

Institution: The University of Manchester
Unit of Assessment: 24b (Development Studies)
Title of case study: NGOs, Civil Society and Development
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research undertaken at the University of Manchester (UoM) highlights the need to address issues of accountability and reflexivity within the NGO sector, and has contributed towards both performance improvements within individual NGOs, as well as the strengthening of sector-wide policies. Impacts have been achieved through a process of ongoing consultation and feedback: identifying, anticipating and analysing key challenges, generating new conceptual frameworks, and building critical relations between the academy and practitioners. This contribution has been clearly acknowledged by both NGOs and other development agencies. In particular, the research has directly assisted the work of organisations and groups as varied as: governments (e.g. El Salvador's); major international NGOs based in both the global north (e.g. The One World Trust, Mango) and south (SDI, BRAC); and bilateral and multilateral aid agencies (e.g. DFID, UNRISD).</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>NGOs are a key development sector, accounting for up to 20 <i>per cent</i> of official development assistance. Research by the Institute for Development Policy and Management (IDPM) at UoM has provided knowledge and guidance to the sector over the last 20 years. Key staff include: Professors Tony Bebbington (2003-date); Sam Hickey (2001-date); David Hulme (1985-date); and Diana Mitlin (2001-date). Research findings include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Increasing NGO impact and influence. The research has advanced understandings of the key strategies that NGOs use to enhance both their economic and political impacts, and their influence on development policy and reach. Four strategies, previously analysed by Hulme and Edwards, are considered: agency growth and replication, alliances with government, alliances with social movements and other grassroots organizations, and advocacy in the North [C]. Subsequent research identified further strategies and constraints on impact. [C][E] (2) Improving NGO effectiveness through developing alternative accountability systems. The research found weak NGO accountability, with their focus upwards to donors and governments and insufficient consideration given to the views of beneficiaries and allied civil society organizations. Alternative systems were proposed to offer more comprehensive rigorous forms of accountability. [C][D] (3) Maintaining autonomy in relations with the state. Negotiating across collaboration, co-optation and contestation, between NGOs and the state, have been consistent research themes. Such relations potentially compromise NGOs' critical identities, reducing their effectiveness and restricting their capacity to elaborate alternative paradigms. Research has highlighted the struggle for NGO autonomy, NGO strategies to manage such relationships and positive and negative outcomes for their mission, objectives and outcomes. [B][C][D] (4) Managing and exploiting opportunities at the global level. Research has considered the implications for NGOs and civil society organisations of new opportunities that have emerged to engage with global politics, alongside the opportunities and constraints faced as NGOs seek to use such openings to their advantage, whilst confronting the difficult challenge of maintaining their focus while being offered increased public funding and legitimacy. [C][D] <p>Research modalities and activities: IDPM has taken on the challenge to work with NGOs in order to better understand – whilst at the same time seeking to improve – their contribution to development in the Global South; primarily through a reflection on their core values, capabilities and sector direction. Interventions have sought to influence the attitudes, policies and behaviours of both NGOs and the governments with which they interact, so as to lead to more effective development interventions. Engaging with the whole NGO sector and influencing its development through changing the understanding of agencies and individuals, is necessarily more difficult and complex than undertaking a single research project. A complex methodology was thus required, with several key research tasks, that included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The convening of a body of individuals to reflect and institutionalise knowledge. • The provision of conceptual frameworks through which to understand NGOs and their roles, functions and contributions. • The identification and elaboration of critical challenges for the sector. • The consolidation of lessons, to improve policy, programming direction and practices.

The conference life cycle was utilised as the anchor modality for fusing research and engagement (discussing themes *ex ante*, preparing papers, meeting and debating, editing and publishing, etc.) Subsequent to an initial conference (1991), conferences were held in 1995, 1999 and 2005. These gatherings provided shared learning spaces, with broadly equal participation from academics and professional development practitioners. The following design was used:

- **Identifying a set of critically reflective individuals** able to structure, lead and prepare conference debates, as well as contribute to ongoing knowledge activities.
- **Convening the conference** whilst analysing feedback, in order to adjust and confirm core themes, as well as identify and develop of alternative positions within each theme.
- **Working with authors to prepare manuscripts** for the edited conference volumes, co-authoring and authoring introductions and conclusions, alongside additional journal articles.

Through these activities, research *users* from the NGO sector became researchers themselves, gathering and analysing information and becoming knowledge *producers*. In tandem, UoM researchers adopted a 'light touch' approach in order to manage, focus and deepen debate. As a consequence, findings emerged that not only challenged the NGO sector, articulating critical minority voices and sharpening debates, but which were also co-produced and therefore owned by the sector. Subsequent research activities have complemented this approach in:

- The development of **knowledge partnerships** between IDPM academics embedded within civil societies in the global South to learn, share ideas and deepen reach.
- Generating associated **consultancies** to support programme and policy reforms.
- Formulating additional **research projects**, including ESRC-DFID funded work on social movements and chronic poverty. [A][B]

3. References to the research (all references available upon request – AUR)

In addition to the work cited, contributions from the conferences have produced six edited books and 17 peer reviewed journal articles, with texts written by 132 different people from 29 countries in five continents. Two-thirds of contributors were civil society practitioners. Additionally, [D] was one of eight works recently republished by Palgrave MacMillan, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of their International Political Economy series

- [A] (2010) Bebbington, A., Mitlin, D., Mogaladi, J., Scurrah, M. & Bielich, C. "Decentring Poverty, Reworking Government: Social Movements and States in the Government of Poverty" *Journal of Development Studies* 46(7) 1304-1326 doi:10.1080/00220388.2010.487094
- [B] (2008) Mitlin, D. "With and Beyond the State – Co-production as a Route to Political Influence, Power and Transformation for Grassroots Organizations" *Environment and Urbanization* 20(2) 339-360 doi:10.1177/0956247808096117
- [C] (2007) Mitlin, D., Hickey, S. & Bebbington, A. "Reclaiming Development? NGOs and the Challenge of Alternatives" *World Development* 35(10) 1699-1720 (136 citations: Google Scholar) (RAE 2008) doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2006.11.005
- [D] (1997) Hulme, D. & Edwards, M. (eds.) *NGOs, States and Donors: Too Close for Comfort* (Macmillan: Basingstoke) (Total sales: 3,337) (AUR)
- [E] (1995) Edwards, M. & Hulme, D. (eds.) *Non-governmental Organisations: Performance and Accountability: Beyond the Magic Bullet* (London: Earthscan) (US sales: 2,467) (AUR)

4. Details of the impact

Pathways to impact: Prior to the first conference in 1991, there had been little research on the role and work of NGOs in development. The only significant international event had been organised in 1987 by the Overseas Development Institute, a non-profit think tank, and primarily involved development assistance agencies. The IDPM initiative, led by Professor David Hulme alongside Michael Edwards from Save the Children Fund, catalysed knowledge and scholarship and involved many more NGOs and researchers. Further conferences broadened the scope to the wider domain of civil society, leading to multiple impacts on non-academic users, and recognition by development agencies and the NGO sector itself (collectively and within individual organizations), alongside other groups and individuals. The primary pathways for this impact have been: participation in events and debates, longstanding relationships between UoM researchers and civil society organizations and written documentation. Key impacts, which encompass a noted effect on organisational performance, can be grouped into three areas: a more aware and

reflective NGO sector; an improved **understanding** of the sector amongst wider stakeholders; and new **tools** and methods for NGOs. To evaluate these impacts, IDPM commissioned an independent study, undertaken by an authoritative, senior and widely respected expert in the field (with public honours in Canada), whose report concluded that: *“In terms of their reach, the significance of the ideas propagated and the depth of their influence, the four IDPM conferences and the associated volumes represent a distinct and material contribution to the work and effort of international development NGOs....an important response to over-theorization and the need for more practical discourse”* [1].

Deeper reflection and understanding: The work of IDPM staff has resulted in a more knowledgeable, prepared and reflective sector, with knowledge emerging from both exposure to different perspectives through participation in conferences, and influence on a generation of practitioners via written texts. As a senior Bangladeshi NGO manager notes: *“IDPM’s key success was as a convening platform”*, with another senior practitioner-academic stating that: *“I don’t know of any other body of work that framed the debate in the way those conferences did”* [1]. These debates provided an important resource for many individuals. The former director of the Ford Foundation (Governance & Civil Society Programme), and a world-leading authority, exemplifies this, stating that: *“I have observed the benefits on both the NGO sector itself (collectively and in individual organizations) and other groups and individuals, including beneficiaries and development agencies”* [2] and noting in the Smillie report that *“IDPM’s work has been ‘a fundamentally important launch pad for things I’ve done in my professional and intellectual life’”*[1]. Several interviewees highlighted the particular value of the texts that emerged from IDPM’s work, a senior Indian NGO manager and regional sector expert arguing that: *“This was precisely the divide that needed to be bridged... ‘How-to’ manuals don’t do it and the heavy academic papers—who reads that stuff? I still photocopy some of the articles for new staff to read”* [1]. Moreover, the significant impact of the research on the scale and depth of reflection in the sector can be exemplified with respect to the particular themes. For example, two key NGO practitioners (Jacobs and Wilford) argue that *“Edwards and Hulme framed the debate on NGO accountability”* [1]; the World Bank acknowledging the significance of Edwards and Hulme’s work in the concept and significance of downward accountability for NGOs; and the Commonwealth Foundation highlighting accountability as a key issue facing the NGO sector within a series of on-line forums in 2010, with the background paper drawing extensively on this work, specifically [E][3].

Evidence of IDPM’s continuing capacity to catalyse debate and challenge thinking in and about the sector is provided by the discussion following a Brooks World Poverty Institute (BWPI) paper published at UoM, which built on earlier IDPM analysis with an updated and critical analysis of trends. Duncan Green, Senior Strategic Advisor at Oxfam (GB) responded in his widely followed blog, receiving 45 replies in the following four weeks, with reference to earlier IDPM publications [4]. Mark Tran, who writes a ‘Poverty Matters’ blog for The Guardian newspaper contributed to the debate, himself eliciting 16 comments in the five days afterwards. Very specific engagements can also be noted, with contributions towards a deeper reflection on governance issues across civil society and the state provided by Bebbington’s recent work with the Ministry of Environment in El Salvador. This work builds on the collaborative research with PRISMA [C] and has *“assisted in the formulation of a proposed new national policy and associated legislation on mining, as well as in the formulation of environmental governance strategy within the Ministry of Environment”* [5].

Improved understanding of the sector leading to more effective development work: A Dutch NGO senior manager with HIVOS cites the monograph emerging out of the fourth IDPM conference as one of the best books available to him, as he sought to address significant questions facing his NGO [1]. Further evidence of the contribution of IDPM’s work is provided by BOND (the UK network of development NGOs) who list reference [E] (above) as a key ‘library resource’. Similarly [D] was selected by Palgrave MacMillan as one of eight titles republished to celebrate the 30th anniversary of their International Political Economy series. As Palgrave confirm, the book *“was the first that we chose... the most successful title in the series’ history... clearly a great influence in its field”* [6]. At a wider scale, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) cite IDPM research in their flagship 2010 publication, in analyses of NGO contributions to formulating and implementing poverty reduction policies. UNRISD also contracted

Bebbington to analyse the role of social movements in poverty reduction activities, with Bebbington drawing heavily on IDPM's work in his report [7]. In addition, Hulme's research has been utilised by the Bangladeshi NGO BRAC (assisting 126 million people) in the formulation of its strategies. As noted by their former research coordinator *"evolving from a critique of mainstream approaches such as microfinance, [Hulme] has helped BRAC develop a programme to work with the 'ultra-poor' that reaches the lowest-income households with £500 million in aid finance... More generally... IDPM... has been helpful to BRAC in contributing to their strategic analysis of the role of NGOs in development"* [8]. This co-learning approach, between Hulme and UoM colleagues and BRAC, has been further developed within subsequent research financed by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) amongst others.

New methods and tools: The impact of work on NGO accountability has been enhanced by the crafting of novel approaches that draw on IDPM's analysis. Since the mid-1990s NGOs have initiated self-regulatory frameworks such as One World Trust's 'Global Accountability Report', with impact ongoing. The One World Trust states that the rise of such frameworks is a response to IDPM work. An example of further impact is provided by two international NGOs – Concern and Mango – whose project 'Listen First', introduced systematic approaches for managing downward accountability; trials involved six countries and more than 530 staff and advisers [A][9].

Finally, the protection of civil society autonomy has been taken up through Mitlin's work with Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) to strategize the development of their Urban Poor Fund International – a multi-million dollar basket fund supported by bilateral development assistance from Norway and Sweden, with contributions from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The aim is to address the needs of the landless urban poor in over 20 countries, supporting local women's led savings schemes, thus addressing the needs of thousands of their members for tenure, security and access to basic services. This has drawn on IDPM research to manage and exploit opportunities provided at the global level, supporting alternative modalities of development assistance that recognise the need to empower and capacitate grassroots organisations and their members. As SDI have confirmed to Mitlin: *"your work and that of others at the University of Manchester has challenged the NGO sector to think about their relations with grassroots organisations and the political strategies that are likely to be successful in achieving social justice and equity in towns and cities of the global south"* [10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (all claims referenced in the text)

- [1] (2012) Smillie, I. 'Impact And Influence At The University Of Manchester's Institute For Development Policy And Management: A Case Study' (Internal Draft: Unpublished)
- [2] Testimonial from Distinguished Senior Fellow, Demos (25th June 2013)
- [3] (2010) Jacobs, A. & Wilford, R. "Listen First: A Pilot System for Managing Downward Accountability in NGOs" *Development in Practice*, 20, 797-811; (2011) Odugbemi, S. & Lee, T. (eds.) *Accountability Through Public Opinion: From Inertia to Public Action* (Washington D.C.: The World Bank); (2010) Grant, R. 'Public Perceptions of Civil Society – Are They Accountable?' Commonwealth Foundation
- [4] (2012) Banks, N. & Hulme, D. 'The role of NGOs and Civil Society in Development and Poverty Reduction' BWPI Working Paper 171 (June); (2012) Green, D. 'What can we learn from a really annoying paper on NGOs and development?' (15th August)
- [5] Testimonial from Minister of Environment, El Salvador (8th July 2013)
- [6] Testimonial from Palgrave Macmillan (13th September 2013); BOND for International Development: Library Resources
- [7] (2010) Molenaers, N 'Civil Society Participation under the New Aid Approach: Pluralist Prescriptions for Pro-poor Interests? (Geneva: UNRISD); (2010) Bebbington, A. 'Social Movements and Poverty in Developing Countries – Civil Society and Social Movements Programme Paper Number 32 (Geneva: UNRISD)
- [8] Testimonial from Former Deputy Executive Director, BRAC (30th June 2013)
- [9] See: Lloyd, R. 2005. *The Role of NGO Self-Regulation in Increasing Stakeholder Accountability*. London: One World Trust.
- [10] Testimonial from Manager, SDI Secretariat (10th June 2013)