

**By: Rajesh
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Changing steps, dancing together

This brief note analyses the changing context of development cooperation globally in order to identify the dilemmas and challenges facing the northern and southern NGOs. It is intended to be a basis for catalyzing some reflections, not a treatise on this theme.

Shifts

Till recently, the global architecture of development cooperation was pretty stable and predictable. Three channels of Aid flows from OECD countries to 'developing' countries were pretty standard---multilateral, bilateral and Non-governmental. Northern NGOs (NNGOs) had a rather stable arrangement with their host governments to receive a reasonably fixed proportion of Aid funds, to be spent directly and in partnership with southern NGOs (SNGOs) in developing countries. This arrangement had remained rather stable over thirty years, up until very recently.

Though in the making for some time, three major shifts in development cooperation have become much clearer in the past 2-3 years.

First, there is a growing fatigue among citizens and politicians of OECD countries about Aid and its effectiveness. This is further compounded by stories of mismanagement and corruption in use of Aid funds. As a consequence, many donor governments are creating systems and procedures for tighter monitoring of money, in the guise of Results-based Management.

Second, the new global economic architecture has brought in such players as BRIC (Brasil, Russia, India, China) and IBSA (India, Brasil, South Africa) who are 'flexing' their economic muscles in search of energy, minerals and food resources worldwide. These countries are now acting as 'donors', but outside the OECD framework. Their interventions in many countries (sub-Saharan Africa and central Asia, for example) are having enormous impact on development of those societies and economies.

Third, the new Aid Effectiveness regime----called Paris Agenda---once again focuses on direct contributions from donors to the national development plans of developing countries, in particular in Africa. In this regime, harmonization of donor contributions to southern governments leaves very little space for NGOs and their contributions, except in support of the development plans of southern governments.

In some ways, these shifts in international Aid architecture are both inevitable and desirable. Globalisation, economic growth and institutional maturity in southern societies did begin to create 'emerging' countries and regions. Strengthening state regimes and institutions to become capable for service delivery and accountable for democratic governance is an important strategy

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for development and poverty eradication. However, this shift poses new challenges and dilemmas for many actors involved in development cooperation, including SNGOs and NNGOs.

Challenges for SNGOs

In many developing countries, international Aid regimes had resulted in growth of development NGOs with commitment and competence to support development programmes. Many of these received financial and technical support from NNGOs. However, questions had been raised about their legitimacy and accountability to their domestic constituencies---both governments and citizens. A major challenge that such SNGOs now face is to learn to engage with their national and sub-national governments---both officials and politicians. Governments can be a source of funding for them; governments are also beginning to frame regulatory regimes and accountability standards for them. Accessing funds from bureaucratic and many a times corrupt government machinery can be quite a hassle? Engaging governments on a regulatory, and, developmental basis requires new perspectives, competencies and structures. In particular, SNGOs have to learn to 'tone down' their moral high ground, as if government officials and politicians are 'less' interested in and capable of addressing societal problems.

SNGOs in countries like India, Brasil and South Africa have also to learn to deal with the new roles of their own governments and private sector in other developing countries. How can BRIC & IBSA undertake development cooperation which is respectful, empowering and sustainable in those communities and societies? This may require new forms of south-south cooperation among SNGOs across such 'new donor' and 'old recipient' countries?

Challenges for NNGOs

The challenges faced by NNGOs are even more complex and multi-dimensional. First set of challenges relate to the relevance in their own host contexts. Many OECD governments, specially their Aid and foreign affairs ministries, are asking for value addition of Aid flows through NNGO routes. Why can these resources not be transferred through SNGOs or southern governments directly, which is seen to be both efficient and economical?

Second, SNGOs in many southern countries have become strengthened to be able to design, implement and monitor development projects on their own, partly as a result of many years of support received from NNGOs. Many SNGOs have been able to build human and institutional capabilities to be able to undertake development cooperation on their own, in response to local requirements and in appreciation of the local context. Therefore, there is further question about the value addition of Aid flows through NNGOs.

Third, there is an increasing trend of 'actor-oriented' north-south cooperation in this new Aid scenario. Many different types of actors in the OECD countries are seeking counterpart partnerships in southern countries; for example, academia, trade unions, local governments and their associations, cooperatives, private sector, media, civic groups, associations of professionals, etc, in addition to NNGOs, are now actively competing for limited Aid funds in OECD countries, as well as in EU. Such increased competition makes new types of demands on NNGOs to demonstrate their value additions.

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Finally, NNGOs are being incentivised to open offices and branches in southern countries to access Aid funds going directly to southern countries. This creates potential for competition and conflict with their SNGO partners and other domestic civil society groups. It could displace local NGOs and their professional staff as NNGOs bring in greater clout and influence to access funds and provide higher compensations, in comparison to local SNGOs.

Issues

The above scenario and challenges generate a set of questions that we need to deliberate upon. These are listed below:

- What is the over all vision of development among NNGOs? Where do southern governments and SNGOs fit in that vision?
- There is evidence to suggest that strong, capable and accountable democratic states, dynamic and efficient private sector, and strong, vocal and vibrant civil society are needed in each country to travel on a path of sustainable development. However, each country and society would have to find its own pace, form and balance for these three sectors of state, market and civil society. How does Aid mechanism in general, and NNGOs in particular, support such a trajectory in different developing countries?
- If strong SNGOs are needed in each country, how can NNGOs support their evolution? How can NNGOs support the strengthening of credibility, legitimacy and accountability of SNGOs in their own societies and with their own southern governments? How can NNGOs support the process of, and be a part as well, south-south cooperation among civil society, as elaborated above?
- How can SNGO voices and perspectives be audible in global policy forums, with support from NNGOs? How can NNGOs partner with SNGOs to influence various economic, developmental and security policies of their own and other OECD governments?
- What kinds of mutuality, solidarity and alliance need to be evolved between NNGOs and SNGOs (as well as their associations) in response to the new global realities and their influence on development cooperation, as outlined above?

Thus, the new global context suggests that NNGOs and SNGOs must find new steps to dance together in future; there is no option but to learn such steps, as dancing together they must.

By: Marie-Trees
Meereboer

Comment on state-of-the-art paper of Rajesh Tandon on “Roles and Tasks North-South”

Rajesh Tandon describes three major changes in the global architecture of development cooperation. My conclusion is that the former supremacy of Western governments is gone. The discussion about the emergence of many different actors and the economic power shift have been stimulated in my opinion by a sense of loss of power by the West. The focus on result-based management and the donor harmonisation by OECD countries can be seen as reactions by Western governments to get more control on the matter. In turn the Paris Declaration has been perceived as neo-colonialism.¹ How to make Southern governments stronger, more accountable and more willing to accept participation of their local NGOs in decision-making? How to make Northern governments more open to the added value of diversity and adverse to the quest of quick wins? Diversity gives the SNGOs more choice in whom to partner with. A diverse field of NNGOs is more flexible towards demands and difference in contexts of SNGOs, because of the large variety of expertise and the fit with their own diverse identities. Moreover, diversity gives room to an abundance of ideas. And structural changes require long periods of investment, longer than the 4 years the present subsidy system allows.

How to show legitimacy and relevance other than by more and more data and success stories? How can trust in development cooperation be regained? And is effectiveness always served by more harmonisation or will it lead to more inefficiency? A larger scale of the NGO does not lead by definition to more effectiveness. I think that better use should be made of the strength of all actors involved and better answers should be found to their weaknesses. The difference in South and North is not relevant anymore. It is about East and West as well. Both SNGOs and NNGOs should be able to clarify their relevance and the reason that the diversity serves a purpose other than just their institutional interests. Southern governments as well as Northern (and Eastern!) governments should be held accountable for their policies and the implementation of these policies. Other actors should be transparent about their agenda and activities. All actors involved should invest more time and energy in learning from past experiences and sharing these lessons with each other

Money makes the world go round but at the same time obstructs real partnership. What can direct funding from Northern governments do to solve the imbalance between NNGOs and SNGOs? Members of Partos suggest that the role of financier should be disconnected from the role as advisor, consultant, lobbyist, networker, etc. because it hinders equality between NNGOs and SNGOs. A more equal relationship might give SNGOs an opportunity for setting their own standards for development cooperation. What is really universal in the values which are used? And what has a real local character and should be respected? And how is a donor going to manage direct funding without having the network and expertise the NNGOs have built up so patiently through the past decades?

¹ *Yash Tandon dissects the Paris Declaration in relation to aid effectiveness and reaches the conclusion that "under the pretext of making aid more effective, the aid effectiveness project is a form of collective colonialism by Northern donors of those Southern countries that, through weakness, vulnerability or psychological dependency, allow themselves to be subjected to it at the Accra conference in September."*
(<http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/48634>)

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Will the funding be combined with capacity building, like the NNGOs do now? By the way, the amount of money available should not lead to more competition. Public service delivery, political change and capacity building are not served by a false competition over financial resources. When all OECD countries would adhere to promises made for the periode 2005-2010, another 75 bln euro could be used.²

² *No Time to Waste: European governments behind schedule on aid quantity and quality. AidWatch Report 2008, CONCORD, Brussels, p.2.*

By: Rolien Sasse

Role of Southern and Northern NGOs – Together

In his discussion paper, Rajeesh Tandon has pointed out three major shifts in the area of development cooperation. I fully agree with his observations that these are the processes Northern and Southern NGOs will have to respond to jointly. I would even add a fourth trend, i.e. the role of media and information. Networks and information flows (internet!) have become really globalised and are increasingly being utilised by civil society groups all over the world. Media and information have become very powerful tools and the division between 'North' and 'South' is fading rapidly, partly because of these tools. We are all global and local actors at the same time.

It is also important to observe what has not really changed in the world. The wide gap between rich and poor is still there and even widening everywhere: in North and South, at the global level between continents and countries, but also at the national and local level within Northern and Southern countries. And still, unequal distribution of power and the disregard or straight exploitation of the poor is still at the root of this problem. At the same time, political, economic/business and security/defence interests are probably even more intertwined as ever before.

In my view, the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) – both in the North and the South - has surprisingly in essence changed very little. It is rather the means to effectively implement these roles and the actors that can be involved, which have changed. One can distinguish two roles for CSOs: First the social and political role: to assist and empower the marginalised, to ensure independent and objective research and information provision and to lobby and hold governments, businesses and the media accountable in the interest of those whose rights are not respected. Such roles become more viable and powerful if civil society organisations work together and build strong, effective and independent networks, including across national boundaries. To be effective, they will also have to look for other strategic partners (outside their own group of CSOs) to team-up with, depending on the topic, in ever changing coalitions and dynamic networks. Often though, they may find international, national or local elites being the people to lobby to or against. Cooperation may be a good strategy, but will not always be possible.

A second role of CSOs still is to provide effective services to marginalised groups in areas or circumstances when others are not effective. Whether these are weak states or specific areas of expertise. This service provision, again, can best be done in cooperation with others. In this role, close cooperation with governments is very important and in the interest of all.

To fulfill their roles, CSOs will need funds. How this funding can be raised and channeled depends partly on the role a CSOs play. In all cases it will be important that CSOs are given the freedom to design those approaches that they know are most suitable to the specific needs and context addressed. And of course, they always be held accountable for this work. For a more

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political role, independence in funding is also crucial, to avoid any political interference. Preferably, CSOs can fund their activities from a diverse range of sources. However, the amount of funds they can raise from the general public is limited and raising funds for advocacy type activities is even more complicated than raising funds for service provision.

In the '70s the Dutch government started funding Southern CSOs through Dutch NGOs, with an explicit vision to strengthen independent civil societies in developing countries, because the importance of their role was acknowledged. As a consequence, Dutch NGOs were given a lot of freedom to make their own policy choices and strategies. Over time, experience how best to support civil society has grown and many NGOs in the Netherlands have increasingly become effective professionals in supporting and strengthening Southern CSOs. However, the perception of NGO support by the Dutch government has shifted very gradually over the years. CSOs increasingly have been seen as a channel to implement Dutch government policy, demanding them to work within the policy choices of the given government at a certain moment in time. Although, so far, Dutch development policies tend to be supportive to issues such as empowerment of the poor and pro-poor approaches, this fundamental shift carries a risk to undermine the independent role and effectiveness of CSOs in the Netherlands and in the South.

In his recent statement that marked the start of this political dialogue on the future policy regarding CSOs, the Dutch Minister of Development Cooperation suggested CSOs may – in line with the Paris Agenda – be funded through bilateral partners and hence through their respective national governments. National governments do have and should have the authority in their country. However, they can not fund their civil society in their political role, when they are supposed to act as their own watch dog, because in many countries, government institutions are highly politicised and often feel threatened by a critical civil society. In a large number of countries, even CSO funding by governments for a service provision role is cumbersome, due to a lack of transparency, capacity and accountability, reducing their effectiveness as a channel to support civil society. Without the voice or power to have their interests heard, the marginalised often fall victim to self-interested political elites and to governments that fail to provide services and protection. Checks and balances in power, transparent and independent sharing of information and an active civil society are needed to hold these governments accountable. Actors of civil society require funds, but should not depend for this on the government they are supposed to monitor and lobby. If the Dutch government wants the Paris Agenda to succeed, it needs a strong and independent civil society to act as watch dog, voice and capacity builders of poor communities. If they want CSOs to play this role, they should look at independent channels to support them.

At the same time, Northern and Southern CSOs will need to be self critical and ask themselves seriously: do we still represent the constituency that we serve? Are we rooted in society and in touch with the poor? To whom are we accountable, apart from our donors? And how much effort do we make to be (financially) independent and sustainable, to be creative and cost-effective? Are we still fighting at the frontline for the empowerment, the rights and the livelihoods of the poor? For instance, the last years has shown the financial vulnerability of the Dutch NGO sector, due to their dependence of government funding. And the lack of alternatives for the large amount of funding the Dutch government provides and that has become so important for CSOs in the North and South. It has in that sense shown the crucial, but ambiguous, role the Dutch government plays. Southern CSOs will increasingly have a role to play to raise funds among

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their own elites, to lobby the foreign policy and practices of their own government and to build and strengthen their own civil society, their government and private partners and colleague CSOs. Roles that before were only fulfilled by Northern CSOs. Northern CSOs have to be careful not to become too dependent of their own government and have to become more active in looking critically at new trends in their own country. Global civil society is facing the challenge to become a global network of a diverse, but cooperating, community of CSOs, instead of a Northern donor community with a Southern community at the receiving end. Capacity building will be key, especially at grassroots level and within global networks. This networked community can be very diverse and dynamic. It needs to be connected and focussed to common objectives. That is the challenge.

The role of civil society has in itself not fundamentally changed. It still lies in the empowerment of and service provision to the marginalised, in combination with lobby, advocacy and monitoring of the powerful. The challenge is rather to reinvent this role in a totally new and globalised environment, in which the challenges and dangers to really play this role are larger than ever before.