. The immediate goal often is to provide the local populace with security, restore essential services, and meet humanitarian needs. The long-term goal is to help develop indigenous capacity for securing essential services, a viable market economy, rule of law, democratic institutions, and a *robust civil society*. (USDOD, 2005: 2, emphasis added)

The blurring of military and humanitarian efforts in post-conflict settings is already well explored in terms of moral issues (Schweizer, 2004). For example, while NGOs may be non-uniformed 'alternatives' to the military, they can be locally perceived as indistinct from their home country's interests. Associated pitfalls include: stigmatization as an instrument of foreign policy; compromised autonomy; eroded ethics; vulnerability to political relabelling of states or groups within them as 'terrorist'; and exposure to charges of abetting authoritarian regimes that are of geopolitical interest to a donor government (FIFC, 2004).

However, the contemporary security situation sharpens existing dilemmas for NGOs in that it more clearly exposes the extent to which, in providing humanitarian relief and post-conflict reconstruction services, they are complicit in serving a geopolitical agenda of dubious moral and legal grounding. So, can NGOs fulfil humanitarianism in 'alternative' ways that do not make them politically complicit? To do so,

NGOs would require a radical change in their relationships to western governments, UN agencies, and the marginalized communities they work in. The political analysis of humanitarian crises and humanitarian action is deeply challenging to humanitarians, particularly NGOs. Its central message is that, in a global economy with global communications, no one sits outside the power structures that shape people's lives, least of all NGOs with a western genesis largely funded by western governments and a western public. These are not easy issues for NGOs to face, not least because they are premised on political-economy models which owe as much to one's political beliefs as they do to empirical evidence. As a result, opting for these models requires agencies to make political judgments. (Feinstein Centre, 2004: 82)

Some NGOs reach political judgement by refusing to work in post-conflict settings such as Iraq and Afghanistan or do so without finance from assailant states. Others assume that it is possible to finesse, deny or ignore ethical ambiguities which implies a compatibility between a unilaterally pursued hegemonic world order, respect for human rights and politically neutral humanitarianism that may be more fiction than fact. Pragmatism rules. Yet others assume that, through on-the-ground experience, their advocacy can 'humanitarianise politics without politicizing humanitarianism', a position of business as usual (Janz, 2006).

The second dilemma of alternative lurks in the quotation from the US military. This is the role of NGOs in building a robust post-conflict civil society. In whose image? With what methods when shielded by an occupying military force? With what approach to political autonomy given the over-bearing presence of external power? These and other difficult questions also apply to the development lens detailed later. But here, after the trauma of war and destruction, neither NGOs or anyone else seems capable of building civil society in the conflict-ridden hinterlands of the latest imperial encounter.

A third dilemma flows from the second and can be applied to other types of complex political conflicts, such as Darfur and the Ivory Coast. This is the enduring question of an appropriate division of roles between local and foreign NGOs. Are alternative policies and strategies required that may or may not be served by the developmental notion of 'partnership'? And, given the political-economy of Northern NGOs alluded to on the Feinstein quotation, are empowering relational alternatives feasible?

### **Constraints on NGOs Associated with Counter-terrorism Measures**

Enhanced counter terrorism measures (CTMs) were prompted by the al-Qaeda-instigated attack in America, with United Nations Resolution 1371 of 2001 calling on all members to apply themselves to combat terror within their areas of jurisdiction. Satisfying this entreaty has typically relied on counter-terrorism measures that apply to all citizens and organizations, with what most observers agree are negative implications for the exercise of basic civic rights (Sidel, 2004). Our reading of CTMs suggests that they are likely to have a series of negative implications for NGOs, in terms of:

- restriction on the basic civil liberties under which they are created and operate;
- additional burdens for compliance;
- increase in overhead costs;
- uncertainty about rules and their application;

- infusion of self-censorship;
- heightened risk aversion.

We outline each concern in greater depth before exploring the evidence to date.

### **Legal and administrative demands**

A primary structural response to prevent violent terrorism has been the passing of new legislation in countries of the North and South, alongside the employment of existing administrative procedures to achieve similar ends. The breadth and scope of these laws has rendered their effects pervasive within the aid system – from back donor to the local office of an International NGDO to Southern NGDOs, communities and residents. They are critical tools in a central approach to combating terrorism: starvation of funding, allied to tracing terrorists through the resources they mobilize. The sums involved in terrorist attacks are not necessarily large and could easily be hidden within transfers between NGDOs. For example, the Madrid train bombing is thought to have cost around €15,000.

To a significant extent, CTMs introduce and rely on government-specified lists of proscribed individuals and organizations. Such lists are shared between governments and posted on the Internet. Because lists come from security services and the prospect of terrorist acts makes governments more mistrustful, secretive and risk averse, they cannot be effectively challenged.

### **Know yourself and beyond**

Legislation and ‘voluntary best practices’ require an NGDO to ensure that none of their staff or those known to be providing funding is on a proscribed list. ‘Know yourself’ also implies adopting and continually monitoring procedures and systems to ensure compliance with what CTM requires. A natural tension arises from the ‘know yourself’ maxim when NGDO employees find themselves subject to employer scrutiny. Demonstrating and confirming in writing that an applicant for public finance is able to comply with CTM are now part and parcel of USAID’s procedures and a formal requirement for Australian Aid.

### **Know (beyond) your partner**

Counter-terrorism legislation is creating a direct obligation on Northern NGDOs, foundations and similar funders to vouch for the probity of the recipients of their support in terms of eligibility and ultimate use of assistance. Approaches to the interpretation of CTM laws also appear to require a funder to vouch for a partner’s partner or, even further, for the bona fides of the final recipient of benefits that funds create. Some US government

agencies also now require a Northern NGDO or Foundation to certify in writing that it has not only checked lists of terrorist organizations but also investigated the data available publicly about its grantees.

### **Follow the money to and from your organization**

To ensure that financial resources are not directly or indirectly deployed to support terrorists or their causes, new laws on international financial transfers are now being applied to NGDOs, as well as remittances. In addition, previously existing laws or regulations defined and propagated by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in the US are being more vigorously enforced. Originally established to counter money laundering, in 2002 FATF's mandate was extended to combat terrorism financing.

Two other constraints arise in the 'follow the money' issue. First, the US Laws apply to not only the transfer of money but also prohibit 'material support' to terrorists or foreign terrorist organizations. These and related laws define support to include 'lodging, training, expert advice or assistance, safe houses ... communications equipment or other physical assets except medicine or religious materials' (InterAction, 2004). Second, US and many other laws prohibit making illegal money legal. This means that the NGDO must not only follow where it sends money, but also know where it came from to ensure that the organization is not being used as a 'laundry' (US Government, 2002; OECD, 2002).

### **Administrative measures**

Alongside these public and overt measures are preliminary indications of subtler ways in which counter-terrorism strategies are pursued. In the case of aid, governments are seldom legally challenged about the way public funds are allocated to NGDOs. Consequently, a choice can easily be made to tighten procedures and requirements – for example, by demanding more information and to apply more stringent risk assessments. Moreover, one of the reasons why decisions about fund reallocation may not be challenged is because Northern NGDOs seldom want to 'rock the boat' or seem to be too difficult or too demanding – the dilemma of being 'too close for comfort' (Edwards and Hulme, 1995). NGDOs that do take issue with such moves are often financed from other (private) sources, which can deepen schisms and the strength of a united front among NGDOs. Thus, self-censorship can result in grudging compliance, although the political realities of a country determine the degree to which this covert scenario plays out.

### **Organizational implications: burdens and risks**

It is clear that laws and procedural changes require much greater NGDO diligence. Examples are: staff educational programmes on the laws, background

checks on employees, internal notification systems and confidential procedures for reporting suspicious transactions, manual or electronic review of lists of 'blocked' organizations, use of 'red flag' checklists to identify potentially dangerous grantees, more complex grant agreements and procedures, reduction or elimination of cash transfers in favour of international correspondent banks, and certification by the recipient NGDO confirming proper fund use.

The costs involved in compliance are likely to be added to organizational overheads. This places additional strain on an already contested (comparative) measure of NGDO efficiency. And, it is far from clear that donors will allow their funds to be used to satisfy CTM requirements. Unlike others, the USA has accepted high overhead levels due to auditing compliance requirements. The danger for non-US NGDOs is that their respective countries adopt CTM but are not willing to accept the extra costs of conforming to what the law requires. At the same time, violation of the laws has serious consequences. In the USA, organizations and individuals associated with the organizations that make improper financial transfers are subject to both criminal and civil penalties. Additionally, charities run the risk of losing their charitable and tax-exempt status.

A normal organizational response to increased threats and uncertainties is to reduce risk, and NGDOs have several options here. Selection of partners and programmes is one of the most obvious. But making significant effort and investment in order to comply fully with legal and administrative requirements can also reduce risk. Another possibility is for a governing body to redefine their risk tolerance levels and risk management strategies and communicate them publicly to show both awareness and openness that improve public image and funders' confidence.

Although the cases of diversion of non-profit funds to terrorism may be few and far between, the precautionary and preventive intentions of counter-terrorism measures mean that, like all other CSOs, NGDOs have to conform.

### **Implications and experiences**

Evidence that CTMs are tightening the space for civil society is increasingly available via the journals and periodic publications of specialist NGDOs, like the Civicus civil society watch programme (CIVICUS, n.d.), which monitor and report on the refinement of legislation and rules justified by terrorism. A common move – under way for example in India – is to (further) increase government oversight and discretionary control on the flow of foreign funds to local CSOs. Enhancing a state's legal ability to restrict the freedom of (religious) association is also becoming more common. However, and although it is not easy to establish effects in practice, some insights are possible.

For example, in order to create awareness and stimulate well-considered, collective responses, during 2006 and 2007, the International NGO Training and Research Centre (Intrac) organized a series of exploratory workshops on CTMs. These events, each with about twenty-five participants mainly from the region concerned, took place in Europe, South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, the USA and with the Somali diaspora in the United Kingdom. These forums provided an opportunity to gather and share information about NGO experiences of these measures in action. The difficulties involved in doing so became readily apparent.

For example, after the first event in the Netherlands, the term 'counter-terrorism' was seldom used to title subsequent workshops. Participants envisaged problems with security and immigration services if this term was used in correspondence or invitations, and so urged caution for reasons of obtaining visas and reducing visibility of the initiative. Instead, workshops were often labelled as reviews of relations between state and civil society.

To provide confidence in a space for open discussion, workshop results were not widely published and were only accessible on the Intrac website for those with passwords. Further, workshop notes or reports did not attribute comments to any specific person or organization. Even then, exchanges were often guarded. Self-censorship is in play, particularly with Southern NGOs. Talking about the constraints imposed by CTMs can too readily be treated as an attempt to discredit the government, inviting punitive responses with little expectation of legal redress.

There are the signs of other effects. Some are well-publicized cases of NGOs, such as Interpal. This British charity was designated a terrorist organization by the US government for its alleged role in channelling funds to Hamas. Despite the Charity Commission finding the charity 'well run and committed', the British government would not intercede to have the designation removed. A Danish NGO found itself in a similar situation and, when cleared of any wrongdoing, was advised to change its name because the government was unable to get the organization taken off the US listing. Examples are also emerging of the 'war on terror' being used as a cover for government harassment of NGOs and popular forces raising critical voices on issues such as the environment in Peru and land rights in Pakistan (Intrac, 2007).

In refusing to sign CTM certification clauses, some NGOs are reducing their resource base. Others are having to deal with government requests to accompany staff to the field as well as having to explain their partners to government agents. Paradoxically, this effect may induce Northern NGOs to remain or re-become development implementers so that they can avoid the hassle and risks of this role being taken up by their local counterparts, which many have been striving for. This would mark a step backwards

in the wider project of Northern NGOs 'handing over the power' to Southern NGOs, particularly vis-à-vis the 'authentic partnership' mode of building inter-organizational relationships (Fowler, 1998). Further, for some American Foundations the administrative burdens of CTM compliance are being accommodated by reducing the number (and increasing the amounts) of grants. A result may be less small seed finance for innovation and for experimenting with alternative forms of social development.

Overall, evidence of the impact of CTMs on NGOs and development processes is still scanty. One reading suggests that a situation of unclear effects may continue as a form of resistance often adopted by a weaker party (Scott, 1990). Faced by a shifting burden of proof of innocence onto their shoulders, NGOs are adopting a position of limited disclosure of CTM impact. They are doing so to protect their relationships and to avoid an insinuation that CTMs are making a notable difference, which would suggest that their house was not in order.

A natural collective response of NGOs would be to argue against the blanket effects of CTMs by advocating for risk assessments of individual organizations. But this approach involves complicity in making easier the government's job of implementing unreasonable regulations. Instead, the body representing UK NGOs involved in international development recommended compliance with requirements of the Charity Commission – the oversight body – which would thus be burdened with working through thousands of pages of reports to gauge regulatory observance (Bond, pers. comm.).

There are very few legally challenged, let alone proven, cases of NGOs as supporters of terrorism, making it difficult to assess actual outcomes. One possible reason for the lack of hard evidence could be of a Machiavellian character. For example, one could imagine governments everywhere not only enhancing CTMs for the formal restraint they impose on civil society, but also because the power of (ambiguous) CTMs lies less in their actual application – which would open up challenges showing their limitations – than in their potential to create an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. Without much additional state effort at monitoring compliance, CTMs provide an opportunity to induce a self-shrinking of space for NGOs to be 'alternative' in practice as well as in thinking.

### **Constraints Associated with Development Aid for Security**

Counter-terrorism measures were an immediate response to violent attack. Later analysis of terrors causes and remedies has given rise to a comprehensive security strategy, outlined in Figure 6.1, where ODA is allocated an important role. The recalibration of overseas development assistance places it

more firmly alongside diplomacy, trade and defence as a key instrument of the security agenda (Duffield, 2001; OECD/DAC, 2003; Natis, 2006). Whether or not the use of ODA as a preventative investment can reduce the causes of insecurity (e.g. DFID, 2005) remains subject to ongoing debate. This section describes what this means in terms of possible constraints for NGDOs as alternatives.

### **Security and ODA**

Terrorism provided an urgent impulse to reconsider the link between aid and security. This process has updated development thinking, goals and policy, particularly in relation to the obligations and capabilities of nation-states to ensure order. The official development community (UNDP, 2005; UN, 2005a, 2005b; DFID, 2005; HSC, 2005: 152) has signalled three expected contributions from official aid to the DfS agenda: enhancing the quality of statehood in terms of both effectiveness and accountability, while simultaneously eliminating systemic sources of instability stemming from both poverty and inequality.

In terms of statehood, all societies contain forces with a potential to undo or block progress in human well-being, destabilize the polity, perpetuate instability and lead to violence. A government's ability to contain disruption is ultimately premised on monopoly possession and application of physical coercion, but also on its capacity to secure popular legitimacy in a broader sense. For donors, this involves a significant shift in relation to their agendas of 'good governance' and 'democratization', in the direction of addressing more fundamental questions of overcoming 'state failure'. While remaining problematic in terms of its pejorative colonial overtones, and largely self-interested in character, this agenda may signal an overdue engagement with the project of promoting 'state formation'.

Importantly, 'state failure' is also conceptualized in socio-economic terms where even if there is peace, a substantial proportion of the population are stuck in poverty (Chauvet and Collier, 2005): a state has failed its people. The relationship between absolute poverty and insecurity as understood by aid agencies is expressed in the following quotation:

Poor countries are most at risk of violent conflict. Research on civil war shows that lower levels of GDP per capita are associated with a higher risk of violent and more prolonged conflict. All other things being equal, a country at \$250 GDP per capita has an average 15% risk of experiencing a civil war in the next five years. At a GDP per capita of \$5,000, the risk of civil war is less than 1%. (DFID, 2005: 8; also OECD/DAC, 2003)

Such a causative link underlies the standards employed by the World Bank to define a country as fragile, with development assistance dedicated to poverty reduction thus seen to have a critical, preventive security dimension.

While absolute poverty matters, Lia and Hansen (2000: 13) argue that relative deprivation is also a driver of disaffection and terrorism. In other words, inequality is a source of insecurity. This causal association is restated in an analysis of the global social situation (UN, 2005b) and finds echoes in the World Development Report 2006 (World Bank, 2005). The general position is that

Violence is often rooted in inequality. It is dangerous for both national and international peace and security to allow economic and political inequality to deepen. Such inequalities, especially struggles over political power, land and other assets can create social disintegration and exclusion and lead to conflict and violence. (UN, 2005a)

In sum, there is a donor conviction that ODA can decrease the potential for (inter)national security by enhancing the quality of statehood while reducing poverty and inequality respectively. What are the possible implications for NGOs?

### **NGDO roles and contributions to development for security**

Each dimension of development for security – reducing inequality and poverty while improving statehood – offer potential sites for NGOs both to be and to produce ‘alternatives’. However, it is equally the case – and perhaps to a greater extent – that each site also creates significant difficulties for such projects. Here we explore constraints further, first through each dimension separately and then taken together.

In terms of challenging inequality, NGOs face considerable obstacles and not just because other constraints combine to steer them towards apolitical functions. They have neither the assets required to promote equality nor the means to redistribute them even if they did. Moreover, they lack the political capacity and uniformity of view or of theory (see Hulme, this volume) to challenge significantly the ways in which socio-economic inequalities have become institutionalized within political norms and structures. Nonetheless, NGOs can focus on exacting government compliance regarding their obligations to ensure equitable access to public goods, pursuing popular mobilization to this end (World Bank, 2005: 222). Further support can be offered to popular struggles against discrimination. As of old, ‘alternatives’ lie in operating in niches populated by the most excluded. Given their enduring resource limitations, the security perspective of combining niche with outreach invites exploration of alternative ways of scaling up NGO ways of working rather than in the identification and demonstration of innovation solely or per se (Uvin et al., 2000). Another way of looking at alternatives is, therefore, for NGOs to reorient towards systemic collaboration with civic actors and grassroots energies to be found in social movements and other member-based formations. An alternative

lies in being non-dominant, or exploitive parties in new configurations of rights- and demand-driven civic relationships.

Establishing a clearer or bigger role for NGOs in tackling poverty reduction is no less a challenge. The sheer scale of the global problem demands forms of public action that only developmental states have historically been able to offer, while NGOs have not unambiguously demonstrated an ability to reach the poorest groups in society (Riddell and Robinson 1995; Fowler, 2000). An alternative approach to NGOs in poverty reduction is, therefore, to rethink the task as one of redistributing the risk and uncertainty of globally connected, locally articulated change away from those most vulnerable and least able to cope. This would be an alternative to technocratic approaches to poverty reduction that are dominated by assets, capital and capabilities, as bringing into focus the substantial 'churning' of populations into and out of poverty that make an emphasis on beneficiary targeting a questionable strategy (Krishna, 2006). The fear and the (frustrated) hope associated with dropping into and of (not) escaping from poverty feeds social anxiety and hence instability. Risk-based thinking invites an alternative discussion when engaging, for example, with poverty-reduction strategies and processes (PRSP). States are sensitive to discontent and the potential for civic disobedience and insurrection. In responding to such sensitivity, development for security offers NGOs opportunities for creative thinking about and strategizing towards the relationship between poverty, injustice and instability in ways that open up space for civic agency in order to reduce the potential for instability.

States are weak or fragile for many reasons. Donors are only beginning to understand how they might go about addressing this problem, let alone think through the proper role of NGOs in such context-specific processes. And there is a strong sense that NGOs may be less important here than other more political actors. For official aid, the DfS agenda is hampered by the Westphalian principle of non-interference in a country's internal affairs, perhaps rendering apolitical and technocratic approaches inevitable. An NGO alternative is to not self-impose this principle. Instead, in civic solidarity, an option is to work on the foundations of legislative self-determination. This alternative has theoretical, process and substance dimensions worthy of elaboration.

A development-for-security agenda that foresees a robust and democratic developmental state as a condition for enduring stability both highlights and sharpens a perceived contradiction and tension between NGO roles as civic protagonists, on the one hand, and compliant service providers, on the other. Put another way, it opens up the necessity for a conversation about NGOs in relation to good governance in the sense of the distribution of power between state and citizen that is inherent to all conceptualizations

and theories of civil society. It points, on the one hand, towards alternatives in the direction of building and deepening the capacities of civil society to redistribute different types of power-selecting processes and time frames that are most likely to succeed under different country conditions and historical trajectories. On the other hand, it implies relational capabilities and strategies to engage with, rather than circumvent, political society in a mutual strengthening that brings the state under the influence of society instead of the other way around (see Guijt, this volume). For Gaventa (2006: 21–30), both reflecting and extending the above, it involves processes of CSO capacity development that are driven by political analysis directed at rediscovering what attaining a robust democracy – now atrophying in ‘mature’ democracies – means by, *inter alia*,

1. Recognizing the need for context-resonating democracies, rather than the implied one-size-fits-all democracy modelled on the West.
2. Appreciating the multiple identities and the sources of civic energy that political society should reflect.
3. Under constraints of increasing inequality, directing greater attention to the material/financial resource base required for autonomous civic action.
4. Rethinking the grounding of representative legitimacy.

This direction of alternatives towards more politically informed, civic-driven change is highly problematic for many NGOs. It calls for a quality of partnership that is rooted more in a solidarity perspective and purpose than in efficient redistribution. It calls for creative use of technological innovations that enable horizontal and vertical connections between levels of civic action and governance engagement (Bard and Söderqvist, 2002). Such facilities enable the real-time dialogues required to hold the tensions between the pace, pressures and interests of different environments and constituency expectations. But it also calls for a quality of resources – long-term, process-oriented, flexible and enabling – that are hard to create or to access (although see Guijt, and also Derksen and Verhallen, this volume). Shifting the rules of the aid game in the direction of this type of quality over greater quantity remains a serious problem. Nevertheless, a paradigm that positions civil society and citizens as central agents in establishing the quality of statehood required for robust security is, arguably, an alternative particularly worthy of the name.

### **Conclusions**

The preceding analysis suggests that challenges coming from the new security agenda call for the notion of NGO alternatives to be rethought and reconstructed. Two reasons for this stand out. First, there are signs that

power holders already regard (some) NGOs to be sufficiently 'alternative' to require constraint. Put another way, governments are waking up to the fact that, at different socio-political scales, civil society contains and exhibits compliant, indifferent and counter-hegemonic formations and agency. While this mix has always been the case, the concern for security shifts the benefit of the doubt about NGO presence, behaviour and intentions from benign to suspicious. As Mark Sidel observes, development for security now places NGOs in an ambivalent position of being treated as both an abettor of insecurity and a collaborator in its prevention.

A number of governments and political actors seem to regard the third sector as a source of insecurity, not as a civil society but as encouraging uncivil society, not as strengthening peace and human security but as willing conduit for, or an ineffective, porous and ambivalent barrier against insecurity in its most prominent modern forms, terrorism and violence. (Sidel, 2006: 201)

This apparent contradiction can be traced to selective, disputed understandings of civil society and its role in mediating power between citizen and state. The forces involved are played out between different segments, values and interests within the civic arena, dynamics which can be misused by regimes to extend control over citizens' lives. In other words, inter-civic disputes between classes, ethnicities, religions, genders, ages, nationalities and so on allow states to reinforce their mechanisms of constraint on and beyond NGOs. This self-inflicted limitation invites a different approach to what 'alternative' might mean.

A second reason for rethinking the idea of NGOs as 'alternatives' stems from a sharper 'for us or against us' pressure to work within and perhaps reform a particular type of globalization or adopt a counter-position that is unlikely to be funded by mainstream official aid. As one activist observed, the revolution will not be funded (Del Moral, 2005). Through this lens, political neo-conservative ideologists, to be found for example in the American Enterprise Institute, argue that NGOs lack the accountability, legitimacy or right to act as an 'alternative' voice to legally constituted governments (see Hulme, this volume). In contrast, the political far left argues that, far from being an 'alternative', NGOs are complicit in perpetuating a US-led hegemonic, globalizing capitalist economic system that is the root of the social injustice, instability and the very causes they raise money to fight (Bond, 2006). In this framing, the real meaning of 'alternative' and the ultimate source of security is structural transformation of the world order (Sen et al., 2007).

There is little to be gained by trying to adjudicate between these perspectives on alternatives as reformation or transformation, or possibilities reflecting other ideological streams and traditions (Chambers and Kymlicka,

2002; Hodgkinson and Foley, 2003). For they all rely on definitions and uses of the concept of civil society that are self-referential to the theory in which they are embedded. As a result, identifying NGDOs as civic actors makes discourse about 'alternatives' depend on the theoretical frame being applied: as much an issue of ideological predisposition as of empirical validity of theoretical predictions over disparate time scales.

More pertinent is to look behind contending theories to their common challenge: this is the task of coherently describing and explaining the evolution, constitution and distribution of power between state and citizens over time (Haugaard, 1997; Lukes, 2005). Such a perspective is intrinsically about politics. And, while the distribution of roles and authority across a society's institutions remains contested across the secular political-ideological spectrum, common cause is that political dispensations should ultimately derive from power founded on and exercised from an adequately informed, capable and self-aware citizenry.

Achieving this condition requires initiatives based on a thorough reading of power in its overt and covert forms, identification of the spaces where they are played out and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion they contain (Guijt in this volume; Gaventa, 2006). Such a capability also calls for what Foucault (1987) terms self-care. That is an honest, critical NGDO self-awareness of power deeply embedded and locked within language and discourse – like 'alternatives' – which determine the very thoughts and hence knowledge through which meaning and power relationships are themselves understood, communicated and manipulated.

Adopting this perspective on alternatives could imply an (unlikely) bifurcation of NGDOs towards the ends of a spectrum of compliance or resistance. This would alter today's 'bell curve' NGDO ecology of mainly middle-of-the-road, more or less critical fellow travellers – with a few more autonomous outliers that eschew public funding – that work for stability within a unipolar, enforced world economic and political order. Realistically, much militates against this future direction for NGDO alternativism, particularly as governments possess a growing array of instruments to impede NGDOs adopting this type of alternative. Nevertheless, relational innovation between civic actors, reformulation of self-understanding and purpose, and strategic awareness of the long game being played, could all be aligned towards a messy 'transformatory-reformism'. For this condition is likely to be the lived reality in rediscovering and reinvigorating the notion of 'alternative' such that this dimension of NGDO-ism does not wither away on the security vine.

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