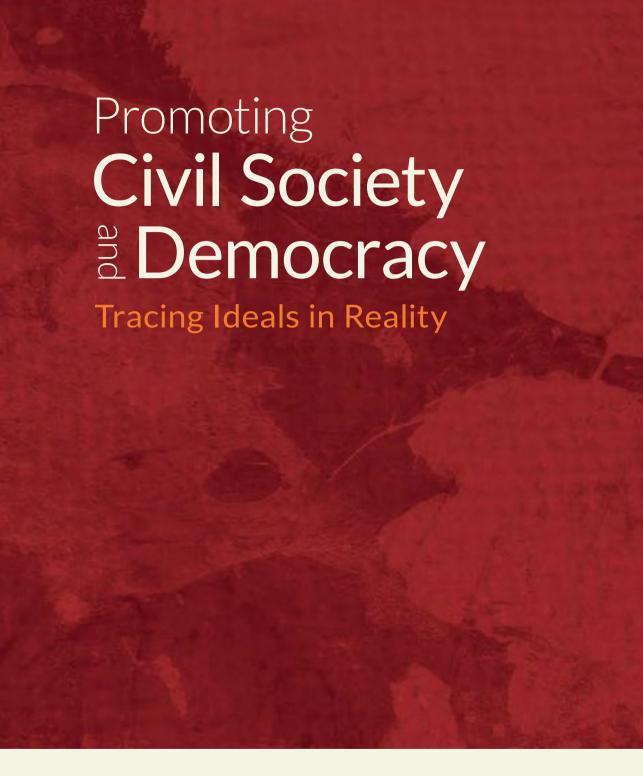
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# Promoting Civil Society and Democracy

Tracing Ideals in Reality

#### **Proefschrift**

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen op gezag van de rector magnificus prof. mr. S.C.J.J. Kortmann, volgens besluit van het college van decanen in het openbaar te verdedigen op dinsdag 26 augustus 2014 om 14.30 uur precies

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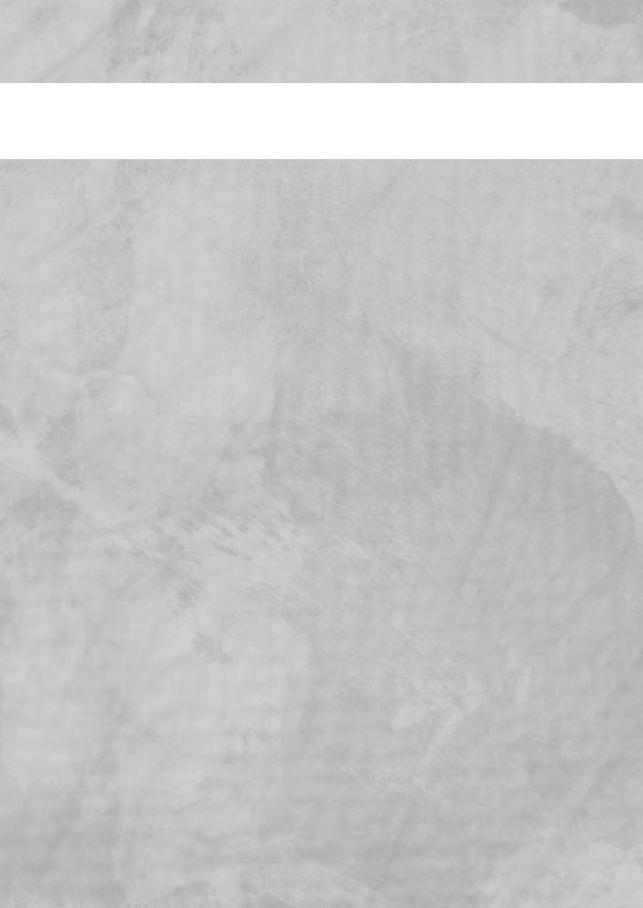
"Among the laws that rule human societies there is one which seems to be more precise and clear than all others. If men are to remain civilized or to become so, the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of conditions is increased."

Alexis de Tocqueville – Democracy in America (1998 [1835-1840], p. 219)

# **Prologue**

When I started this PhD project on the promotion of civil society and democracy in developing countries, one author kept reappearing in the texts I read, namely the French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville. Often his thoughts are linked to the idea that civic associations serve as a 'school of democracy' where citizens learn about the norms, values and practices of democracy. Intrigued by this thought I wanted to see for myself what Tocqueville had to say about the link between civic association and the development of a democratic society. I purchased a copy of his seminal work Democracy in America, which I read during my stay in Ghana. First, I was surprised to find that only a few chapters explicitly tackle the importance of civic associations in the American democratic system. The chapter titled "Relation of civil to political associations" seems to be central to Tocqueville's ideas on the importance of civic associations for democracy. Although I did indeed find the idea that "civil associations [...] facilitate political association". I was further surprised that this sentence, and actually the whole chapter, also contained the idea that "on the other hand, political association singularly strengthens and improves associations for civil purposes." Reading on, I found that according to Tocqueville civic association is not so much the school of democracy, but the other way around: "Political associations may therefore be considered as large free schools, where all the members of the community go to learn the general theory of association."

Having made this discovery, I realised that I would probably not be the first one to have noticed this oddity. After a short search, I encountered a study by Michael W. Foley and Bob Edwards (1996), titled The Paradox of Civil Society. They basically make the same observation and link it to the work of the neo-Tocquevillian Putnam. Putnam's influential studies Making Democracy Work (1994) and Bowling Alone (2000) describe the importance of social capital and civic association for the functioning of a democratic society. According to Putnam, "networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalised reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust. Such networks facilitate coordination and communication, amplify reputations, and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved." (Putnam, 1995, p. 67). Foley and Edwards (1996, p. 40) propose that Putnam puts too much emphasis on civic association and underestimates "the ability of newer organisations, and of specifically political associations such as social movements and political parties, to foster aspects of civil community and to advance democracy." In sum, the discrepancy was noticed more than 15 years ago, and it had been published in a renowned journal. So why then does the debate still revolve around neo-Tocquevillian interpretations rather than those of Tocqueville himself? With this question at the back of my mind, I pursued this research on the promotion of civil society and democracy in developing countries, only to find many more questions and anomalies.



# Chapter 1

# **General introduction**

#### 1.1 Introduction

This thesis tackles the subject of civil society and democracy promotion in developing countries. It looks at how policy assumptions in this field turn out in practice and aims at explaining the discrepancies between both. This is an important matter for several reasons. First, theoretically, civil society and democracy are highly contested concepts. No univocal idea has evolved on the meaning of either civil society or democracy, let alone about how one influences the other. Nevertheless, many donor policies are based on these contested ideas and beliefs. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have been hailed as the panacea for democracy and development. They are believed to have many positive qualities which stimulate the process of democratisation. One of the reasons why there is such a strong belief in the positive force of civil society is that it is a field where science and activism have often interacted, producing a strong normative component to the debate (Opoku-Mensah, 2007). Many have noted that literature on civil society and democratisation has the tendency of mixing ideals with reality (Kopecky & Mudde, 2003; Mitlin, Hickey, & Bebbington, 2007; Robins, Cornwall, & von Lieres, 2008; Tvedt, 2007).

Second. the scientific debate offers donor-agencies wishing to support civil society and democratisation little concrete starting points to improve their strategies. This is probably a result of the combination of both the problems with defining the subject and with its normative treatment. Many of the theoretical propositions about how civil society contributes to democracy remain very abstract, meaning everything and nothing at the same time, NGOs are the 'seedbeds of democracy', they are close to the people and act as 'antenna's'. They are also supposed to be 'in tune' with their social, political and economic environment. Many studies remain at this high level of abstraction, not making concrete what these metaphors mean for actual democracy promoting NGOs. Hence, Cornwall and Brock (2005, p. 1043) argue that 'civil society', 'voices of the poor' and similar buzzwords which "once spoke of politics and power have come to be reconfigured in the service of today's one-size-fits-all development recipes, spun into an apoliticised form that everyone can agree with." As such they have been rendered meaningless.

This thesis tackles both problems identified within the debate. First, it deals with the normative component of the debate by explicating the central beliefs on which donor-policies in the field of civil society and democratisation are based, and then by scrutinising how these ideals turn out in practice. So, although international donor agencies are not the object of study, the thoughts and ideas underpinning their policies in the field of civil society and democracy promotion are. Second, it offers studies which aim to be very concrete, i.e. having a low level of abstraction, to make the matter tangible instead of it remaining 'up in the air'. For instance, when looking at civil society, it looks at donor-sponsored NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia. And when looking at these NGOs, it breaks them down to their organisational components (i.e. mission, structure, strategy, resources), and analyses how these combined aspects influence the way NGOs operate. As all of the chapters of this book relate to the actual promotion of civil society and democracy in developing countries, each of the studies delivers policy recommendations for international donors wishing to improve their work.

Four of the central policy assumptions on which civil society and democracy aid is based are drawn from the debate and are put to the test by using various theoretical and methodological approaches. Chapter two will start by looking at the assumption that an enabling environment is important for a civil society to flourish. Chapter three looks at the belief that NGOs are conducive to promoting context-specific democracy by examining to what extent they actually are context-specific. Chapter four looks at the idea that donor-funding to NGOs is a good strategy to promote this context-specific democracy. Finally, chapter five looks at the idea that NGOs stimulate democratisation by performing a range of democratic roles.

The main underlying idea connecting these four policy assumptions is that to be able to make a meaningful contribution to democracy, civil society needs to be locally owned and embedded in its national context. This idea stems from many critical studies over the years which have pointed out that the external manufacturing of civil society and democracy has often been counterproductive (Blaug, 2002; Howell & Pearce, 2001). This puts donor agencies in a difficult position. By definition, development aid represents an external intervention in the domestic affairs of a country. Given this situation, however, they now have to make their aid as contextually sensitive as possible. This assignment almost implies a 'contradictio in terminis'. The four policy assumptions relate to ways of overcoming this tension. The assumption in chapter two represents an indirect way of supporting civil society development. Instead of directly interfering, it focuses on bringing about the preconditions for civil society development. If these conditions are in place, then civil society can develop locally. The other chapters look at the assumptions behind the more hands-on approach to civil society and democracy development, namely supporting NGOs. Here the tension becomes even more apparent, because it implies direct interference with actual CSOs. Still, the rationale behind this policy points towards a reconciliation of the tension between 'home-grown' and 'externally manufactured'. It is argued that NGOs are conducive to promoting context-specific democracy, and that they do so by performing various democratic roles. Therefore, donor-funding to NGOs is a good strategy to promote this context-specific democracy.

The remainder of this introduction is structured as follows. First, to get a sense of the complexity of the debate, it provides a theoretical view of the meaning of democracy, the meaning of civil society and the relation between the two notions. Second, it pays close attention to the promotion of civil society and democracy in

developing countries. Third, it discusses the focus of this thesis which results in the formulation of the central research questions. Fourth, it describes the contributions of each of the studies, providing an outline for the thesis. Finally, it discusses the methodologies used in this thesis.

# 1.2 Defining democracy

Many different meanings have been assigned to the term democracy. Some see it purely as a political system that allows citizens to elect their leaders for a certain period of time (liberal democracy). Others employ a more comprehensive notion of democracy where participation goes beyond elections (participatory democracy) and where democracy is not only confined to the political realm, but also enters the social and the economic realms (social democracy). Still others point out that formal democratic institutions do not equal democracy, they emphasise that it is the substance of the democratic process which is important (deliberative democracy). Besides these four well-known visions of democracy, there are many more to be found. The goal of this short overview is not to be exhaustive, but to show the basic distinction between comprehensive and minimal forms of democracy, and how much these forms differ in their appreciation of what a democratic system entails.

Most democracies share elements of the liberal democratic model (Carothers. 1997, p. 11). Probably the best summary of that basic model is provided by Dahl (1971, pp. 1-9). Dahl assumes that responsiveness is one of the main characteristics of a democratic political system. In its ideal form a democracy is completely responsive to all its citizens. For a government to be responsive over a period of time. politically equal citizens must be able: 1) to formulate their preferences; 2) to signify their preferences to their fellow citizens and their government; and, 3) to have their preferences weighted equally in the conduct of government. In order to attain these conditions for a large number of people, Dahl (1971, p. 3) further assumes that the institutions of a society must provide guarantees concerning voting and elections, namely: the right to vote; eligibility for public office; the right of political leaders to compete for support and for votes; free and fair elections; and institutions for making government policies depend on votes. A society must also provide institutional guarantees for the formation and functioning of civil society, namely: the freedom to form and join organisations; freedom of expression; alternative sources of information; and institutions for making government policies depend on expressions of preference other than votes.

Schumpeter is often cited as representing a minimalist position on liberal democracy. His definition of democracy is minimal in the sense that 'rule by the people' barely goes beyond the voting procedure. According to Schumpeter (1950,

p. 269) "the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's votes". He puts competition for political leadership at the core of his definition. By doing so he breaks with the classical theory on democracy which centres around the notion that the will of "the people" is translated into political decisions by elected representatives. In Schumpeter's definition the role of the electorate is reduced to producing a government, be it directly or indirectly. When a government is formed it will take all the decisions for the duration of its term. The next elections give the citizens the opportunity to hold their rulers accountable, to re-elect good rulers and to reject bad ones.

At the ideological level, the liberal democratic model is also minimalistic (Fung, 2003). First of all, liberal democrats are very much concerned with negative freedom, which basically means that citizens should be protected from pervasive state interference in their personal lives (Sørensen, 1993, p. 6). Freedom of individual choice is the highest end in this tradition, for some this end is even more important than democracy itself. Liberal democrats therefore propagate a minimal state, often referred to as the 'night watchman state'. A minimal state limits its interference to protecting individual freedom, as regulation concerning any other terrain will result in less individual freedom. Closely related to this concern with negative freedom is the notion of political equality. Political equality does not go beyond the 'one man, one vote' principle. This principle ensures that every citizen can exercise his vote to protect his freedom vis-à-vis the politicians that rule over him.

More comprehensive forms of democracy give both a different procedural and a different substantive meaning to democracy. In opposition to Schumpeter's view, Diamond (2005, p. 2) states: "Electoral participation is not enough. People at every level of public life must become involved in the decisions that affect their lives". According to Diamond this is necessary to promote social inclusion and political ownership of state policies. If all the different groups in society participate in formulating policies, policies will be better informed about the needs of citizens. This will increase both the legitimacy and the sustainability of policies as citizens are more likely to accept policies they helped to create. This kind of democracy is often described with the use of the adjective 'participatory'. Diamond (2005, p. 3) also summarises the social democratic critique of liberal democratic ideology when he states:

"Now, we all know that political equality is linked to economic equality, and that everywhere those with money and high social status have vastly more access to power and more influence over government than do the poor and middle class".

Even though formal political equality provides every citizen with equal opportunities, social and economic inequalities will provide for very unequal outcomes. Freedom in the sense of non-interference thus leads to a situation of political inequality. The social democratic answer to this is to use state interference to combat social and economic inequality. Individual freedom can only be realised in a situation where there are no vast social and economic inequalities because marginalised citizens have limited freedom of choice.

Another prominent comprehensive view on democracy is called deliberative democracy. This view emphasises that the institutional characteristics such as electoral system, referenda, separation of power or constitutional design, should not be the focus when determining how democratic a system is. The legitimacy of decisions should not be merely based on the aggregation of votes, but must also be based on authentic deliberation (Bohman, 1998; Cohen, 1997; Habermas, 1996). Authentic deliberation can only take place when the institutional conditions of a country support the ideal of democratic autonomy, which is considered to be the real essence of democracy (Held, 1987). Democratic autonomy covers both the micro and macro level, and can be divided into individual and political autonomy (Hendriks, 2006; Warren, 2001). An individual is autonomous when he or she has the capacities to take part in critical examination of self and others, to participate in reasoning processes, and to arrive at judgments he or she can defend in public argument. Individuals who are barely educated or who spend all their time just to subsist have no chance of arriving at individual autonomy. Political autonomy is based on very much the same idea with the difference that it functions at a higher level of abstraction. namely at the level of the public sphere. The public sphere is the place where individual judgments are transformed into collective judgments. These collective judgments are autonomous when they are held with due consideration and can be justified by the giving of reasons to others (Warren, 2001).

## 1.3 Defining civil society

Like democracy, there is no uncontested definition of civil society. Different theorists emphasise different aspects at different levels of analysis. Some are mainly concerned with civil society as a realm or a sphere and relate it to other realms like the state, the private sphere or the market. Others are more concerned with the organisational and structural characteristics of civil society. Finally, some see civil society as a means towards a certain end (e.g., promoting democracy), thus giving it a teleological dimension.

In contemporary literature, civil society is usually positioned as a realm or space that is opposed to society at large, the state, the market and the family (Bebbington,

1997; Fisher, 1998; Hyden, 1997; G. White, 1994). A clear articulation is provided by Reichardt (2006, p. 23) who states that "civil society is an intermediate social space between the state, the economy and the private sphere. Linked to these three spheres by manifold relationships and interactions, it can still be distinguished as a relatively independent space". Besides clearly positioning the realm of civil society, this definition acknowledges that civil society is not some entity that lies completely outside of the three other spheres. An important aspect related to positioning is autonomy. In order for civil society to flourish, it needs to have a certain degree of autonomy. If civil society is co-opted by the private sphere, the market or the state, it cannot perform its societal functions independently (Edwards, 2004; Fowler, 2000; Howell & Pearce, 2001: Reichardt, 2006; Wang, 2006), For Habermas (1991), civil society needs to be autonomous to safeguard the formation and functioning of a democratic public sphere. Within this sphere, equal citizens can freely debate public matters and influence politics by reaching consensus over issues through communicative action. In Habermas' ideal type model this means that consensus is reached through the power of argumentation rather than through coercion. In contrast, Gramsci's (1971) analysis sees civil society not as an autonomous sphere, but as highly intertwined with the state. Coming from a Marxist background, he saw the capitalist state as being made up of two overlapping spheres, a 'political society' which rules through coercion and a 'civil society' which rules through consent. His approach implies a more conflictual perspective on civil society. Even more than a sphere where consensus can be reached, it is a sphere of political struggle by societal groups over ideas and norms. As such, civil society is the sphere of both the development of hegemony and contestation over state institutions. It is the site where the power of the dominant class is produced and reproduced, and therefore it is also the site where counter-hegemonies should be developed to overthrow this dominant class.

In terms of its organisational and structural properties, civil society is often depicted as space for voluntary organisation. It is a realm which is populated by all sorts of formal and informal organisations, like NGOs, associations based on kinship, social movements, community based organisations, labour unions and professional associations (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). As a result of this multitude, there is also a lot of discussion on which organisations belong to civil society and which do not. Different authors use different criteria, for instance concerning their economic, political and social roles (Edwards, 2004). When civil society is defined as an organisational realm, the dimensions of *diversity*, *density* and *depth* become important (Edwards, 2004; Hadenius & Uggla, 1996). If civil society is to promote pluralism and multiple interests, it needs to be diverse with regard to the groups it represents and the goals it seeks to achieve. Equally, if civil society is to create a significant positive impact on society, there needs to be a sufficient number of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). Finally,

civil society's depth refers to the level of citizen participation in CSOs. This is viewed as an indication of the degree to which CSOs are embedded in society. Closely related to this are authors who view civil society from the perspective of social capital theory. Neo-Tocquevillians such as Putnam (2000; 1994) tend to emphasise the importance of structural connections. A distinction is made between bonding (connections within organisations), bridging (connections across them) and linking (connection between associations, government and the market). It is argued that these connections create the social fabric needed for the functioning of CSOs. In case effective network structures exist in civil society, the whole will be greater than the sum of the parts.

Finally, civil society is often linked to the performance of various roles. As such it is seen as a means toward an end (Howell & Pearce, 2001). Edwards (2004, pp. 13-15) provides a clear account of these roles from a developmental perspective. He identifies three interrelated roles: an economic, a social and a political role. The economic role centres on securing livelihoods and providing services where states and markets are weak. This role also encompasses nurturing the social values, networks and institutions that underpin successful market economies, including trust and cooperation. In their social role, civil societies are seen as a reservoir of caring, cultural life and intellectual innovation. They teach people the skills of citizenship and nurture a collection of positive social norms that foster stability and increase social capital. Finally, in the political role civil societies are seen as a crucial counterweight to states and corporate power. They are an essential pillar in promoting transparency, accountability and other aspects of 'good governance', as well as promoting democracy itself.

All these approaches contain normative ideas about a 'good' or 'strong' civil society. As such, "civil society is simultaneously a goal to aim for, a means for achieving it, and a framework for engaging with each other about end and means" (Edwards, 2012, p. 12). This shows the complexity of the concept of civil society in a nutshell. At a basic level, there is no agreement about whether it is an analytical concept or a tool for socio-political action. Furthermore, there is disagreement about the meaning of civil society within all of the dimensions mentioned, namely about where to position civil society vis-à-vis other realms, about its most important organisational and structural properties and about its roles. In sum, like democracy, civil society can mean a lot of different things to a lot of different observers.

## 1.4 The relation between civil society and democracy

To make matters more complex, the concepts of civil society and democracy are highly intertwined. Each different definition of democracy implies a different role or kind of civil society, and vice versa (Hendriks, 2006). In the liberal democratic model, civil society is seen as a means of protecting individual freedom against an intrusive state. In the comprehensive social democratic model, civil society is seen as a means of equalising political representation by bringing in previously marginalised groups (Bebbington & Hickey, 2006). In the deliberative democratic model, civil society is seen as the public sphere where citizens debate the means and ends of governance. By this process of deliberation and the public reasoning of citizens, civil society helps to attain the democratic ideal that government should be based on the 'will of the people' (Bohman, 1998; Habermas, 1996). As such, civil society can be seen as an integral part of democracy instead of being something separate. Because of this interrelatedness, there is no simple and straightforward theoretical answer to the question how civil society contributes to democracy. The answer depends on several assumptions about the process of democratisation and the role of civil society in it.

#### Civil society and the process of democratisation

Although most of the debate revolves around civil society being conducive to the process of democratisation, arguments for the opposite relation are equally plausible. This means that the actual direction of the causal relation between civil society and democracy is still being debated. In fact, one of the authors most cited for stating that civil society is the school for democracy, actually puts more emphasis on the opposite relation, namely that "political association singularly strengthens and improves associations for civil purposes" (Tocqueville, 1998 [1835-1840], p. 224).

When assuming that civil society contributes to democracy, assumptions about the nature of the process of democratisation become important. A basic distinction can be made between on the one hand theorists of the 'third wave' of democratisation like Huntington (1993) and Fukuyama (1992), who see the process of democratic transition as unfolding in several stages towards the liberal democratic model. On the other hand, there are theorists who criticise this transition paradigm by pointing out that democratisation processes are messy and do not follow a predefined path. Also the outcome of a liberal democracy is questioned by this approach. According to Carothers (2002), many of the 'transition' countries are not moving towards democracy. They appear to be stuck in a situation of either 'feckless pluralism' where different governments keep making the same mistakes or dominant 'power politics' where a single group has captured most of the power. The political situation in these countries actually calls the transition paradigm into question.

Both approaches employ different notions of the role on civil society in the process of democratisation. The latter approach contends that when removing the teleological dimension inherent in the transition paradigm, a more realistic picture of a country's state of democracy will emerge (Carothers, 2002). This implies that an analysis of the democratisation process of a country, and the role of civil society in it, should not be based upon expectations of where a country is going, but instead on where a country is. Following the logic of this argument, it is difficult to make generalisations about the contribution of civil society to democratisation, because it depends on the specific situation in a country.

In contrast, theorists following the logic of the transition paradigm assume that civil society has a different kind of contribution to the process of democratisation in each of the stages of democratic transition. Central to this paradigm is Rustow's (1970) model of democratic transition, which divides the process of democratisation into three succeeding stages. First, the preparatory phase consists of the breakdown of the nondemocratic regime and is characterised by political struggle and uncertainty. In the decision phase important decisions about the shape of the main democratic institutions are taken. Finally, in the consolidation phase, democracy is further developed, ever larger parts of the population are included, and democratic norms and ideals become ingrained in the political culture of a country. Following the logic of this transition model, there are two different contributions of civil society to the process of democratisation (Biekart, 1999; Diamond, 1999; Sørensen, 1993). In the preparatory phase, civil society can contribute to the bringing about of democratic institutions, which is mainly done by social movements that position themselves in opposition to the state. As soon as the common enemy is gone these movements tend to disintegrate. This is when the overall resurrection of civil society has to take place, so it can help to protect and deepen the recently gained social and political rights (decision and consolidation phase). This deepening of democracy entails that democracy becomes "a meaningful way for diverse sectors of the populace to exercise collective control over the public decisions that affect their lives" (Roberts, 1998, p. 2). Civil society's contribution in this phase is to ensure that the political process is shaped in such a way that citizen participation goes beyond voting once every four years and that it is based on the principle of political equality as much as possible (Beetham, 1993).

#### The democratic roles of civil society organisations

There are multiple ways in which civil society organisations (CSOs) can contribute to the deepening of democracy. Four democratic roles can be derived from the debate: an educational, a communicative, a representational and a cooperative role. In its first role, civil society educates citizens about the norms, values and practices of democracy. The most relevant aspects of this role include the provision of information to citizens, nurturing civic virtues and teaching citizens political skills. By widening and enriching the flow of information available to citizens, associations can enhance transparency and public accountability (Diamond, 1999; Warren, 2001). Associations can also foster a culture of democracy and civility by nurturing civic values (Fowler, 2000). According to Putnam (2000), the most important of those civic values are generalised reciprocity and trust. The experience of cooperation within associations not only nurtures civic values, it also increases political skills like speaking in public, negotiating and building coalitions (Warren, 2001). Some authors therefore consider participation in associations as a stepping stone to a political career, helping to recruit politicians and strengthen people's skills as future political leaders (Diamond, 1999; Edwards, 2004).

Second, in its communicative role, civil society provides the communication structure between state and society (Habermas, 1991). This role is derived from the idea that civil society protects a democratic public sphere in which citizens can debate the means and ends of governance (Edwards, 2004). Associations foster public communication and deliberation because they are closely connected to the life worlds of individuals. As such, they have a great capacity to signal individual concerns and can communicate them to a broader public (Warren, 2001). By doing so, they provide citizens with additional channels, which go beyond voting and lobbying, through which to make their voices heard in government decision-making (Diamond, 1999; Edwards, 2004). Beyond interest representation, the provision of this communication structure is essential to facilitate public deliberation (Fung, 2003).

Third, the representational role of civil society refers to aspects of voice and resistance. Where the communicative role provides the communication structure, voice provides the actual content of communication. Civil society is often seen as a means for broadening political participation by bringing in the voice of previously marginalised groups (Fowler, 2000; Sabatini, 2002). This ensures both the constitution of a pluralist society and of power centres outside the state (Sørensen, 1993). These power centres outside the state are important for the aspect of resistance. Civil society organisations provide people with veto power (Warren, 2001). By opposing government, CSOs can provide a check against the abuse of state power (Edwards, 2004), and can play a disciplinary role towards the state, safeguarding standards of public morality and improving accountability (G. White, 1994).

Fourth, civil society is not necessarily a force of opposition, it can also involve cooperation with the government (Boulding & Gibson, 2009). In developing countries, cooperation can be of importance for meeting development needs. Through cooperation, NGOs "help to build pockets of efficiency within government agencies, provide strategic partners for reform-oriented ministries" and "fill voids in the government's social service delivery role" (Clarke, 1998, p. 49). Besides serving as alternative modes of governance, associations also have become more important in

their role as coordinators in complex policy areas with multiple actors involved. The networks and contacts of associations can help manage different interests, generate expert knowledge, mobilise support and negotiate a policy direction (Warren, 2001).

One striking element of these four roles is that they treat civil society as something which is inherently good for democracy and development. These positive accounts get the most attention while there is also evidence of civic participation that weakens the foundations of democracy (Chambers & Kopstein, 2001). A prominent example of such 'bad' forms of civil society is the rich associational life during Germany's Weimar republic, which served as a significant training ground for Nazi cadres and a strong base for their eventual rise to power (Berman, 1997). Other examples include organisations like the mafia, paramilitary groups with a strong civic base, single issue NGOs like the National Rifle Association, associations who only exist for the economic wellbeing of their members and activist groups who pursue their goals by violent means (Carothers & Barndt, 1999; G. White, 1994).

In conclusion, the overview shows that the theoretical field concerning civil society, democracy and the relation between the two is highly diverse. Although there are some dominant perspectives, such as the neo-liberal interpretation of democracy and the idea that civil society is always a positive force, each of these perspectives is questioned. Nevertheless, donor policies in the field of promoting civil society and democracy have been derived from these contested ideas, and have been applied to countries around the world. While donors continued implementing their strategy of supporting NGOs, a growing number of studies started critiquing their work. Simultaneously, a more fundamental critique of the whole scientific debate emerged. The next section summarises this critique and positions the studies of this thesis vis-à-vis this debate on the promotion of civil society and democracy in developing countries.

# 1.5 Promoting civil society and democracy in developing countries

Supporting civil society organisations as a way to promote democracy has been a prominent strategy among bi- and multilateral donors of international development aid for over two decades now. Boosted by the success of civil society groups in Eastern Europe in overthrowing communism, donors started implementing programmes to support civil society as a means "to make democracy stick and work" in Eastern Europe and Eurasia (Petrova, 2007, p. 1277). This strategy became so appealing that it is still being applied worldwide. It was so appealing because it provided donors agencies with an alternative to promoting democracy through corrupt states and political parties. It allowed them to bypass these actors and directly connect to citizens in developing countries. Another reason for its appeal is that it is based on a firm belief that civil society is always a good force for democracy and good governance (Brown, Brown, & Desposato, 2008; Hendriks, 2006; Roy, 2008; Sabet, 2008). A speech by the former Dutch Minister of Development Cooperation for the Society of International Development lecture series on *Democracy and Development* clearly illustrates this belief:

"A democratic society without a vital civil society is an empty shell, as I am sure everyone here would agree. Strengthening civil society is crucial since it represents the demand side of the political equation. Civil society organisations such as voluntary associations, educational institutions, clubs unions, charities and churches can amplify the voices and voice the demands of the most silent, invisible and impoverished citizens. They also foster many elements essential to democracy, such as participation and accountability" (Van Ardenne-van der Hoeven, 2008, p. 27).

Most of the civil society aid for democracy promotion has been directed to NGOs. During the 1980s, NGOs were already part of development programmes, but mainly in the role of public service providers in areas where the state was weak. From the 1990s onwards, NGOs became important as vehicles for democratisation, good governance and the protection of human rights (Jordan & van Tuijl, 2006). This focus on NGOs is caused by the "central assumption underlying civil society aid carried out under the auspices of democracy promotion, that advocacy NGOs are a critical segment, perhaps the critical segment of a civil society, at least with regard to democratisation" (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000b, p. 295). Also, "for many donors, civil society and NGOs are virtually synonymous" (Encarnación, 2012, p. 474).

While all the merits of civil society were projected onto NGOs, studies started to show that they often could not live up to the image of being flexible, being closely connected to citizens, serving as a check on state power, fostering public deliberation, helping include the poor and marginalised, educating citizens on the norms and values of democracy, and being able to cater to local circumstances and local needs (Diamond, 1999; Edwards, 2004; Fowler, 2000; Hendriks, 2006; Houtzager & Lavalle, 2010; Warren, 2001). In Africa, for instance, there were signs that NGOs were hijacked by the same elites who had hijacked the state. Therefore, "hopes that the NGO sector will be an independent, democratic force which will counteract state power may be misplaced" (Gary, 1996, p. 163). Hearn (2000, 2007) confirms this image when she concludes that African NGOs are maintaining rather than challenging the status quo. More generally, the representational capacities of NGOs have been questioned (Guo & Musso, 2007). Houtzager and Lavalle (2010) show that the representative claims of

NGOs in Brazil are often nothing more than an 'assumed representation' of the urban poor. Similarly, Roy (2008, p. 677) shows that assertive community based NGOs in India have not helped "to expand political spaces available to poor people". Also, because most NGOs are not membership-based, they do not teach citizens civic values (e.g. compromise, cooperation, trust) by bringing people together in cooperative ventures (Sabatini, 2002). These and other observations led to the conclusion that many of the NGOs which are part of the aid system do not represent the kind of civil society organisations which are so important for promoting democracy (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Ottaway & Carothers, 2000a; Sabatini, 2002; Tvedt, 2006).

The failure of NGOs to bring about all that was hoped for has been related to the nature of the international aid system. Donor-funding creates the paradoxical situation that the aid relation itself weakens the democratic capacities of the NGOs which it tries to strengthen. It has had the unintended effect of weakening the link between NGO and society as it replaced accountability to constituencies with accountability to donors (Aksartova, 2009; Henderson, 2002; S.C. White, 1999). Furthermore, donorfunding has caused NGOs to follow donor priorities rather than the priorities of their constituencies (Elbers & Arts, 2011; Fagan, 2005; Parks, 2008). One of the reasons for these failures is that donor agencies apply the same kind of strategy to very different contexts. Many have criticised this top-down blueprint-approach by donors, pointing out that civil society and democracy are highly context-specific phenomena, and that promoting a particular Western paradigm may damage rather than build democracy in developing countries (Blaug, 2002; Diamond, 1999; Easterly, 2006; Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Evans, 2004; Howell & Pearce, 2001; Munck, 2009; Ottaway & Carothers, 2000a).

International donors have acknowledged the problems and have framed the solutions in terms of ownership, participation and sustainability. Many bi- and multi-lateral donor agencies started using this terminology in their policies, especially after signing the Rome declaration on harmonisation (2003), the Paris declaration on aid effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008). For instance, one of the core principles of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers policy of the IMF and the World Bank was that it should be: "country-driven, promoting national ownership of strategies through broad-based participation of civil society". Similarly, in their 'strategies for sustainable development', the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD stated that, whereas lower levels of success can be attributed to top-down approaches:

International Monetary Fund (IMF), Factsheet Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, available at: http:// www.imf.org/external/np/exr/facts/prsp.htm [accessed July 2010].

"A review of experience shows that successful approaches share certain characteristics. They set priorities and establish a long-term vision; seek to promote convergence between already existing planning frameworks; promote ownership; can demonstrate national commitment; and are built on appropriate participation" (OECD, 2001, p. 16).

All these declarations underscore the idea that aid effectiveness requires a more context-specific approach and that national ownership of development policies is one of the ways to achieve this.

Whether or not this pledge of the donor-community will be the solution to the problems with civil society and democracy aid is uncertain because the aid system is "a powerful structural force, impacting organisational landscapes and civil societies all over the world in complex ways we do not yet understand" (Tvedt, 2002, p. 363). One of the reasons for this lack of understanding is that beneath this critique on donor policies lies a more fundamental critique which also extends to the scientific community, namely that civil society and democracy are often treated as normative rather than as empirical concepts (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Hendriks, 2006; Howard, 2003; Howell & Pearce, 2001; Kopecky & Mudde, 2003; Mitlin et al., 2007; Robins et al., 2008; Tvedt, 2007). The debate on civil society and democracy is dominated by Western conceptions of liberal democracy, and the language of the debate "betrays a normative view on how democratic development should be 'done', which ultimately obscures a potentially more fruitful engagement with the ways in which NGOs are embedded in their local contexts" (Mercer, 2002, p. 20). Existing forms of civil society around the world do not conform to idealised models, therefore a normative approach obscures what is actually going on (Robins et al., 2008). Orvis (2001), for instance, argues that narrow idealised visions of civil society prevent us from portraying African civil society accurately. A more realistic analysis will reveal that African civil society is internally less democratic and also less likely to support liberal democracy. In response to these problems, there has been a growing call for more contextualised and less value-laden research (Howell & Pearce, 2001; Kopecky & Mudde, 2003; Mercer, 2002; Tvedt, 2007).

# 1.6 Policy assumptions and central research questions

This thesis answers that call by focusing on the policy assumptions underlying civil society and democracy aid, and by analysing how they turn out in practice. This is a strategic choice because it bypasses the analytical problem of mixing normative and empirical concepts. Policy assumptions are the ideas on which policy measures such as supporting NGOs are based. Whether or not these ideas are of a more

normative or analytical nature does not matter for the analysis. When they are explicated, they can be used as a benchmark. By analysing how this benchmark relates to the empirical practice, the research becomes concrete, contextualised and less value-laden. Furthermore, the policy assumptions are key to understanding the complexity of success and failure in the field of civil society and democracy aid. This is the case because some of the assumptions do not relate to the local setting of associational life. For instance, the premise that associational life is inherently voluntary does not relate to many African settings where it is often involuntary, as it is based on kinship and other customary systems (Lewis, 2002; Sogge, 2004).

In order to improve our understanding of both theoretical and practical (policyrelated) issues concerning the promotion of civil society and democracy in developing countries, the following central research question is posed:

How do policy assumptions quiding civil society and democracy aid turn out in practice, and what explains any discrepancies between both?

This question has been divided into four sub-questions which relate to the four central policy assumptions underpinning civil society and democracy aid:

- 1) What national contextual factors explain for differences in civil society development in countries around the world?
- 2) What are the similarities and differences between Ghanaian and Indonesian democracy-promoting NGOs in terms of their organisational characteristics and to what extent do these similarities and differences indicate context-specificity?
- 3) How does donor-funding affect the concrete organisational characteristics of Ghanaian and Indonesian democracy-promoting NGOs?
- 4) What kind of democratic roles do Ghanaian donor-sponsored NGOs perform, and what organisational characteristics enable them to perform these roles?

Together these sub-questions will provide a comprehensive answer to the central question because they cover the two main donor strategies in the field of civil society and democracy aid, namely supporting civil society's enabling environment and direct support to NGOs (Blair, 1997). These strategies, and the policy assumptions behind them, can all be connected to the pledge of donors to make their approach more context-specific. The comparison between Ghana and Indonesia serves to explicitly incorporate this element of context-specificity by introducing variation in context in the research design. While being in a similar phase of democratisation, these countries present NGOs with a very different institutional environment. As was argued in the introduction, there is a tension between the nature of civil society and democracy aid and the goal of making this aid more context-specific. By its very nature, external aid represents the wish of foreign actors to influence inherently national processes. The goal of attaining home-grown civil society and democracy is therefore by definition at odds with the means of achieving it, namely external interference. Each of the policy assumptions can be seen as a rationale for reducing this tension.

The first strategy, supporting civil society's enabling environment, is an indirect way of supporting civil society development. In this case, the 'external manufacturing' does not focus on civil society itself, but on the factors which serve as a precondition for home-grown civil society development. The assumption behind this strategy is that civil society needs an enabling environment to thrive. Although the importance of an enabling environment for civil society development is often stressed, supporting it has received far less attention than the more popular strategy of direct support to NGOs (Blair, 1997). One of the reasons that it has been neglected is that defining and measuring the context of civil society is a difficult and multi-interpretable topic which has received little attention (Anheier, 2005; Heinrich, 2005; Howard, 2005). Furthermore, civil society is often seen as a means towards an end rather than being an end in itself (Howell & Pearce, 2001). This makes it an important topic to tackle before turning to assumptions underlying the more popular strategy of supporting NGOs.

The second strategy, direct support to NGOs, is more difficult to reconcile with the idea of home-grown civil society and democracy as it represents a direct interference with actual civil society organisations and how they promote democracy. Nevertheless, the three main policy assumptions underlying this strategy provide a rationale for how this strategy can still contribute to promoting context-specificity. The first assumption is that NGOs are locally embedded democracy promoters. It is believed that NGOs have the capacity to cater to local circumstances and local needs because they are flexible and closely connected to people's life-worlds (Diamond, 1999; G. White, 1994). NGOs are thus the perfect vehicles to ensure that democracy becomes locally rooted and widely accepted by different segments of a population (Hadenius & Uggla, 1996). While donors and researchers alike stress the importance of context, context-specificity remains an ill-defined and elusive concept (Anheier, 2005; Heinrich, 2005; Howard, 2005). To what extent NGOs actually are context-specific democracy promoters remains a question. One of the reasons for this is that many analysts of associations write about the North American context and assume a consolidated democratic system. Therefore, many attempts to come to a general theory on the relation between association and democracy overlook the notion that "the desirability of various associative contributions to democracy depends deeply on features of particular political contexts" (Fung, 2003, p. 534).

Behind the assumption that NGOs are conducive to promoting context-specific. or 'home-grown' democracy, lies the assumption that donor-funding to these NGOs is a good strategy to support this development. In the field of civil society and democracy promotion, the relevance and effectiveness of donor strategies is often linked to their ability to adjust to local contextual factors like local needs, local knowledge and local cultural practices (Easterly, 2006; Evans, 2004). It is now widely accepted that civil society and democracy "cannot be created from blueprints" and do not lend themselves to "external manufacturing" (Howell & Pearce, 2001, p. 121). As outlined above, the strategy of donor-funding to NGOs has often been criticised for not being able to adjust to the local context. In response to this criticism, many bi- and multilateral donor agencies have pledged to make their approach more context-specific by allowing local ownership and participation. When funding is based on local ownership and participation, then domestic NGOs can take the lead in promoting 'home-grown' democracy. Nevertheless, this does not change the core of the initial assumption, it merely changes its application. As Tvedt (2002) noted, a lot remains unknown about how the aid system influences these NGOs, therefore it is important to see how this assumption turns out in practice.

The final assumption is that NGOs contribute to the deepening of democracy in a country by performing several democratic roles (educational, communicative, representative and cooperative). The deepening of democracy, by definition, entails that it becomes locally rooted. Through performing democratic roles, NGOs make sure that ever larger parts of the population are included in the political process, and that democratic norms and ideals become ingrained in the political culture of a country. However, for many of these roles it is unclear whether NGOs actually have the capacities to perform them. For instance, little is known about the actual representative capacities of NGOs (Guo & Musso, 2007). There are not many studies that explain what organisational characteristics an NGO needs to be able to perform a certain democratic role (exceptions include: Hadenius & Uggla, 1996; Warren, 2001). Having this knowledge is important because "the qualities required to promote success in democratisation are very different" (Edwards & Hulme, 1996, p. 965).

#### 1.7 Contributions to the literature

Each of the studies explicates one of the central ideas underpinning civil society and democracy aid and investigates to what extent, or how, these ideas relate to practices, norms and forms of actual civil society organisations. This both helps to separate norm from practice, and to counter the tendency of civil society becoming an empty buzzword. By translating abstract concepts such as civil society, democracy and context into empirical research designs, they become tangible. Instead of using the various theoretical perspectives, the studies in this thesis use the policy assumptions as a starting point for defining civil society and democracy. In this way, the research stays closest to the way the concepts are actually being applied by donors. Following Blair (1997), this means looking at the enabling environment of civil society, and looking at NGOs, as providing support to each of these entities constitutes the two basic donor-strategies in the field of civil society and democracy promotion. Therefore, the choice to focus on the organisational dimension of civil society, and within that dimension mainly on NGOs, directly relates to the fact that bi- and multilateral donors direct most of their funding to NGOs.

The use of the term 'donor' mainly relates to bi- and multilateral donor agencies, such as the UNDP, USAID, SIDA, DFID and the Royal Netherlands Embassy, as these are the most prominent donors behind the selected NGOs. It must be noted that the NGOs, rather than their donors, are the starting point of analysis. However, while the donors themselves are not the object of the studies, the ideas on which donor-policies are based are. Based on the confrontation between policy assumption and policy practice, policy recommendations are formulated which serve as a direct input for the debate on supporting civil society and democracy in developing countries. The approach and the added value of each of the studies will now be explained.

# Contribution 1: Exploring the importance of an enabling environment for civil society development

The first study takes a critical look at the idea that civil society needs an enabling environment to thrive. It contributes to understanding how context influences civil society development by analysing the structural determinants of civil society affiliation in 53 countries worldwide. The multilevel regression analysis used associational membership as a proxy for measuring the strength of civil society, and defined the enabling environment in four key dimensions, namely: level of democracy, political stability, rule of law and economic development. The added value of this study mainly lies in approaching the matter from a development perspective. It does so in three ways: first, by including developing countries in the analysis; second, by including contextual variables which are particularly relevant for developing countries (political stability and rule of law) in addition to the more generally applied contextual variables (level of democracy and economic development); and third, by examining alternative explanations for membership levels in developing countries. This approach is an important contribution because existing studies mainly focus on Western and post-communist transition countries. Therefore, it remains a question whether their findings also apply to developing countries.

As civil society is hard to define as a concept, concrete indicators for cross-national empirical measurement of the strength of civil society are scarce (Heinrich, 2005; Howard, 2003). The strength of civil society can be measured in terms of each of the

dimensions that were identified in paragraph 1.3, namely in terms of positioning (i.e. its independence vis-à-vis other spheres), its organisational properties (diversity, density, depth), and its successfulness in performing its developmental roles (social, political, economic). Because of the scarcity of available data, this study uses associational membership as a proxy for measuring the strength of civil society. This measurement refers to the organisational dimension of civil society. To be more precise, it relates to the diversity, density and depth of citizen participation as it measures membership levels of citizens in a broad range of civil society organisations. This focus on associational activity (in terms of membership levels) is particularly neo-Tocquevillian, a perspective which is often used by donors to justify their civil society support. From this perspective, increased associational activity is desirable as it increases opportunities for citizens to organise and interact, thereby generating trust and facilitating collective action (Brown et al., 2008).

#### Contribution 2: Exploring the principle and practice of context-specificity of NGOs

The second study looks at the idea that NGOs are conducive to promoting contextspecific democracy. Starting from the idea that democracy and civil society are context-specific phenomena, it explores the meaning of context-specificity for individual NGOs. The empirical analysis compares the organisational characteristics of several democracy promoting NGOs from Ghana and Indonesia. Because Ghana and Indonesia represent very different contexts, this setup maximises the chances of finding context-specific differences in organisational configuration. Differences are likely to manifest themselves in four areas: 1) the mission of the organisation 2) the organisational strategy, 3) the organisational structure, and 4) its resources in terms of both financial and human capital like staff, members and volunteers (Diamond, 1999; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Mintzberg, 1983). Together these areas capture what an organisation stands for, what it does to achieve its goals and how it is organised to do so.

Theory only predicts that different contexts need different organisations, it does not detail how these contextual differences will manifest themselves exactly in mission, strategy, structure and resources. Indicators for determining the contextspecificity of these organisational characteristics are currently missing. Therefore, this study explores several possibilities. The study contributes to the debate by constructing a framework which defines context-specificity at the level of organisational characteristics and by analyzing to what extent NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia actually conform to this definition of context-specificity. Explicating this model is both a way of separating assumption from practice, and of making the elusive concept of context more tangible.

## Contribution 3: Explaining how donor-funding influences organisational characteristics of NGOs

The third study looks at the idea that funding NGOs is a good way to promote home-grown democracy. It contributes to understanding how donor-funding affects the way NGOs organise in terms of their mission, their strategy, their structure and their staff. To explain for the similarities and differences, the findings of the previous study are linked to the concepts of organisational field and institutional isomorphism (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995, 2008). Within the field of organisational institutionalism these concepts are used to explain how and why organisations tend to become more similar over time. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified the 'organisational field' as the context in which the process of organisational adaptation takes place, and isomorphism as the process of homogenisation.

The analysis identifies three organisational fields, namely a Ghanaian field, an Indonesian field and an international field. Each democracy promoting NGO is considered to be part of their national organisational field and, through their relation with international donors, of the international field. Both fields exert coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphic pressures on the NGOs. The comparison between countries provides a strong tool for checking which organisational field exerts most influence over the NGOs. In cases where NGOs are firmly embedded in their national organisational fields, one would expect many differences between NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia because the countries have entirely different social, cultural, political and economic backgrounds. This would indicate a contextual approach by donors, as they give NGOs leeway to adjust their organisations to national rules and practices. In contrast, in cases where NGOs are more embedded in the international donor field, one would expect NGOs to be similar across countries. This would point more towards a top-down blueprint approach by donors.

# Contribution 4: Exploring the relation between organisational characteristics of NGOs and the performance of democratic roles

The final study looks at the idea that NGOs contribute to the deepening of democracy by performing educational, communicative, representational and cooperative roles. This study explores how the organisational characteristics of five Ghanaian NGOs relate to their ability to perform different democratic roles. Despite the criticism of both researchers and practitioners, donors continue to invest in NGOs without major changes in their basic assumptions. Ghana provides a good example of this approach because it enjoys the status of 'donor darling' and is often seen as a textbook example of democratisation and good governance for the rest of Africa (Crawford, 2005). The Ghanaian state has actively involved NGOs in important social, economic and governance initiatives (Hughes, 2005). To support this development,

a group of international donors set up a pooled funding scheme for NGOs which has been growing each year from about 2 million US\$ in 2005 to over 3.25 million US\$ in 2009.2 This makes Ghana a good case for exploring how the assumptions behind this aid turn out in practice.

The study in this chapter aims to make three contributions. First, the empirical analysis explores the link between organisational characteristics and democratic roles. This contributes to understanding what kind of roles NGOs actually perform and what organisational characteristics enable them to do so. The framework of the four democratic roles serves as a benchmark. In describing these roles, many authors make use of metaphors like, civil society "acts as an antidote to state expansion" (Fowler, 2000, p. 7) or that "associations can be seen as the seedbeds of democracy" (Sørensen, 1993, p. 57). These claims remain very abstract and hardly provide any clues for empirical research. To overcome this problem, the performance of democratic roles is linked to concrete organisational characteristics, namely structure, strategy, resources and relations with the environment. Second, by confronting theory with practice, it identifies shortcomings in the assumed roles and offers solutions to improve them. Finally, the improved framework is presented as a tool which allows donors to review and fine-tune their policies in the field of civil society and democracy assistance.

#### 1.8 Methodology

Although each of the studies takes a policy assumption and uses it as a benchmark for comparing and classifying empirical findings, they employ various research designs and research methods for doing so. Analyses are based on large scale quantitative data-sets and on original qualitative interview-data. This section discusses the choices in research design, the selection of countries, and the use of data and methods.

#### Research design and the role of theory

The several sub-questions point to both qualitative and quantitative research designs. Each type of design has its particular strengths and weaknesses. The quantitative approach reduces reality to a set of variables in order to produce generalisations about the relationships among these variables. This approach is especially useful to discover patterns in large scale data files. It is not able, however, to understand these patterns in a historical or social context. If the latter is what one wants to achieve, a qualitative design is needed (Verschuren, 2001, 2003).

Ghana Research and Advocacy Programme, Core Grants, available at: www.G-RAP.org [accessed November 2011].

The choice for a research design should be based on the type of question. The first research question points to a quantitative design as it aims at finding patterns and correlations between country-level and individual-level variables. This is typical for a reductionist approach. The word "explain" can be misleading in this sense. Although the aim is to analyse which contextual factors *explain* for differences in civil society development in countries around the world, it does not aim to explain *how* these factors influence civil society development. The word explain should be interpreted in its reductionist sense, namely as explained variance. As it aims to find relations between variables of different levels (country-level and individual-level), the study employs multilevel regression models to analyse data of 53 countries. Details about the methodological choices concerning this analysis can be found in the methodological section of chapter 2.

The other three research questions point to a holistic rather than a reductionist approach as they aim at understanding complex (causal) relationships. A research design that is well equipped for this purpose is the (comparative) case study design. The advantage of this design is that by taking a holistic approach, cases can be examined in their context. By comparing cases it can also control for differences in context. This is important because the same processes might lead to very different outcomes in different contexts (Ragin, 1989, p. 24). For answering each of the questions, different case study designs are used. They employ different meanings of 'case', 'context' and 'comparison'. For the second research question, the cases are defined at the country-level, namely Ghana and Indonesia. Differences in the social, political and economic context of both countries form the basis of the comparison. The idea of comparing NGOs within these different contexts directly stems from Ragin's notion that the same processes might lead to very different outcomes in different contexts. The third research question focuses on explaining a process which transcends national contexts and individual NGOs. To explain for similarities in NGOs around the world, it looks at the institutional context of the international aid system. Finally, for the fourth research question, the NGOs represent the cases. These cases are compared in terms of their organisational characteristics and their democratic roles. Context is included as one of the organisational characteristics, namely in terms of the kind of relations an NGO has with its environment (i.e the state, citizens and other NGOs).

The role of theory differs slightly for each of the studies. The quantitative study in chapter 2 uses theory in two ways, namely for formulating hypotheses and for interpreting the outcomes. The main goal of this approach is theory testing. The second study uses a combination of theory and contextual characteristics of Ghana and Indonesia to get a grip on the meaning of context-specificity for NGOs. By constructing and applying a model for measuring context-specificity, it has elements of both theory building and theory testing. The third study is a clear case of theory building, as it results in a model which aims at explaining the process of homogenisation

of NGOs across different contexts. The final study uses theory to construct an analytical framework on democratic roles. By examining actual roles of NGOs and by explaining how this relates to their organisational characteristics, this study adjusts and refines existing theories. As such its main goal is theory building.

#### Country selection

In the first study, 53 countries from all over the world are included. The goal here was to include as many countries as possible in order to improve our understanding of contextual factors affecting civil society development worldwide. The sample of countries was limited to the number of countries for which information was available on both the dependent and independent variables.

For the other three studies Ghana and Indonesia were selected for a specific purpose. Three criteria guided the selection of the countries. First, as this thesis focuses on civil society and democracy promotion in developing countries, they needed to be aid-receiving countries. Second, as it focuses on the role of donor-funded NGOs in the process of deepening and consolidating democracy, they needed to be countries where the transition to democracy has already taken place. Finally, to be able to explore how democracy and civil society promotion relates to different contexts, contrasting cases were needed.

The first selection criterion used the Development Assistance Committee list of Official Development Aid recipients of 2007.3 On the one hand, there are the 'rich' countries where development assistance is coming from and, on the other hand, there are different types of countries where there is little to no development assistance in the field of civil society and democracy. These are for instance countries that are very hard to access, that are in open conflict, that experience extreme poverty or countries that experience a combination of these factors. For this reason, when looking at the DAC list of ODA recipients of the OECD, the 'extremes' will not be considered in this research, leaving the low income countries (Ghana) and the lower middle income countries (Indonesia) eligible.

The second selection criterion combined the perspectives of the transition paradigm and Carothers' critique of this paradigm. As seen from the perspective of transition theory, the commonality of Ghana and Indonesia is that they have moved away from authoritarian regimes and are in a process of moving towards a democratic regime. They are both in a phase of deepening and consolidating their recently gained democratic institutions. In both countries donors are supporting this development. However, as Carothers notes, this does not mean that they are moving in the same direction. He concludes that there is a group of countries that seems to be on the path towards democracy (including Ghana) while another group of countries seem to

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), DAC list of ODA Recipients 2007, available at: http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/daclistofodarecipients.htm [accessed June 2013].

be stuck in 'feckless pluralism' or in 'dominant power politics' (Carothers, 2002). Indonesia seems to conform most to 'feckless pluralism' as there are changes in government, but regardless of which government is in place, corruption remains high. These categories represent quite different 'playing fields' for NGOs.

These different playing fields relate to the final selection criterion. Ghana and Indonesia represent contrasting cases without being extreme cases. Although they are in a similar 'phase' of democratisation, they have very different institutional environments. They are located on different continents and have very different social, cultural, political and economic structures. This provides a solid ground for comparing democracy-promoting NGOs in different environments. Looking at extreme cases, like North Korea and Sweden for instance, would not deliver the answers to the research questions, because in the former there is no sign of a democratisation process whatsoever and in the latter democracy is already firmly consolidated.

#### Data and methods

Each of the chapters provides a detailed account of the data and methods used for that chapter. Here, a short overview is provided. As the different sub-questions focus on different units of analysis, different combinations of data sources and data collection techniques have been used. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the research designs, the countries and the data sources for each of the research questions.

The data collection process can roughly be divided into three parts. First, secondary data was gathered and combined for the quantitative analysis. This study uses large scale individual-level data of the World Values Survey and country-level data of UNDP's Human Development Index, the World Bank's World Governance Indicators and Freedom House's indicators on political rights and civil liberties. Second, data was gathered on the national institutional context of Ghana and Indonesia. This information has been obtained through expert interviews and through document analysis (scientific literature, country reports, etc.). Finally, the main part of the qualitative data collection focused on a strategic sample of democracy promoting NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia. Extensive fieldwork was carried out in Accra (Ghana) and Jakarta (Indonesia) between November 2007 and April 2009. The fieldwork consists of 50 in-depth interviews with 46 respondents, principally with directors, researchers and founding members of the NGOs. To complement and check this data source, interviews were conducted with local experts, i.e. political scientists, NGO consultants and representatives of major bi- and multilateral donor agencies in the country (for an overview see appendix 1.1). In addition to interview data, annual reports, funding reports, internal documents, and websites and publications of the selected NGOs and their donors were also used as data source. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and subsequently analysed through a process of thematic coding in the software package Atlas.ti.

Table 1.1 Methodological overview

Research Questions	Research design	Role of theory	Countries	Data sources
What national contextual factors explain for differences in civil society development in countries around the world?	Multilevel regression analysis	Theory testing	53 countries worldwide	<ul><li>World Values Survey</li><li>UNDP</li><li>World Bank</li><li>Freedom House</li></ul>
2) What are the similarities and differences between Ghanaian and Indonesian democracy-promoting NGOs in terms of their organisational characteristics and to what extent do these similarities and differences indicate context-specificity?	Comparative case study	Theory adjusting / building	Ghana and Indonesia	- Interviews with: selected NGO (24); NGO (4); international NGO (1); NGO expert (1); donor agency (7); university (10) - Documents on selected NGOs
3) How does donor-funding affect the concrete organisational characteristics of Ghanaian and Indonesian democracy-promoting NGOs?	Case study	Theory adjusting / building	Ghana and Indonesia	- Interviews with: selected NGO (24); NGO (4); international NGO (1); NGO expert (1); donor agency (7); university (10) - Documents on selected NGOs
4) What kind of democratic roles do Ghanaian donor-sponsored NGOs perform, and what organisational characteristics enable them to perform these roles?	Comparative case study	Theory adjusting / building	Ghana	<ul> <li>Interviews with:</li> <li>selected NGO (17); international</li> <li>NGO (1); donor agency (2); university</li> <li>(4); government agency (3)</li> <li>Documents on selected NGOs</li> </ul>

#### Appendix 1.1: Overview of interview data

Overview of interview data Ghana

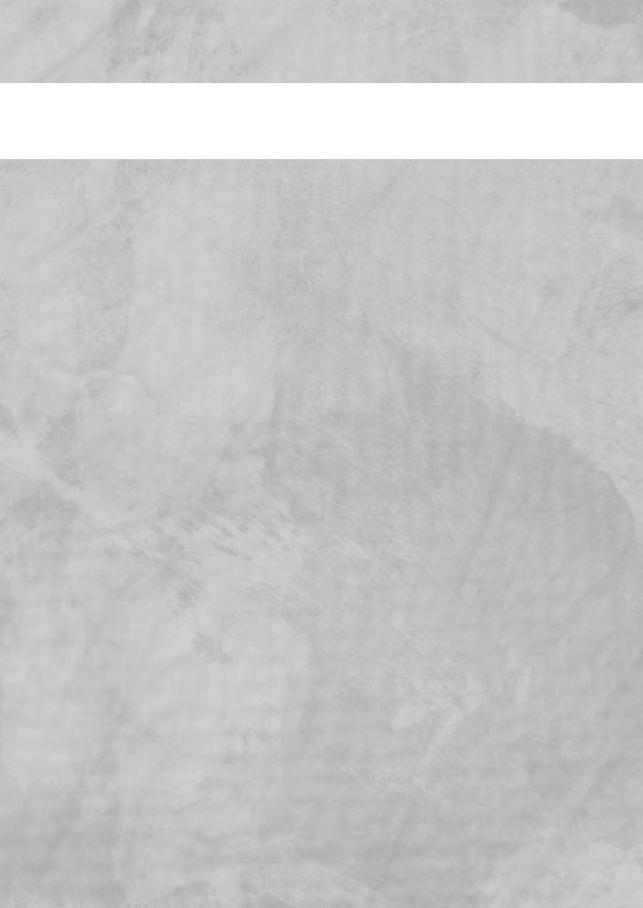
Organisation	Туре	Respondents / interviews	Date(s)
Center for Democratic Development (CDD)	NGO	2 persons / 3 interviews	11/30/2007 12/03/2007 12/11/2008
Institute of Democratic Governance (IDEG)	NGO	3 persons / 3 interviews	12/04/2007 12/05/2007 12/10/2008
Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA)	NGO	2 persons / 3 interviews	12/11/2007 11/06/2008 12/12/2008
Integrated Social Development Center (ISODEC)	NGO	3 persons / 5 interviews	12/06/2007 11/05/2008 11/10/2008 12/12/2008
Abantu for development	NGO	2 persons / 3 interviews	12/13/2007 11/06/2008 11/11/2008
GAPVOD (Umbrella organisation for Ghanaian NGOs)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	11/29/2007
IBIS Ghana	International NGO	1 person / 1 interview	12/14/2007
Netherlands Embassy	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	11/28/2007
Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	01/23/2008
Ghana Research and Advocacy Program (G-RAP)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	11/19/2007
Faculty of law – University of Ghana	University	1 person / 1 interview	11/28/2007
Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) – University of Ghana	University	2 persons / 2 interviews	11/19/2007
Department of Political Science – University of Ghana	University	2 persons / 2 interviews	11/26/2007 11/27/2007
African Peer Review Mechanism Ghana (APRM)	Government agency	1 person / 1 interview	11/20/2007
Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS)	Government agency	1 person / 1 interview	12/12/2007
Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment - NGO office (MMYE)	Governmental ministry	1 person / 1 interview	11/29/2007

Note: a total of 30 interviews with 24 respondents (one respondent works for both university and for one of the selected NGOs).

#### Overview of interview data Indonesia

Organisation	Туре	Respondents / interviews	Date(s)
Demos - Centre for democracy and human rights studies	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	03/31/2008
Centre for Indonesian Law and Policy Studies (PSHK)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	04/03/2008
Partnership for Democratic Governance Reform	NGO	3 persons / 1 interview	04/03/2008
Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (Elsam)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	04/07/2008
Yappika - The Civil Society Alliance for Democracy	NGO	3 persons / 2 interviews	04/09/2008
Indonesian Community for Democracy (KID)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	04/10/2008
Institute of Research, Education and Information of Social and Economic Affairs (LP3ES)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	04/04/2008
Centre for strategic and International Studies (CSIS)	NGO	2 persons / 2 interviews	03/19/2008 03/31/2008
NGO consultant Jakarta	NGO expert	1 person / 1 interview	03/18/2008
United Nations Development Program (UNDP)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	04/01/2008
Netherlands Embassy	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	03/26/2008
Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	01/23/2008
Asian Development Bank (ADB)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	03/25/2008
Faculty of Social and Political Science - Universitas Indonesia (Jakarta)	University	2 persons / 2 interviews	03/26/2008 04/02/2008
Center for population and policy studies – Gadjah Mada University (Yogyakarta)	University	1 person / 2 interviews	03/11/2008 03/11/2009
Faculty of Social and Political Science – Gadjah Mada University (Yogyakarta)	University	1 person / 1 interview	04/20/2009

Note: a total of 20 interviews with 22 respondents.



### Chapter 2

# National context and the transformation of civil society affiliation\*

<sup>\*</sup> This chapter is based on a paper by Kamstra, J., Ruben, R., Pelzer, B. & Elbers, W. and has been submitted to a peer-reviewed journal for publication.

#### **Abstract**

This chapter analyses the structural determinants of civil society affiliation based on four key dimensions: level of democracy, political stability, rule of law and economic development. Whereas existing studies mainly focus on Western and transition countries, we explicitly include developing countries in our analysis. We use associational membership as a proxy for civil society affiliation and include data of 53 countries. Two main factors affecting associational membership emerge from our multilevel regression models: legal environment and economic development. However, unlike previous studies, we show that both relations are quadratic instead of linear. We argue that this could be the case because reasons for membership are essentially different in the developed and in the developing world. This points to a transformation of civil society membership rather than simple growth. Contrary to popular beliefs, democratic rights and political stability do not appear critically important for civil society affiliation.

#### Keywords

Civil society, associational membership, developing countries, enabling environment, cross-national analysis, multilevel analysis.

#### 2.1 Introduction

Based on the assumption that a strong and articulated civil society is crucial for development, many international donor agencies are engaged in supporting programmes aiming at strengthening civil society organisations (CSOs) in transition and developing countries (Diamond, 1999; Fowler, 2000; Howard, 2003; Ottaway & Carothers, 2000a). Yet, despite its importance, there is little clarity on which strategies are most appropriate to support civil society development. Therefore, current efforts to promote civil society building and reinforce citizen participation in civil society organisation are rather scattered and do not appear very coherent.

Blair (1997) identifies two basic donor strategies for supporting civil society development: (1) direct support to CSOs through funding of voluntary agencies, and (2) support aimed at strengthening an 'enabling environment' for civil society by improving its contextual conditions. While most donor agencies rely on the former approach, the latter strategy has received relatively little attention. Moreover, several studies have shown that donors face difficulties in aligning their reform programmes to the great variety of country settings in which they operate (C. W. Andrews, 2008; Fritzen, 2007), and that they frequently use a general 'one size fits all approach' that tends to ignore important historical, political, cultural and economic differences between countries (M. Andrews, 2012; Easterly, 2006; Evans, 2004). Consequently, a coherent vision on the enabling contextual factors for supporting civil society building. based on insights into how civil society works and how it can be strengthened in the most effective and efficient way, seems to be largely absent (Howell & Pearce, 2001).

This lack of conceptual clarity is not confined to the realm of policy making alone, but also extends to the academic world. Several authors point out that the strength of civil society in individual countries is the outcome of their specific political constituency, socio-economic structure and cultural history, but there is little agreement in literature on the key factors enhancing civil society development (Heinrich, 2005; Orvis, 2001). While some authors emphasise the importance of a legal space for voluntary organisation (Blair, 1997; Reichardt, 2004), others refer to critical socio-economic conditions (Almond & Verba, 1963; Uslaner & Brown, 2005), to political factors (Badescu & Uslaner, 2003; Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Shen & Williamson, 2005) or to the effects of religious tradition (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Ruiter & De Graaf, 2006; Vermeer & Scheepers, 2012) as vital conditions for individual affiliation to civil society organisations.

Systematic analyses to understand the specific influence of these contextual factors on civil society development are hindered by the fact that concrete indicators for cross-national empirical measurement of the strength of civil society are scarce (Heinrich, 2005; Howard, 2003). Civil society is a broad concept which goes by many names, such as third sector, nonprofit sector, voluntary sector, philanthropy and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). This multitude of concepts creates confusion

because they are related to different theoretical traditions and none of them covers the whole sphere (Muukkonen, 2009). As a result, the strength of civil society can be measured in many different ways. It can for instance be measured in terms of the degree of autonomy vis-à-vis other sectors like the state, the private sphere or the market (Fowler, 2000; Howell & Pearce, 2001). Scholars analysing civil society from a network perspective emphasise that high levels of diversity, density and depth of CSOs and citizen participation strengthen civil society (Edwards, 2004). When analysed from the perspective of social capital theory, social connections become important (Pichler & Wallace, 2007; Putnam, 2000). Finally, the strength of civil society can also be measured by looking at the functional services provided through CSOs (Edwards, 2004; Uphoff & Krishna, 2004). As seen from this perspective, their contribution to reaching certain socio-economic or political ends becomes important (i.e. providing access to resources, protection or social security).

Available data only covers a small part of the wider concept of civil society. Existing cross-national (sociological) studies therefore focus on aspects of civil society such as volunteering and associational membership (Curtis, Baer, & Grabb, 2001; M. Hwang, Grabb, & Curtis, 2005; Parboteeah, Cullen, & Lim, 2004; Ruiter & De Graaf, 2006; Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001). Most of these studies take contextual factors into account and use data on volunteering or associational membership from different waves of the World Values Survey (Inglehart, 2005). Parboteeah et al. (2004) show for 21 countries that country wealth, country education, religiosity, societal collectivism and liberal democracy all have a positive effect on volunteering. Curtis et al. (2001) look at 33 democratic countries and find that volunteering tends to be particularly high in Christian and protestant countries, in countries with a long and continuous tradition of democracy, in social and liberal democratic countries and in countries with a high level of economic development. Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas (2001) analyse membership of voluntary associations in 32 countries and show that statist countries have higher levels of individual associational membership than non-statist countries, and the same is the case for corporate versus non-corporate societies. Ruiter and De Graaf (2006) look at the influence of religiosity on volunteering in 53 countries and find that devout countries have higher levels of volunteering for both secular and religious people.

This chapter tries to address some shortcomings in the current debate on structural determinants of differences in civil society affiliation, mainly by approaching the matter from a development perspective. As most theorising and testing has focused on Western and transition countries, the effect of adding developing countries to the equation remains little understood. We therefore include 53 countries from all parts of the world in our analysis. Associational membership serves as a proxy for measuring the strength of civil society, and we use a multilevel regression framework to identify which contextual factors play a key role in explaining membership

levels. Besides the commonly used context variables of the level of economic development and democracy, we add two variables which are particularly relevant for developing countries, namely political stability and conflict, and the strength of the legal environment. Furthermore, unlike previous studies, we will test both linear and non-linear models, because theories on membership in the developed world sometimes contradict those in the developing world.

The chapter is structured as follows: section two identifies some key contextual factors that could explain the strength of civil society and formulates hypotheses for empirical testing. Subsequently, section three discusses the possibility of non-linear relationships because of different situations in developing countries. Section four outlines the data sources and statistical procedures, while section five presents the results of the multilevel regression models, identifying the most important factors in explaining the strength of civil society worldwide. Section six summarises major conclusions and outlines policy implications.

#### 2.2 Explaining national variation in civil society affiliation

Despite the popularity of the concept of civil society in the field of international development, surprisingly little has been written about the contextual factors that could explain its strength. This contrasts with the rich body of literature which emerged in the field of sociology (see introduction). A possible explanation is provided by what Howell and Pearce (2001) have called 'the instrumentalisation' of civil society. From the perspective of international development, civil society is usually (implicitly) seen as a 'means to an end'. Many desirable 'ends' have been identified over the years, ranging from sustainable development and democracy to poverty reduction and good governance. Therefore, much research is devoted to detailed analyses of CSOs and their roles, strategies and effectiveness in achieving such ends (see for instance: Kamstra & Knippenberg, 2014; Lewis & Kanji, 2009; Offenheiser & Holcombe, 2003).

Nevertheless, several comparative studies identify key factors that may explain differences in civil society development (Heinrich, 2005; Hyden, Court, & Mease, 2004; Shen & Williamson, 2005). We have chosen to make an empirical assessment of the influence of those factors that are theoretically relevant and for which empirical data is available. We therefore focus on four key factors that could influence the strength of civil society: (a) the level of democracy, (b) the level of economic development, (c) the level of political stability and (d) the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society. On these factors we will formulate linear hypothesis as is commonly practised. In the next section we will argue why we also might encounter non-linear effects for these predictors.

#### Democracy

Democracy is generally seen as an important factor for civil society development (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Lipset, 1994). The capacity of civil society to fulfil its developmental roles is directly and indirectly determined by the extent to which citizens enjoy democratic rights in a given country. The main argument is that civil society will have little room to address structural problems of inequality, discrimination and concentration of power and wealth if the political system of a country does not provide an appropriate environment for voluntary organisations capable of challenging existing political institutions and practices. An often mentioned argument is that civil society can only exercise its abilities if conditions for operating independently are sufficiently quaranteed (Reichardt, 2004). Compared to lessdemocratic countries, countries with stable democratic political systems and genuine political competition tend to grant civil society more freedom, and thus offer a more favourable environment for CSO development and affiliation (Edwards, 2004; Shen & Williamson, 2005). Democracy not only protects and promotes political pluralism, but also provides a space for cultural, ethnic, religious and other minority groups to exercise a reasonable level of self-determination, self-government and participation in decision-making processes. Less democratic regimes are inclined to reduce the room for civil society to act as a watchdog, to promote transparency and other aspects of good governance, or to protect the interests of minority groups in society. Put differently, when the government is less transparent, with limited accountability, not encouraging public discussions on policy issues and oppressing dissident voices, civil society will have little room to flourish. We therefore hypothesise that: (1) the higher the level of democracy in a country, the higher the level of civil society affiliation.

#### Economic development

Several arguments can be found for a positive effect of economic development on associational membership. First, it is argued that industrialisation leads to occupational specialisation and social stratification. This development gives rise to a diverse range of interest groups in which people can participate (Curtis et al., 2001). Second, economic growth is often linked to the establishment of a sizeable middle class which has the resources in terms of time, money and education which are conducive for participation in voluntary organisations (Lipset, 1994). For people to be able to devote time and energy to associational life a certain level of economic well-being is needed. Therefore, in countries where the welfare state is fragile or nonexistent, where high levels of poverty prevail and where the majority of people devote most of their time and energy simply to subsistence, participation in voluntary organisations can be expected to be lower. Third, civil society organisations cannot raise income through taxation as governments do, nor can they generate profit

through capital accumulation like companies. Nevertheless, they need resources in order to function. They require funding for (paid) staff, offices, equipment, transport, communication and campaign materials. Even while volunteering is generally regarded as an important resource for civil society (Bell, 1999), sufficient professional staff is needed to effectively develop and implement CSO policies and strategies. Economic development is therefore also important for the potential of CSOs to mobilise financial resources. In economically more developed countries, CSOs have ample opportunities for domestic fund-raising through donations, grants, corporate financing and membership fees. In countries with lower levels of economic development and a limited middle class, fewer opportunities exist for domestic fund-raising, and local CSOs mainly depend on international donor agencies (Fowler, 2000; Howell & Pearce, 2001; Wang, 2006). Hence, we hypothesise that: (2) the higher the level of economic development in a country, the higher the level of civil society affiliation.

#### Political stability

The level of political stability in a country is crucial for the functioning of all sectors of society, including civil society. Governments of countries that are politically unstable and whose power is challenged are often repressive towards forms of societal organisation. A study by the World Bank (2005) in conflict-affected and fragile African countries concludes that civil society in these countries was generally subjected to all kinds of arbitrary restrictions not sanctioned by law. As such, CSOs' room to operate in many developing countries is narrow, being limited to little more than service delivery. Furthermore, countries with low levels of political stability are also more likely to suffer from (internal) violence. In such (post)conflict countries, there are still many areas that are physically unsafe, where governmental authority and service provision is often weak or non-existent and physical infrastructure is frequently damaged or destroyed. Under such harsh conditions, it is very difficult for CSOs to function. We therefore hypothesise that: (3) the higher the level of political stability in a country, the higher the level of civil society affiliation.

#### The rule of law

The rule of law, which is defended by an independent judiciary, is important for ensuring the equality of citizens and restricting the abuse of state power. In relation to civil society this means that, "adequate rights and guarantees must exist for the functioning of diverse social organisations and for the exercise of vertical societal accountability" (O'Donnell, 2005, p. 15). In cases of a poor rule of law civil society has a weak position to demand accountability from state institutions. In this situation, especially the poor and vulnerable are deprived of their rights, as they do not have the resources and networks for alternative options (O'Donnell, 2005).

Salamon and Toepler (2000) demonstrate the importance of the legal environment for the functioning of civil society. According to them, civil society is unlikely to flourish if the right to associate is not protected in a country's basic legal system, regardless of how other legal issues are solved. Their findings stress the importance of laws that facilitate the formation of CSOs. If the legal framework in a country makes it difficult to establish CSOs because of formal requirements and restrictive registration procedures, civil society is less likely to develop. Moreover, unstable or arbitrary legal conditions affect the confidence of citizens in non-profit institutions. To safeguard CSO legitimacy, transparent legal conditions regarding reporting requirements and preclusion from making a profit are required. We therefore derive the following hypothesis: (4) the more favourable the legal environment in a country, the higher the level of civil society affiliation.

# 2.3 Civil society affiliation in developing countries: an alternative explanation

The hypotheses of the previous section provide a grim perspective for people in developing countries, namely they who are most in need of CSO membership are least likely to have it. We argue however that this is not necessarily the case. The hypotheses of the previous section are based on experiences in industrialised nations (democracy and economic development) and presume the need of formalised CSOs (political stability and the rule of law). There are two reasons why developing countries might deviate from the hypothesised linear trends: first, memberships might be higher exactly because people are more in need of them, and second, informal forms of civil society make up for the lack of formal forms.

#### A high need for CSO membership

People in developing countries are likely to be in need of CSO membership because of widespread poverty and a state which is often unable to provide basic services, freedoms or security. In these harsh conditions, people can turn to CSOs for safeguarding their autonomy vis-à-vis oppressive or badly functioning governments, exploitative and polluting companies, or just for providing the basic needs of life. Edwards (2004, pp. 13-15) summarises these functions in three developmental roles of CSOs: (a) an economic role, (b) a social role and (c) a political role.

The economic role centres on safeguarding livelihoods and providing services where states and markets are weak. CSOs then nurture the social values, networks and institutions that underpin successful market economies, including trust and cooperation. In their social role, CSOs are seen as a reservoir of caring, cultural life and intellectual innovation. They teach people the skills of citizenship and nurture a

collection of positive social norms that fosters stability, loosely collected under the rubric of social capital. Finally, in the political role, CSOs are seen as a crucial counterweight to states and corporate power, and essential in promoting transparency, accountability and other aspects of democracy and good governance. Taken together, the three dimensions present an image of why people in developing countries are likely to be involved in CSOs. In situations of extreme poverty, CSO membership can serve as a bridge towards resources. In situations of conflict, lawlessness and insecurity. CSO memberships provide alternative sources of social cohesion and stability, and finally, CSO membership helps citizens to defend themselves against corrupt governments.

#### Formal versus informal organisations

The hypotheses formulated in the previous section imply that civil society, in order to function, needs a certain level of economic development, democracy, political stability and rule of law. However, it is questionable whether civil society actually needs all these conditions. It rather points to a specific form of civil society, consisting of formally established organisations with abundant resources, through which active citizens make use of their democratic rights to organise themselves and participate in public debates.

While there are fewer opportunities for formal civil society organisations in developing countries, this is not the case for informal forms. Especially in the field of international development, civil society is often equated with formally established and registered (non-governmental) organisations (Edwards, 2004; Fowler, 2000; Orvis. 2001). Even though formal organisations represent an important part of civil society. this view is far too narrow. Especially in developing countries, civil society also comprises less-formalised manifestations of organisational life, such as informal associations based on religion, kinship, ethnicity and gender. These groups can exist regardless of economic development, democratic rights or the rule of law, exactly because they are informal. They do not necessarily need registration, funding or an office location.

Formal and informal voluntary organisations can be strongly connected through a variety of networks. Wherever effective network structures exist in civil society, the sum can be greater than each of its parts (Pichler & Wallace, 2007; Putnam, 2007). In countries where formal organisations have limited possibilities or are small in numbers, connections with informal groups are crucial for reaching marginalised groups. This highlights the insurance function of social networks, which tends to be more important in developing countries.

Based on these considerations we hypothesise that: (5) (very) low levels of economic development, democracy, political stability and rule of law will increase CSO membership levels. To test this alternative option we will include non-linear (quadratic) models.

#### 2.4 Data source and methods

In this study we rely on data from the World Values Survey (WVS) that provides detailed insight in membership to a broad range of voluntary organisations in different types of countries, as well as the individual characteristics and motivations that account for CSO affiliation (Inglehart, 2005). The WVS permits cross-country comparison since it includes measurements of thousands of individuals across the globe that answered the same questions concerning their civil society affiliation. For conducting a logistic multilevel regression, we constructed a binomial dependent variable and added both individual-level (control variables) and country-level variables to the regression. We will now discuss both dependent and independent variables.

#### Dependent variable

The World Values Survey is conducted in different waves. For the construction of the dependent variable, data collected during the fourth wave, carried out between 1999 and 2004, was used.<sup>4</sup> The questionnaire contains questions relating to membership of fifteen different types of CSOs.<sup>5</sup> This relates to the diversity and depth of citizen participation in voluntary organisations. It implies that when individuals in a country belong to more CSO categories, the stronger the civil society of that country is considered to be.

Constructing the dependent variable involved several choices. The first choice was to remove the category of membership of political parties since this relates to organisations positioned in the political realm, and not in civil society. After this selection, fourteen categories of CSOs were included in the analysis.<sup>6</sup> Two categories of organisations that were included deserve some discussion: labour unions and professional associations. These two categories are positioned at the borderline between civil society, the state and the market, and were included for two reasons: (1) the primary objective of these groups is to promote the interests of their members, and (2) they often play a significant developmental role.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/ for additional information.

These are: (1) social welfare service organisations for elderly, handicapped or deprived people; (2) religious or church organisations; (3) organisations in the area of education, arts, music or cultural activities; (4) labor unions; (5) political parties or groups; (6) local community action groups on issues like poverty, employment, housing, racial equality; (7) organisations that focus on third world development or human rights; (8) organisations that focus on conservation, the environment or animal rights; (9) professional associations; (10) youth work organisations (e.g. scouts, guides, youth clubs, etc.); (11) sports or recreation organisations; (12) women's groups; (13) the peace movement; (14) voluntary organisation concerned with health; and (15) other groups.

<sup>6</sup> The category 'other groups' was also incorporated to include a wide range of CSOs.

<sup>7</sup> Curtis et al. (2001) find that high union membership counts for former eastern bloc nations distort their analysis. They argue that this is the case because union membership is compulsory rather than voluntary in many of these countries. As they use the WVS data from right after the fall of the Berlin wall

The next step was to aggregate the data on the fourteen CSO-categories into one dependent variable. We created a proportion variable ranging from 0 to 1, providing information on the total number of memberships of each individual divided by the maximum number of possible memberships. 8 Table 2.1 provides an overview of the average number of memberships per country per person. Among the countries with high numbers of memberships are usual suspects such as the United States. Sweden and the Netherlands, but we also see surprisingly high levels of memberships in countries such as Tanzania, Bangladesh and Uganda.

#### Independent variables

Table 2.2 presents an overview of the basic descriptive statistics for the structural factors that are considered to influence CSO membership. For measuring the level of democracy, the Freedom House (2002)9 indicators for 'political rights' and 'civil liberties' were summed, resulting in a score ranging from 2 to 14.10 This combined indicator looks at a number of factors related to democracy, namely a country's electoral process, the extent of political pluralism and participation, the functioning of government, and the freedom of expression, assembly, association, and religion. To measure economic development, we used the commonly used GDP per capita (2003, corrected for purchasing power parity) from the UNDP<sup>11</sup> Human Development Index.<sup>12</sup> To measure political stability and the rule of law, we used the World Governance Indicators of 2002 from the World Bank.13 The political stability (and absence of violence) indicator measures the perceptions of the likelihood that the government will be destabilised or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means. including domestic violence and terrorism. The rule of law indicator measures the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide the rules of society, in particular the quality of contract enforcement, the police and the courts, as well as the likelihood

<sup>(1991</sup> to 1993), the influence of communism was still strong. This reasoning does not apply to our study because we use data from 1999 to 2004.

Because the maximum number of organisational memberships is limited to 14, we used a binomial 8 distribution rather than a poisson distribution to model our dependent variable. The proportion of memberships is linked to the covariates by using a logit link function.

Freedom House, Freedom of the World 2002: the annual survey of political rights and civil liberties, available at: http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2002 [accessed February 2012].

<sup>10</sup> Here we followed Ruiter and De Graaf (2006) and inverted the scale for interpretation purposes. Higher scores indicate a higher level of democracy.

United Nations Development Programme, Human development report 2004: Cultural Liberty in Today's 11 Diverse World, available at: http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2004/ [accessed March 2012].

Following Curtis et al. (2001) and Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas (2001), we calculate the logarithm of GDP, to prevent extremely rich countries from dominating estimated regression effects.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank, World governance indicators 1996-2005, available at: http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/ governance/exelgraphs [accessed February 2012].

 Table 2.1
 Respondents per country and average no. of memberships per country

Country	Respondents	Average	Country	Respondents	Average
		no. of memberships			no. of memberships
1. Albania	937	1.598	28. Luxembourg	927	1.402
2. Argentina	1231	.583	29. Malta	998	.565
3. Austria	1447	1.391	30. Mexico	1347	.959
4. Bangladesh	1354	2.722	31. Moldova	924	.865
5. Belgium	1681	1.509	32. Morocco	1168	.258
6. Bulgaria	907	.312	33. Netherlands	979	2.999
7. Belarus	923	.516	34. Peru	1439	.933
8. Canada	1828	1.826	35. Philippines	1187	1.326
9. Chile	1151	.868	36. Poland	1039	.386
10. China	768	.340	37. Portugal	958	.377
11. Croatia	876	.686	38. Romania	1034	.294
12. Czech Republic	1781	1.020	39. Russia	2357	.375
13. Denmark	879	1.878	40. Singapore	1485	.845
14. Estonia	921	.503	41. Slovakia	1217	1.075
15. Finland	859	1.873	42. Vietnam	880	2.169
16. France	509	.616	43. Slovenia	918	.938
17. Germany	1911	.720	44. South Africa	2869	1.573
18. Greece	1009	1.141	45. Spain	2200	.468
19. Hungary	909	.429	46. Sweden	945	3.091
20. Iceland	911	2.528	47. Turkey	1128	.090
21. India	1501	1.231	48. Uganda	985	2.145
22. Ireland	906	1.160	49. Ukraine	1003	.442
23. Italy	1716	.724	50. Macedonia	984	1.013
24. Japan	1005	.813	51. Tanzania	1011	3.395
25. Kyrgyzstan	1019	.815	52. United States	1167	3.060
26. Latvia	925	.396	53. Venezuela	1150	1.436
27. Lithuania	893	.236	Total	64056	1.134

Source: World Values Survey 1999-2004, own calculations.

**Table 2.2** Descriptive Statistics for Independent variables

	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation	Year
Individual level variables:				
Age	15 / 99	42.49	16.56	1999-2004
Highest educational level	1 / 8	4.42	2.19	1999-2004
Materialist values (dummy)	0 / 1	.29	.46	1999-2004
Mixed values (dummy)	0 / 1	.58	.49	1999-2004
Post-materialist values (dummy)	0 / 1	.12	.33	1999-2004
Sex (male=0)	0 / 1	.52	.50	1999-2004
Religious service attendance (inverted scale)	-8 / -1	-4.64	2.52	1999-2004
Country level variables:				
Rule of law	-1.13 / 2.06	.51	.98	2002
Political Stability	-1.47 / 1.69	.42	.84	2002
GDP/capita (PPP US \$1.000)	.62 / 62.29	16.13	1.19	2003
Political rights (inverted scale)	-13 / -2	-4.57	3.11	2002

Note: Averages and standard deviations are calculated over 64056 individuals.

Sources: World Values Survey 1999-2004, Freedom House (2002), World Bank (2002), UNDP (2004), own calculations.

of crime and violence. The governance indicators are measured in units ranging from about -2.5 to 2.5, with higher values corresponding to better governance outcomes (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2009).

Although the hypotheses on structural factors influencing CSO membership were formulated at the country-level, individual-level variables are also included in the analysis. The purpose of taking individual-level variables into account was to allow for individual-level variance and thereby control for composition effects. This is to ensure that the effects of the country-level variables are genuinely attributable to the country-level and are not the result of factors at the level of individuals. The variables at the individual-level taken into account are: age (and age squared), level of education, sex, attendance of religious services and the value index. These variables are generally considered to explain CSO membership (Curtis et al., 2001; Ruiter & De Graaf, 2006; Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001).

It is expected that as people get older, the chance of being a member of a CSO will increase. Some studies show, however, that the relationship between age and CSO membership is actually curvilinear (Ruiter & De Graaf, 2006). To accurately establish the relationship between age and membership, a squared term of the variable age was also included in the analysis. The level of education of a person is expected to correlate positively with CSO membership, as is the frequency of attendance of religious services. With regard to the latter, the scale has been inverted to facilitate its interpretation. Males are expected to have a different level of CSO membership than women, but the gender differences in CSO participation are subject to much debate. Finally, the value index relates to Inglehart's (1997) concepts of (post) modernisation that captures driving forces for human action. People adhering modern values are believed to emphasise physical and economic well-being, whereas people who adhere to post-modern values emphasise self-actualisation and quality of life motives. Post-materialist values tend to favour more individualistic behaviour and CSO membership is then perceived from a self-interest principle.<sup>14</sup> CSO membership is expected to be more pronounced amongst people with (post)modern value regimes.

#### 2.5 Results

To identify the influence of the country-level variables, a logistic multilevel regression was conducted in the statistical analysis program Stata.<sup>15</sup> The model specification includes six different steps. The results are presented in Table 2.3.

The first step (model 1) included all individual-level variables. All the hypothesised effects of the individual-level variables are confirmed at the .001 significance level and the directions of most coefficients are as expected. Regarding age, the non-linear relationship between age and membership of CSOs was confirmed (i.e. the squared term is significant), indicating that somewhat older (i.e. more experienced) people tend to join CSOs, but at a declining share. Similarly, education proves to be a favourable factor for CSO membership. Interestingly, CSO membership over countries is strongly male-biased. This will be particularly true for labour unions and sports clubs, even while in some other types of organisations (e.g. churches, health groups) females usually represent a key driving force. Attendance of religious services has a univocal positive influence on CSO participation. Finally, people adhering to post-material values appear to be more likely to become CSO members, indicating that self-actualisation and identity motives tend to dominate other, more functional goals of CSO affiliation.

<sup>14</sup> In the analysis, the three categories are recoded into dummy variables for materialist values and mixed values that should be interpreted in relation to the reference category of post-materialist values. The expectation is that both dummies will have negative coefficients, and that the materialist category will show a more pronounced negative coefficient than the mixed category.

<sup>15</sup> We applied the xtmelogit procedure with a random intercept for the countries using 7 quadrature points.

 Table 2.3
 Logistic multilevel regression for CSO Membership a)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Constant	-2.872 (.118)***		-3.358 (.171)***	-3.358 (.140)*** -3.358 (.171)*** 27.407 (6.011)*** -2.297 (.386)*** 13.514 (6.534)*	-2.297 (.386)***	13.514 (6.534)*
Individual level variables:						
Religious service (inverted scale)	.104 (.002)***	.104 (.002)***	.104 (.002)***	.104 (.002)***	.104 (.002)***	.104 (.002)***
Age	.014 (.001)***	.014 (.001)***	.014 (.001)***	.014 (.001)***	.014 (.001)***	.014 (.001)***
Age-squared / 100	015 (.001)***	015 (.001)***	015 (.001)***	015 (.001)***	015 (.001***	015 (.001)***
Highest educational level	.122 (.002)***	.122 (.002)***	.122 (.002)***	.122 (.002)***	.122 (.002)***	.122 (.002)***
Sex (Male=0)	115 (.008)***	115 (.008)***	115 (.008)***	115 (.010)***	115 (.008)***	115 (.008)***
Materialist values (dummy) <sup>b)</sup>	253 (.014)***	252 (.014)***	252 (.014)***	252 (.014)***	252 (.014)***	252 (.014)***
Mixed values (dummy) <sup>b)</sup>	091 (.012)***	091 (.012)***	091 (.012)***	091 (.012)***	091 (.012)***	091 (.012)***
Country level variables:						
Rule of law		320 (.154)*				232 (.249)
Rule of law squared		.524 (.119)***				.570 (.138)***
Political stability			105 (.147)			195 (.188)
Political stability squared			.400 (.162)*			057 (.143)
log GDP/capita				-6.928 (1.355)***		-2.979 (1.579)
log GDP/capita squared				.390 (.076)		.139 (.095)
Level of democracy (inverted scale)					.227 (.153)	.440 (.180)*
Level of democracy squared					.015 (.011)	.024 (.011)*
Between-country variance	.667	.454	.592	.441	.637	.307
Deviance	184729.674	184709.410	184723.398	184707.940	184727.268	184688.726

\* = P < .05; \*\* = P < .01; \*\*\* = P < .001 Note: a) Calculations are based on 64056 individuals. b) Compared to group of post-materialist values as reference category. Sources: World Values Survey 1999-2004, Freedom House (2002), World Bank (2002), UNDP (2004), own calculations.

The second step (model 2-5) was to add country level variables (and their squared terms), to explain for variance at the country level. In subsequent models, each of the country-level variables was added to model 1 to identify their specific influence on the dependent variable of CSO membership. Model 2 through 4 show that rule of law, political stability and log GDP/capita all have a significant quadratic effect on CSO membership. Model 5 shows that the level of democracy has no significant effect (both quadratic and linear). This means that we cannot confirm any of our linear hypotheses. However, we can confirm our quadratic hypotheses for rule of law, political stability and log GDP/capita. Of these variables, rule of law and log GDP/capita are most important, as can be seen by the level of significance and the reduced country-level variances of model 2 and 4 as compared to the slight reduction of country-level variance in model 3 (political stability). Therefore we conclude that economic development and rule of law are most important in explaining variation in CSO membership between countries. Figure 2.1 and figure 2.2 clearly demonstrate the quadratic nature of this relationship.

In the final model 6, all country-level variables were included to study the importance of each country-level variable when controlled for the influence of the others. Even though the between-country variance drops to .307, the (quadratic) effect of only one country-level factor remains significant at the .001 level in this model, namely rule of law. Also, both effects of level of democracy become slightly significant now. These deviations from the previous models are most likely due to multicollinearity combined with the relatively small number of countries.<sup>19</sup> As such, the results of model 6 may present a somewhat distorted picture. To check whether rule of law and log GDP/capita are still the most important predictors we tested several other models. We subsequently removed one of the country-level variables from model 6 and looked at the resulting increase in between-country variance and deviance (the higher the increase, the higher the explanatory value of the removed variable). This procedure showed that removing the level of democracy variable did not result in a significant increase of the deviance nor in a substantial increase of the between-country variance. The same was the case for political stability. However, the opposite was true for rule of law and log GDP/capita, the removal of both of which resulted in a significant (p<.001) increase in deviance and a substantial increase in

<sup>16</sup> We also tested a model with only a linear effect which appeared to be insignificant.

<sup>17</sup> This point can also be proven by looking at the deviances of models 2 through 5 as compared to the deviance of model 1.

The quadratic nature of the relationship is also proven by the dramatic rise in explained variance when fitting a quadratic rather than a linear line to the total (see reported values under the figures) using OLS regression.

<sup>19</sup> The country-level variables show relatively high levels of correlation, ranging from .64 to .85 (in absolute terms).

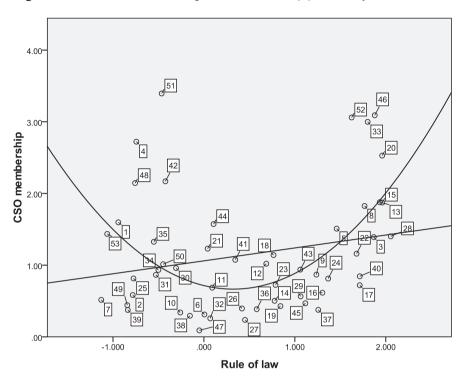


Figure 2.1 Rule of law and average CSO membership per country

Note: R2 linear = .047

 $R^2$  quadratic = .247

Labels correspond to countries in table 2.1

Sources: World Values Survey 1999-2004, World Bank (2002), own calculations.

between-country variance. Hence, these analyses confirmed our initial conclusions, namely that rule of law and log GDP/capita are the most important predictors.

Finally, we removed all the quadratic terms from model 6, to analyse the importance of the quadratic terms in model 6. Omitting these terms, and only using linear countrylevel predictors resulted in a great and significant (p<.001) increase of deviance and country-level variance. The explained country-level variance of model 6 including quadratic terms equals 55% while only including linear terms results in a drop to 22%. This again underscores the importance of the quadratic relations in comparison to linear ones.

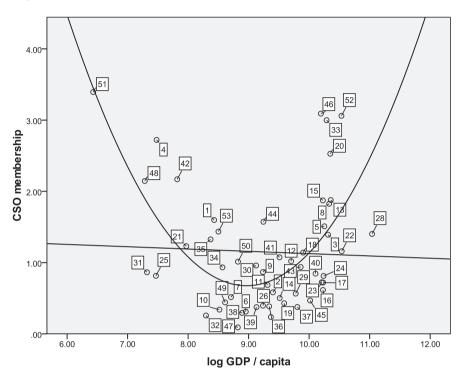


Figure 2.2 Log GDP /capita and average CSO membership per country

 $Note: R^2 Iinear = .002$ 

 $R^2$  quadratic = .4

Labels correspond to countries in table 2.1

Sources: World Values Survey 1999-2004, UNDP (2004), own calculations.

#### 2.6 Discussion and Outlook

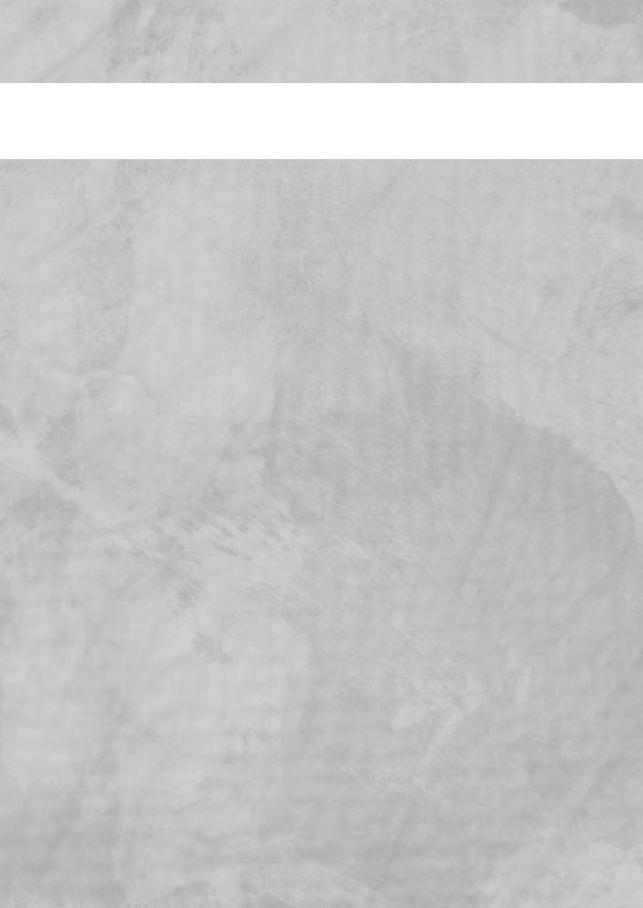
In this chapter, we empirically tested four structural factors which may account for differences in the strength of civil society affiliation, controlling for composition effects of countries by including individual-level variables in the logistic multilevel regression. Of the four contextual factors ('rule of law', 'political stability', 'level of democracy' and 'economic development'), only the rule of law and the level of economic development emerge as the key mediating factors for CSO membership. Surprisingly, this relation is not linear but quadratic, meaning that improvement in both the rule of law and the economic situation in a country first 'causes' CSO membership to drop and after a certain threshold to rise again. Contrary to popular beliefs, the level of democracy could not be confirmed to exercise a significant influence on civil society affiliation. Similarly, the degree of political stability appears to be only slightly significantly related to CSO development. This raises two questions, first, how can we explain this quadratic pattern, and second, what does it mean for supporting an enabling environment for CSOs?

A possible explanation for our findings is that people in poor countries where the rule of law is low are indeed very much in need of memberships for safeguarding their basic needs in life. If we zoom in on the countries on the upper left and upper right corner of figure 2.1 and 2.2, we see that they are on the one hand Tanzania, Bangladesh, Vietnam and Uganda, and on the other hand Sweden, the United States, the Netherlands and Iceland. In both groups high membership scores are mainly based on membership of religious organisations, but next to religious organisations the group of Western countries score a lot higher on membership of labour unions and other groups, and the group of developing countries score a lot higher on membership of local political initiatives, women's groups, peace movements and health groups. Although this is a purely descriptive analysis, it seems to support the idea that people in developing countries have different reasons for becoming a member than people in the Western world. Their motives may be more connected to the basic needs in life (health, peace) or to fighting for rights which are not yet incorporated into the legal environment (local political initiatives, women's rights). Also in developing countries, churches are very often involved in the provision of basic needs, and often play a developmental role (Barro & McCleary, 2003; Grier, 1997). In the Western countries, where basic rights are safeguarded by law and basic needs are covered by social welfare regimes and high income levels, existing theories seem to apply. If we relate this to Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs, those who are at the top (self-actualisation, self-esteem) and those who are at the bottom (physiological and safety needs) are most likely to have a CSO membership (Maslow, 1943).

What does this mean for donor agencies wishing to support civil society development? Our analysis confirmed that country-level factors have a significant influence on CSO membership, so in addition to direct support for establishing local CSOs in developing countries (push-factor approach), the alternative of a more structural (pull-in) approach focusing on the creation of 'enabling conditions' deserves serious attention. There are no good reasons to wait until formal democratic conditions or political stability are in place; the rule of law and economic growth are confirmed to be sufficient requirements for mediating CSO affiliation. However, our data suggests that improving these factors could actually lead to a drop in the number of CSO memberships.<sup>20</sup> Although it sounds counter-intuitive, this drop in the amount of memberships can be interpreted as a good thing. As the situation in a country improves and more rights and basic needs are covered by a good rule of law and a good economic climate, people have less reason to be a member of CSOs which are providing it for them. Only after a certain level of wealth and rule of law is reached, memberships start rising again, but probably because of different reasons, related to self-actualisation and self-esteem. This points to a transformation of civil society over time, rather than a simple growth.

Finally, we should acknowledge that this analysis does not permit to draw firm conclusions about causality. Since most variables used are time-invariant, we cannot confirm whether CSO organisation also favours a process towards the strengthening of the socio-economic or legal-political framework in particular types of countries. While such relationships are frequently forwarded in the debate on the roles of CSO in fostering development and reducing poverty or inequality (Biekart, 1999; G. White, 1994), there is until now little empirical proof - at least at aggregate level - of possible complementarities between CSO organisation and progress in reaching development goals.

<sup>20</sup> Because we use cross-sectional data it is difficult to predict whether individual countries will actually follow this path. An alternative explanation could be that the low number of memberships in the middle of figures 1 and 2 are actually caused by post-communist countries. In these countries, Howard (2003) argues that low numbers of membership are related to the communist legacy, rather than to GDP or Rule of law. To test for this alternative explanation we added a dummy for former communist countries to our models. This analysis showed that this group of countries (while having a significantly lower number of memberships) does not affect our quadratic explanation.



### Chapter 3

# Cut from a different cloth? Comparing democracy-promoting NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia\*

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#### **Abstract**

This study compares donor-sponsored NGOs promoting democracy in Ghana and Indonesia. Starting from the idea that democracy and civil society are context-specific phenomena, we explore the question of what context-specificity means for individual NGOs. While donors and researchers alike stress the importance of context, context-specificity remains an ill-defined and elusive concept. Our study contributes to the debate by (1) constructing a framework which defines context-specificity at the level of organisational characteristics and by (2) analysing to what extent NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia actually conform to this definition of context-specificity. Because Ghana and Indonesia represent very different contexts, we maximise the chances of finding differences in organisational configuration. Our fieldwork data from Accra and Jakarta only partly confirm this expectation. Although the mission statements echo national differences, we find remarkable similarities in terms of strategies, structures and resources. These similarities lead us to conclude that the NGOs operate quite independently from their national contexts. In the discussion we relate our findings to the debate on donor support to NGOs.

#### Keywords

Civil society, NGO, democracy, context, development aid, comparative analysis, Ghana, Indonesia.

#### 3.1 Introduction

Effective development aid requires tailoring policies to local contextual factors like local needs, local knowledge and local cultural practices (Easterly, 2006; Evans, 2004). Also in the field of civil society and democracy it is now widely accepted that both "cannot be created from blueprints" and do not lend themselves to "external manufacturing" (Howell & Pearce, 2001, p. 121). Democratic engineering has often had damaging effects because it enforces a particular organisational paradigm (Blaug, 2002). One way of overcoming this problem is by supporting domestic civil society organisations such as nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) which can take the lead in promoting 'home-grown' democracy. This solution only works, however, if the sponsored NGOs are themselves rooted in their society and are sensitive to local contextual factors because "civil societies in any context have a history and must develop in tune with their particular historical, cultural and political rhythms" (Howell & Pearce, 2001, p. 121).

Several studies have pointed out that donor funding to democracy-promoting NGOs has had the unintended effect of weakening the link between NGO and society. For instance, Henderson (2002) shows that donor support to NGOs in Russia caused them to be accountable towards their donors, rather than towards their constituencies. White (1999, p. 321) argues that, due to donor support, some of the NGOs in Bangladesh have "grown into formidable institutions, very far from the citizens' associations of classical civil society theorists". Hearn (2000, 2007) concludes that NGOs in Africa are maintaining rather than challenging the status quo, and can even be seen as agents of Western powers. These and other observations led to the conclusion that many of the NGOs which are part of the aid system are not the ones which are so important for promoting democracy (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Ottaway & Carothers, 2000a; Sabatini, 2002; Tvedt, 2006).

This critique has been widely accepted, not least by donors, who pledged to improve their approach. For over a decade now, they have emphasised the idea that a more context-specific approach is needed, and that national ownership and participation are ways to achieve this.<sup>21</sup> However, defining and measuring the context of civil society is a difficult and multi-interpretable topic which has received little attention (Anheier, 2005; Heinrich, 2005; Howard, 2005). While the studies mentioned above clarify a lot about how donor funding causes NGOs to become detached from their societies, they do not systematically analyse what being context-specific actually means for NGOs. As a result, context-specificity often remains an empty concept. We therefore aim to contribute to the debate by exploring and substantiating the meaning of context-specificity for individual NGOs.

<sup>21</sup> Many bilateral and multilateral donor agencies started using this terminology in their policies after signing the Rome declaration on harmonisation (2003), the Paris declaration on aid effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008).

The analysis is guided by two questions: (1) what are the similarities and differences between Ghanaian and Indonesian democracy-promoting NGOs in terms of their organisational characteristics and (2) to what extent do these similarities and differences indicate context-specificity? In our empirical analysis we compare the organisational characteristics of NGOs from Ghana and Indonesia. By explicitly taking variation in context as a starting point of our analysis, we maximise the chances of finding contextual differences between the NGOs. As there are currently no concrete indicators for determining whether or not the organisational characteristics of the NGOs are context-specific, we explore several possibilities. In this exploration we link our empirical findings to aspects of the Ghanaian and Indonesian contexts. By doing so, we construct and apply a framework for determining the context-specificity of NGOs.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. First, we discuss the link between democracy, civil society and context-specificity. Here we also explain our choice to compare the NGOs in terms of their mission, strategy, structure, and resources. Second, we describe the research methodology and the selection of organisations. Third, for each organisational characteristic, we compare the Ghanaian and Indonesian NGOs, and discuss their context-specificity. We find that, despite major contextual differences, NGOs principally only differ in terms of their mission and are remarkably similar in terms of their strategy, structure and resources. We conclude the chapter by summarizing our framework and findings and by discussing donor-dependency as a potential explanation for the similarities we find.

## 3.2 Democracy, Civil Society and Context-specificity

The expectation of finding organisational differences between democracy promoting NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia is based on two premises in contemporary literature: first, that each country has its own path to democracy; and second, that NGOs are conducive to rooting democracy in society. The idea that there is one path to democracy has long been invalidated. Each country has its own path, and it is not even sure whether it will lead to the same end state (Carothers, 2002). Although democracy is often portrayed as a universal ideal, it manifests itself in many forms. In effect, the universal ideal of 'rule by the people' is an important source of variation and deviation. Democracy can only work if it is fundamentally rooted in society; it needs institutions that help ordinary citizens gain control over the decisions that affect their lives (Beetham, 1993). Because people all over the world differ in their cultural habits, their language, their history and so on, rule by the people is bound to produce some significant differences. Therefore, "different countries might very well be doing what is best for them, given their circumstances, by following different paths" (Munck, 2009, p. 337).

In general, a critical and vibrant civil society is believed to be important for developing democracies because it provides a counterweight to state power, it promotes necessary state reforms, it includes the poor and marginalised, and it teaches citizens the norms and values of democracy (Clarke, 1998; Edwards, 2004; Fowler, 2000; Hendriks, 2006). There are several reasons why NGOs are conducive to rooting democracy in society. First, it is believed that they promote plurality and inclusion. We broadly define NGOs as the formal and informal associations that exist outside the state and the market (Hendriks, 2006). They can take on all sorts of forms. representing all sorts of societal groups and interests, thereby promoting plurality. Furthermore, these different groups can use NGOs to gain more control over the democratic institutions in their country. In this way, NGOs act as an alternative channel, distinct from political parties and elections, by which to present the democratic system with a more differentiated and more constant flow of input (Biekart, 1999; Clarke, 1998). Second, it is believed that NGOs have the capacity to cater to local circumstances and local needs because they are flexible and closely connected to people's life-worlds (Diamond, 1999; G. White, 1994). NGOs are thus the perfect vehicles to ensure that democracy becomes locally rooted and widely accepted by different segments of a population (Hadenius & Uggla, 1996).

Although theory remains vague about what concrete differences we might expect between NGOs in different countries, it does offer some clues where we need to look. Like all formal organisations, NGOs "need structures for defining goals, making decisions, mobilizing resources and directing resources towards goals" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 316), Successful organisations, i.e. the ones that survive, have a structure and strategy that best serve the purpose of the organisation and are consistent with the environment in which it operates (Mintzberg, 1983). For NGOs this means that they need to adapt their "mission, their functions and their structures" to the social and political context in which they operate (Diamond, 1999, p. 230). Following these ideas we will compare the NGOs on: (1) their mission, (2) their organisational strategy, (3) their organisational structure, and (4) their financial and human resources (Diamond, 1999; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Mintzberg, 1983). Together these areas capture what an organisation stands for, what it does to achieve its goals and how it is organised to do so.

## 3.3 Data and Methods

The research employs a comparative case study design. This approach is appropriate to study phenomena within their specific contexts. By contrasting the contexts, the way different conditions affect different outcomes of the phenomenon can be examined (Yin, 2003). In this study, Ghana and Indonesia represent the different contexts and the democratisation NGOs represent the phenomenon. As Ghana and Indonesia are such different countries, we would expect NGOs to adapt to their environments and show different 'outcomes' in terms of their mission, their strategy, their structure and their resources. As little is known about context-specificity, we cannot start looking for clues in the context. Instead, we start by comparing the NGOs and subsequently link our findings to the different contexts.

The NGOs have been selected by means of criterion sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is a qualitative sample, and as such it is not randomised and not representative in statistical terms. The purpose of this sampling technique is to capture the variety of a phenomenon within the boundaries of the criteria. Three criteria guided the selection. The first criterion was that the NGOs work in the field of promoting (aspects of) democracy. The second criterion was that they are supported by international donors<sup>22</sup>. The third criterion was that local experts (i.e. political scientists, NGO consultants and representatives of major bilateral and multilateral donor agencies in the country) had to consider them to be important players in the field of democratisation in their country. Based on these criteria, and the interviews with experts, a short list of organisations was compiled which captured a diverse group in terms of focus, age and size. Table 3.1 provides an overview.

This chapter is based on extensive fieldwork data, collected in Ghana (Accra) and Indonesia (Jakarta) between 2007 and 2008. It consists of 47 in-depth interviews with 43 respondents, principally with directors, researchers and founding members of the NGOs (for an overview see appendix 3.1). To balance their stories, interviews were conducted with the aforementioned local experts. In addition to interview data, the analysis uses annual reports, funding reports, internal documents, and NGO websites and publications. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and subsequently analysed through a process of thematic coding in the software package Atlas.ti.

This criterion did not specify the number of donors, the type of donors or the amount of funding. With regard to these aspects, the group is highly diverse both within and between countries. In terms of the number of donors there are NGOs that have a large number of donors and NGOs with very few donors. CDD is an example of the former, as they have received grants from, among others, the UNDP, the World Bank, the Ford Foundation, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and SIDA. On the other hand, there is KID which depends for almost all of its funds on the Netherlands Institute of Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), because 'so far, beside the Dutch embassy, they are the only funders of KID's activities' (Interview KID, April 2008). The researched NGOs are supported by a variety of types of donors, which include bilateral, multilateral and nongovernmental funding agencies. Partnership, for instance, mainly relies on funding from bilateral donors who channel their funds through the UNDP (a multilateral donor), while ISODEC has a long-term funding relation with the NGO Oxfam NOVIB. Finally there are big differences in terms of their budgets. For the year 2007, Abantu anticipated a budget of US\$ 0.4 million as compared to the Partnership which had an estimated budget of US\$ 10 million.

Table 3.1 Basic characteristics of the NGOs

	Organisation	Full name	Establishment	Main focus	Size (No. of staff)*
	Abantu	Abantu for Development	1998	Gender inequalities	Small
	CDD	Center for Democratic Development	1998	Political and economic issues	Medium
ยนย	IDEG	Institute of Democratic Governance	2000	Political issues	Medium
ер	IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs	1989	Political and economic issues	Medium
	ISODEC	Integrated Social Development Center	1987	Social service delivery and social inequalities	Big
	Demos	Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies	2002	Democracy and human rights	Medium
	Elsam	Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy	1993	Democracy and human rights	Medium
sisənc	XI O	Indonesian Community for Democracy	2004	Political education and political party dialogue	Small
pul	Partnership	Partnership for Democratic Governance Reform	2000	Civil society building and political and administrative issues	Big
	PSHK	Centre for Indonesian Law and Policy Studies	1998	Legal reform	Medium
	Yappika	The Civil Society Alliance for Democracy	1991	Civil society building and human rights	Medium

\*Small: n < 10; Medium: 10 < n < 40; Big: n > 40 Sources: Interviews, NGO websites, NGO documents

## 3.4 Different Countries, Different Organisations?

In this section we compare the NGOs in terms of their mission, strategy, structure, and resources. Subsequently, we explore to what extent these findings indicate context-specificity by relating them to the context in Ghana and Indonesia. In this way we aim to demystify the concept of context-specificity and make it more tangible.

#### **Comparing Missions**

When comparing mission statements, we find clear deviations between countries in the kind of topics being tackled. Table 3.2 summarises the mission statements of the selected NGOs.

In Indonesia, for example, corruption and human rights are prominent topics. The organisations tackle different aspects of these problems. Demos promotes "humanrights based democracy" and aims "to promote the participation and representation of marginalised people" (Interview Demos, March 2008). Elsam also sees the promotion of human rights as essential for promoting a democratic political order. According to the director, their mission is "to introduce human rights as a political instrument in Indonesia" (Interview Elsam, April 2008). This requires institutional reform because the current judicial institutions are perceived to be part of the problem rather than the solution. KID aims at improving the quality of the democratic discourse at the local level by educating strategic young individuals about the norms and values of democracy. They argue that the nature and quality of participation is as important for improving democracy in Indonesia as the quantity of participation (Interview KID, April 2008), Partnership seeks to strengthen the democratic quality of the civil service sector and the security and justice sectors by targeting corruption and improving transparency, accountability and respect for human rights in these sectors.<sup>23</sup> PSHK believes that more attention should be given to legal reform. According to PSHK "law continues to be a crucial area in need of reform" because, "settlement of serious law violations in terms of corruption and human rights require effective legal institutions".<sup>24</sup> Finally, Yappika bases its work on the idea that a strong civil society movement is necessary for improving democracy and human rights in Indonesia. Besides providing grants for NGOs at the local level, they developed a more hands on approach after the fall of Suharto because "the environment supported involvement in dialogues with policy makers" (Interview Yappika, April 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Internal document: Partnership for Governance Reform in Indonesia (2006), Strategic Plan 2007-2011 (Jakarta).

<sup>24</sup> PSHK, About PSHK, available at: www.pshk.or.id [accessed July 2010].

**Table 3.2** NGO mission statements

	Organisation	Mission summary
	Abantu	Build women's capacity to participate in decision-making, influence policies from a gender perspective and address unequal social relations.
_	CDD	Promote democracy, good governance and the development of liberal economic environment.
Ghana	IDEG	Generate knowledge and enhance capacity of citizens to influence public policy choices in order to consolidate democracy and good governance.
	IEA	Promote good governance, democracy and a free and fair market economy.
	ISODEC	Achieve economic and social justice and a life of dignity for all by promoting rights, accountability and responsibility.
	Demos	Enhance community capacity to promote democracy and human rights through the practise of discourse; dissemination and cooperative networks.
	Elsam	Promote the existence of a society that respects human rights and democracy and attains social justice as well as gender sensitivity.
Indonesia	KID	Facilitate commitment of citizens to democracy and facilitate their participation, so people can monitor and control public decision-making.
Ind	Partnership	Promote good governance by strengthening public service governance, deepening democracy and improving security and justice, while considering gender equality and marginalised groups.
	PSHK	Contribute to consistency of legal enforcement and legal reform with independent research.
	Yappika	Promote a democratic and independent civil society that fights for democracy and human rights.

Source: NGO websites.

In Ghana, by contrast, the focus lies on different aspects, namely on poverty and the exclusion of vulnerable groups (Abantu, ISODEC), and on identifying and overcoming institutional gaps in the macro political system (CDD, IDEG, IEA). ISODEC has its roots in service delivery work for vulnerable groups in society. They commence from the ideal that "poor and marginalised people and their organisations achieve their economic justice" and that they "have an effective voice in influencing decisions affecting their lives". 25 Abantu has a similar goal with a different target group, namely to promote the position of women in Ghanaian society: "It has been set up to support women's organisations, to build their capacity for policy influencing" (Interview Abantu,

<sup>25</sup> Internal document: ISODEC (2006), The ISODEC Rights-based Advocacy Programme (RBAIII) 2007-2009 (Accra: ISODEC), p. 18.

December 2007). Both organisations look at how their constituencies are served by existing institutions and stress the need for inclusion and distributive justice. The other organisations (CDD, IDEG, IEA) take a different perspective, focusing on "systems and processes of the central government, and how policy is made and implemented" (Interview CDD, December 2007). They identify institutional problems that relate to the lack of decentralisation, constitutional reform, the separation of powers, political party reform, and the quality of electoral procedures. Besides identifying similar problems, they also develop similar solutions. For instance, in order to overcome the weak position of parliament in relation to the executive, IDEG "builds the capacity of parliament at the national level through workshops and seminars" (Interview IDEG, December 2007), IEA takes parliamentarians "through courses on various subjects" (Interview IEA, December 2007), and CDD teaches "new members of parliament about the rules and procedures of parliament" (Interview CDD, November 2007).

#### Context and Mission

In both Ghana and Indonesia the mission statements and, subsequently, the areas in which the NGOs work, reflect the different problems that Ghana and Indonesia face on the path of consolidating and deepening their democracies. Despite some parallels in their historic development, Ghana and Indonesia present NGOs with a very different institutional environment. Both countries experienced a prolonged period of colonial rule where a European state imposed its repressive and extractive administrative structures. Indonesia officially gained independence in 1949 after a violent struggle against their Dutch colonisers. In Ghana the transition of power from the British colonisers was more peaceful and took place in 1957. After decolonisation, both countries had short experiences with parliamentary democracy (Chazan, 1988; Sundhaussen, 1989). However, the most long-lasting regimes were the military ones, in Ghana under Rawlings and in Indonesia under Suharto. In Ghana the transition to democracy was gradual and peaceful, and took place between 1992 and 2000 (Gyimah-Boadi, 2001). In contrast, the 1998 transition in Indonesia was short and violent (Schwarz, 1999).

Currently, both countries struggle with different societal problems. In Ghana, the combination of widespread poverty and the lack of education (illiteracy rate of 42%) are an obstacle to basic democratic practices such as participation and demanding government accountability (Abdulai & Crawford, 2010). These are the issues being tackled by NGOs such as ISODEC and Abantu. In Indonesia, poverty is less widespread and the level of education is generally higher with an illiteracy rate of about 10%.<sup>26</sup> Here, one of the main societal obstacles to democracy is conflict.

<sup>26</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, CIA World fact book 2011, available at: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook [accessed May 2011].

Throughout the archipelago, past and present conflicts between ethnic and religious groups cause a lot of instability and are rated as one of Indonesia's biggest governance problems (Kaufmann et al., 2009). During these various conflicts human rights have often been violated, which explains the prominence of the topic in the mission statements of the Indonesian NGOs.

The macro political environment also presents democratic development with different obstacles. In Ghana, for instance, the separation of powers is a significant weakness in the democratic system on which NGOs such as CDD. IEA and IDEG work. Although both countries have a history of concentration of power in the executive, in contrast to Indonesia, Ghana has not broken with this history. The executive remains dominant, especially over the legislative branch (Abdulai & Crawford, 2010; Lindberg & Zhou, 2009). Because Ghana functions as a two-party system, the president usually has a safe majority in parliament. His power to appoint and dismiss ministers among the parliamentarians ensures that this majority is loyal to his policy because "every parliamentarian from the presidential party wants a ministerial appointment" (Interview University of Legon - Faculty of Law, November 2007). The dominance of the executive weakens the separation of powers, designed to ensure checks and balances between the different branches of government. In Indonesia this is less the case because their presidential system functions differently. In order to be able to govern, the president needs to build coalitions with multiple parties in parliament, which strengthens the separation of powers (Perdana & Friawan, 2007).

A related problem with democracy in Ghana, on which each of the selected Ghanaian NGOs has some sort of programme, is the lack of decentralisation. CDD, IDEG and IEA work on it from an institutional perspective, and ISODEC and Abantu from the perspective of the participation of the poor and women respectively. Although Ghana has decentralised structures in the form of districts, the central executive dominates these structures, leaving less space for local input and participation. The District Assemblies are only partly decentralised because the president has the right to appoint and dismiss the District Chief Executive and one-third of the assembly members. The independence of the districts is also undermined by financial dependence on the central government, which allocates only 5% of the national budget to them. This is not sufficient to attract qualified personnel and sustain a local bureaucracy. As a result, many of the bureaucratic structures at the local level still take orders from Accra (Crawford, 2008; Owusu, 2005).

In contrast, in Indonesia an ambitious decentralisation programme was implemented after the fall of Suharto. In a short period of time, the central government transferred most of its tasks along with two-thirds of its bureaucracy to the local level (Fitrani, Hofman, & Kaiser, 2005). The decentralised structure consists of provinces,

districts, sub-districts and municipalities. Except for the sub-districts, these structures have direct elections for both the legislative and the executive. As in Ghana, the most important source of income comes from the central government, which allocates 25% of its budget to the sub-national level (Perdana & Friawan, 2007).

In Ghana the centralisation of power is an obstacle to democracy, but in Indonesia dispersed power delivers its own set of problems. First of all, the aforementioned conflicts are sometimes linked to the process of decentralisation. Although it helped to improve the situation in long-lasting conflicts such as Aceh and East Timor, some argue that in other cases the handing over of decision-making authority to the local level actually fuelled the fire of ethnic conflict and secessionism (Brancati, 2006). Second, Indonesia copes with much higher levels of corruption than Ghana (Kaufmann et al., 2009). During the New Order regime, corruption was also high, but limited to a relatively small clique around Suharto. After the fall of Suharto, corruption spread through the Indonesian system, following the separation of powers. In the judiciary, it became so widespread that almost nobody working for it was above suspicion (Ghoshal, 2004). In addition, the process of decentralisation effectively spread corruption throughout the country, bringing it closer to the people (Aspinall & Van Klinken, 2011; Hadiz, 2004). Therefore, many NGOs in Indonesia, including PSHK and Partnership, see combating corruption as an important aspect of improving democracy there. To sum up, the mission statements of the NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia can be called 'context-specific' because they relate to important issues which can be identified in the wider socio-political environment in which they operate.

## **Comparing Strategies**

From our interview data we uncovered a range of strategies being pursued by the NGOs. Table 3.3 summarises our findings, and despite some deviating strategies, like ISODEC's service delivery work and KID's focus on political education at the regional level, it also shows some remarkable similarities. First, almost every organisation in our sample has embraced research-based advocacy as a main strategy, and second, within this strategy they focus on non-confrontational forms of advocacy, mainly targeting the central government.

The strategy of research and advocacy can be summarised as identifying a problem, conducting research on this problem, writing a research report with recommendations, and finally advocating these recommendations among policy-makers. At Demos "there are only two divisions, one for advocacy and one for research, but it's not really separated" (Interview Demos, March 2008). High quality research is seen as a necessary input for advocacy activities because "you cannot promote advocacy work without having evidence" (Interview Abantu, December 2007), and advocacy activities are "are only taken seriously by the government when they are backed by research" (Interview IDEG, December 2008). Advocacy follows

C	rganisation		Mai	n type of stra	tegy	
		Research and	d Advocacy	Service	Political	Civil society
		Institutional	Protest	delivery	education	capacity building
	Abantu	V				V
ซ	CDD	$\checkmark$				
Ghana	IDEG	$\checkmark$				$\sqrt{}$
G	IEA	$\checkmark$				
	ISODEC	$\checkmark$	$\sqrt{}$	$\checkmark$		$\sqrt{}$
	Demos	$\checkmark$				
ಹ	Elsam	$\checkmark$				
Indonesia	KID				<b>√</b> *	
орі	Partnership	$\checkmark$				$\sqrt{}$
<u>-</u>	PSHK	$\sqrt{}$				
	Yappika	$\checkmark$	$\sqrt{}$			$\sqrt{}$

<sup>\*</sup> Most of the other NGOs are also involved in political education programmes, but not as a main strategy. Furthermore, KID's approach to political education differs from the other NGOs. Whereas for the other NGOs it is more part of their advocacy work, KID has set up several democracy schools throughout Indonesia where local politicians, civil society activists and community and business leaders follow a curriculum on the norms, values and practices of democracy.

Sources: Interviews, NGO documents, NGO websites

research because "research will only fill up your bookshelves if you do not advocate the findings" (Interview PSHK, April 2008). The strategy is so appealing that even organisations focusing on community development (Yappika and ISODEC) added it to their repertoire. They had similar reasons for doing so. At Yappika, they reasoned that "just to channel money to NGOs is not enough" and that they "also had to build experience in policy advocacy to be able to influence policy reform" (Interview Yappika, April 2008), while ISODEC "wanted to have a bigger impact on society, so the idea of rights-based advocacy came in" (Interview ISODEC, December 2007).

The range of possible advocacy tactics is rather broad, from all kinds of protests to careful institutionally embedded forms of communication and advice (Jenkins, 2006). In both Ghana and Indonesia, institutional advocacy tactics are dominant. The NGOs advocate their messages through roundtables, conferences, seminars, book launches, radio, TV, newspapers, and lobbying parliamentarians and policymakers. By employing such non-confrontational strategies, the organisations find it easier to get access to parliamentarians and policymakers and make sure that "they take your work into account and use it to improve the governance system in the country"

(Interview IEA, November 2008). The best guarantee for getting access and being heard is having informal contacts because when "people have personal friends in government, it works very well in getting issues pushed through" (Interview CDD, November 2007). Therefore, they go playing golf with the minister (Interview Partnership, April 2008), stay in close touch with "the good guys in parliament and government" (Interview Elsam, April 2008), and invite "ministers, members of parliament and ambassadors for an informal lunch" (Interview IEA, November 2008). ISODEC and Yappika are the only organisations in our sample which are prepared to employ protest forms of advocacy to put pressure on the government. They usually start their advocacy activities with institutional forms like lobbying, but "if lobbying brings no change, we back off and organise for a demonstration" (Interview Yappika, April 2008). ISODEC applied the same logic in their campaign against the privatisation of water in Ghana:

"The water campaign started in a workshop setting with policymakers and the community. But when the minister wanted to go ahead with this water privatisation, [...] there is no compromise, so definitely something has to be done to stop it. And the only way is to demonstrate. So our mode of advocacy may be different from that of the other NGOs" (Interview ISODEC, November 2008).

Although the other NGOs join advocacy coalitions and lend their expertise to them, they do not engage directly in the activity of organizing demonstrations. Like PSHK, they "focus more on the research and policy advocacy, so we only do demonstrations with coalitions, not in our work plan, but indirectly" (Interview PSHK, April 2008). Different reasons are given for not joining or organizing demonstrations. Some think it is the job of other organisations to do this (KID), others say that their donors would not approve of this strategy (Partnership), and again others point out that this would damage the relationship of trust they have built with the government (IDEG, Abantu).

#### Context and Strategy

In Ghana, the non-confrontational approach to influencing state officials can be placed within a context where state-society relations are quite good. In Indonesia, where state-society relations are more antagonistic, this is however not the case. After a history of repression, both Ghana and Indonesia now have an enabling legal environment for democracy-promoting NGOs. By its very nature, promoting democracy is politically sensitive as it means challenging and criticizing existing state institutions. During the military regimes of Suharto (Indonesia) and Rawlings (Ghana), only de-politicised NGO activities such as relief and community welfare activities were permitted. All other independent NGO activity was looked upon with suspicion and vocal NGOs were actively repressed or co-opted (Gyimah-Boadi & Oquaye,

2000; Hadiwinata, 2004). To fight for democracy in such a context is dangerous and requires careful non-confrontational tactics in order to avoid persecution. In Indonesia, NGOs had to act like chameleons and adopt the state ideology as their own ideology (Hadiwinata, 2004). In Ghana, large groups of citizens reacted to repression by retreating into local forms of organisation, outside the scope of the state (Chazan, 1988).

Towards the end of the military regimes, societal groups became more vocal, openly confronting the regime with demands for change. In both Ghana and Indonesia, the transition to democracy opened the space for NGOs to pursue their own agenda's and have their own ideologies. Constitutional provisions now safeguard the right to engage in a whole range of democracy promoting activities such as civic education, community organisation, civil society building, mobilisation, lobby and advocacy, and protest and demonstrations.

Although the current legal environments in Ghana and Indonesia allow a similar range of NGO activities, state-society relations make it more likely for Indonesian NGOs to pursue confrontational strategies than NGOs in Ghana. In contrast to Ghana, the transition to democracy was particularly violent in Indonesia, causing conflicts throughout the country. This reinforced a sense of mutual suspicion and distrust, which had been building up between state officials and civil society groups in the decade before the fall of Suharto (Hadiwinata, 2004). Many NGOs proliferated to oppose the hegemony of the Indonesian state (Clarke, 1998). State officials therefore generally see civil society actors as destabilising, and many NGOs still perceive of the state as an adversary, therefore "many of civil society's tactics are confrontational and hardnosed" (Ibrahim, 2006, p. 7). In Ghana, state-society relations also started out from low levels of mutual trust, but since the transition to democracy there has been a growing space for interaction between NGO leaders, government officials and even activists (Darkwa, Amponsah, & Gyampoh, 2006). State-society relations improved most notably when the opposition party NPP first came to power in 2000. While in opposition, the NPP had collaborated with many NGOs, which improved mutual understanding and trust (Interview University of Legon - Faculty of Political Science, November 2007). In such a context, it is less likely and perhaps less necessary for NGOs to resort to confrontational strategies.

#### Comparing Structures

In both Ghana and Indonesia, the NGOs are hierarchic organisations, which "do not have members but they have a governing board" (Interview UNDP, April 2008). The governing board represents "the highest decision-making body" (Interview Abantu. November 2008). The main task of the board is to outline the strategic direction of the organisation, because "at the end of the day the board decides about the issues we will focus on" (Interview IEA, December 2008). Below the board level, the management takes most of the daily decisions. In principle, the policy will be "decided at the top of the structure, but in the practice, all of the policies are discussed in the executive staff" (Interview Yappika, April 2008), and "most of the activities are designed together with the board" (Interview Elsam, April 2008). These boards often include founders of the organisation and important national figures, as is the case with Partnership, where the board consists of "prominent leaders in Indonesia, from the private sector, from NGOs, from the university, and from the government we have ministers and even the president" (Interview Partnership, April 2008). This is an understandable but also rather paradoxical situation, if we realise that the mission of quite a few of these organisations is to strengthen the position of the common citizen against the existing power holders.

Because the structures of the NGOs are closed to membership participation, the people they supposedly work for have no direct influence on the direction of organisational policy, nor are the organisations formally accountable to them. This is also the case for ISODEC and Demos, even though they are democratic membership organisations. They both regard marginalised people in their country as their constituency, but they have not yet succeeded in including them in their membership. At ISODEC, "the membership is very restricted, there is no mass membership" (Interview ISODEC, November 2008) and at Demos "there are about 35 members, staff members, human rights activists, journalists and academics" (Interview Demos, March 2008). Both organisations intend to be more inclusive, but neither has succeeded in doing so because their constituencies are relatively large and sometimes difficult to reach.

In general, the NGOs in the sample experience problems in defining and limiting their constituencies: "The problem with these national NGOs is that they don't have a clear constituency, unlike grassroots NGOs whose constituency is very clear, but with these NGOs the constituency is everybody" (Interview Asian Development Bank, March 2008). Abantu and Yappika for instance have very large constituencies as they are working for 'women in Ghana' and for 'NGOs in Indonesia', and at many of the think-tanks and policy institutes the constituencies are even less well defined: "You talk about policymakers, civil society itself, the general public itself, development partners, researchers, academics. Because our main tools are research, advocacy and training, it is quite a broad constituency" (Interview CDD, December 2007). Not knowing exactly for whom you work weakens the link with society because then there is also no societal group to whom you should be accountable.

#### Context and Structure

The legal framework in both Ghana and Indonesia allows for a whole range of organisational forms. As a result their civil society sectors are populated by all sorts of formal and informal associations such as advocacy groups, service delivery

NGOs, faith-based organisations, trade unions and community-based organisations (Darkwa et al., 2006; Ibrahim, 2006). If we take context-specificity to mean that we should find a similar variety of organisational forms in our sample, we can conclude from our empirical findings that this is clearly not the case. However, because this criterion looks at a spectrum of organisational forms in an NGO community, it does not tell us much about the context-specificity of the organisational structure of individual NGOs. As the context does not provide direct clues to what kind of organisational structure would be 'context-specific' in either country, we will take a more normative approach.

Democracy is about the inclusion, participation and representation of all seaments of society. According to Hadenius and Uggla (1996, p. 1623) "to serve as an organ of socialisation into the practice of democracy, the associations in question must themselves be democratically structured". Similarly, Robinson and Friedman (2007, p. 644) hypothesise that internally democratic NGOs "can make a positive contribution to the process of democratisation by fostering pluralism, promoting democratic values, and enhancing political participation". In other words, contributing to these particular aspects requires organisations that are themselves rooted in their society and open to societal input. From this perspective, we would expect context-specific NGOs in both Ghana and Indonesia to have organisational structures that strengthen their links with society and facilitate the participation and inclusion of many different societal groups.

The optimal structure for strengthening the link with society is a democratic membership organisation. Organisational structures can be either conducive or obstructive to rooting an organisation in its environment. A distinction can be made between two extremes, namely hierarchic non-membership organisations and democratic membership organisations (Jenkins, 2006).<sup>27</sup> Hierarchic non-membership structures insulate themselves from their environment by having top-down power structures. The management and the board of the organisation can determine the organisational course regardless of what happens in the environment. Interaction with the environment is carefully managed and in its most extreme form limited to the composition of the board. At the other end of the spectrum are democratic membership organisations. The bottom-up power structures make the membership the highest decision-making authority, thereby institutionalizing environmental input. By being open and accountable to the environment, the organisation loses control, but achieves embeddedness.

Instead of open structures, in both countries we find hierarchic non-membership organisations that are closed to citizen participation. This seems paradoxical because, while striving for democracy, the people and groups they claim to work for

<sup>27</sup> Although there are various intermediate forms, such as hierarchic membership organisations, we focus here on the two extremes for the sake of our argument.

are not included. Furthermore, many of the NGOs have trouble pinpointing their constituency, so it is not clear for whom they work and to whom they should account. The only two democratic membership organisations in the sample, ISODEC and Demos, are not the kind of organisations where a constituency organises and speaks for itself. As the people for whom they work (the poor and vulnerable) are not included in their membership, they can be characterised as trustee organisations, i.e. they speak for those who do not speak for themselves (Ottaway, 2000).

#### **Comparing Human Resources**

In terms of human resources, we find that NGOs in both Ghana and Indonesia are dominated by hired professionals with an elite profile, namely highly trained academics, many of whom received education abroad. The volunteers that work within the NGOs are small in number and resemble the elite profile of the staff. The core staff of every NGO in our sample is almost exclusively composed of hired professionals, like at Demos where "almost 90% of the staff studied at university" (Interview Demos, March 2008). Managers in Ghana and Indonesia mentioned the level of education as the most important quality of their personnel. The general tendency is that "to be a core staff, you have to have some professional competence" (Interview CDD, November 2007), and sometimes "even the supporting staff, like the receptionist, has a good first degree" (Interview IEA, December 2007). Many of these academics received their masters or PhD at European or American universities, and among the NGO leaders are prominent national scholars such as Dr. Gyimah-Boadi (formerly IEA and currently CDD) in Ghana and Dr. Ignas Kleden (KID) in Indonesia. Partnership provides a good example of this elite profile. According to the UNDP their staff "is similar to the Indonesian staff we would have at UNDP" while adding: "In fact, a lot of our staff works there now, and vice versa" (Interview UNDP, April 2008). Partnership itself not only confirms this image but even strengthens it: "Basically we work with university graduates, not only at the policy level but also on a more practical level" (Interview Partnership, April 2008).

Organisations which started out with volunteers and activists, like ISODEC and Elsam, now also mainly work with academics. In the case of ISODEC, people that have been hired with a lower level of education are encouraged to pursue an academic degree abroad.<sup>28</sup> Elsam notes that this process of professionalisation has had mixed consequences, namely gaining expertise in their field of work at the cost of losing touch with society:

"Before, we had the activists from the 90s generation, but since 2000 we see a different character. [...] I think the new generation has more expertise about human rights [...] but lacks the experience of organizing the basis, like peasants, workers, or the urban poor. [...] So we have very skilful staff for dealing with the government and for legal drafting, but they have a very limited knowledge about society" (Interview Elsam, April 2008).

The NGOs in both Ghana and Indonesia also resemble each other in the sense that volunteers are small in number and have a high level of education. In some organisations "nobody volunteers" (Partnership) or the number is "very minimal" (ISODEC). Usually these volunteers are "either fresh graduate students or students who are in their last semester doing an internship" (Interview PSHK, April 2008). Most of them stay for a limited period or become staff members. Besides domestic students, the NGOs also receive international graduate students (Abantu) or PhD candidates (KID) as volunteers. At the level of project implementation, the number of volunteers sometimes rises. Yappika can count on about twenty active students who "help organizing mass actions, they organise their friends and make banners" (Interview Yappika, April 2008), while Demos cooperates "with 32 key informants, 130 local researchers, and about 1200 informants" to implement their research (Interview Demos, March 2008). However, although these volunteers perform valuable functions at project level, they have no influence within the organisational hierarchy.

#### Context and Human Resources

There are basically two ways of determining the context-specificity of human resources. One way would be to assess whether the people working for the NGOs reflect different societal groups. This is a difficult approach, as it requires defining important societal groups in Ghana and Indonesia, which are complex societies with multiple divisions between ethnic, religious, social and economic groups. A more practical approach would be to see whether they have staff members who maintain a link with society. Here we can use a (crude) distinction, which is often made in non-profit literature, between organisations that are dominated by professional staff and organisations that are dominated by volunteers and activists (Hwang & Powell, 2009). While not being mutually exclusive, these categories draw a clear picture of, on the one hand, people who are motivated by a salary and are hired because of their expertise and, on the other hand, people who work for free and are motivated by their ideals. We would expect to find a mix of both: professionals who are hired to perform certain technical tasks to keep the organisation running, and volunteers and activists who have their feet on the ground and serve to strengthen the link with the communities they work for.

Both benchmarks indicate that our findings are not context-specific. In both Ghana and Indonesia the NGOs are dominated by professionals. More specifically, they are dominated by a group of highly trained academics, many of whom received education abroad. This means that instead of including a diversity of domestic groups, in both countries the NGOs are controlled by an academic elite. Even most of their volunteers resemble this elite profile. Furthermore, although volunteers perform some important functions at the level of project implementation, their influence at higher levels in the organisation is minimal. These findings also contrast with the importance of volunteerism in wider civil society in both countries, because at community level 84% of the Indonesians are performing volunteer work (Ibrahim, 2006, p. 30) and in Ghana "civil society is characterised by a significant level of human resources (mainly volunteers) that work for NGOs operating at different levels, in both urban and rural settings" (Darkwa et al., 2006, p. 8).

#### **Comparing Financial Resources**

In terms of financial resources, neither Ghanaian nor Indonesian NGOs manage to raise enough income domestically to sustain their organisation. Interviewees named several sources of domestic income, namely membership dues, philanthropy and marketing expertise. As none of the organisations has an extensive membership, this provides no substantial source of income. In terms of philanthropy, we find some differences between Ghana and Indonesia. In Ghana, philanthropic gifts were virtually absent. In Indonesia, some organisations managed to get some, like PSHK whose building is "a donation from one of our founders", but none of these gifts could cover the costs of day-to-day operations (Interview PSHK, March 2008). Finally, in both Ghana and Indonesia, most organisations generate some resources by "selling publications and professional expertise to other institutions" (Interview CDD, November 2007). During the 1990s, ISODEC raised about 40% of its income in this way. They were "doing service delivery and consultancies for the government", but "when we shifted focus from service delivery to advocacy [...] all of a sudden we lost all those contracts" (Interview ISODEC, December 2007). Nowadays, none of the organisations manages to raise more than 20% of its income domestically.

Because of the lack of local revenues, "the bulk of finance comes from donor support" (Interview CDD, November 2007), and "most of our money comes from international relations" (Interview Yappika, April 2008). Despite differences in the number of donors, the types of donors (e.g., private aid agencies, bilateral or multilateral donors) and the amount of money they get, the organisations are united by the fact that none could survive in its current form without donor support. IDEG explains that in Ghana "most civil society organisations and most policy institutes depend upon foreign donors" and that without this foreign assistance they "could not be operating, because internal sources in Ghana are zero" (Interview IDEG, December

2007). In Indonesia the same story is told. According to the Asian Development Bank (Interview March 2008), "NGOs are very much donor-oriented [as] very few come up with their own money", adding that "if the tap is closed I do not know what will happen to them". Such financial problems are described as "a common problem".

#### Context and Financial Resources

In terms of financial resources, we could define context-specificity as the ability of an organisation to sustain itself locally without being dependent on international funding. In that case, the NGOs in both Ghana and Indonesia would not be classified as being 'context-specific' because of their donor-dependency. One might say that this finding is unsurprising as one of the selection criteria was that the NGOs receive donor funding. However, receiving donor funding does not necessarily imply donordependency. NGOs that receive funding still have the opportunity to reduce dependency by raising their own income. To see whether our findings really indicate a lack of context-specificity, we also need to look at the potential availability of domestic resources for NGOs. In that case the picture changes somewhat because the Indonesian context provides NGOs with more opportunities than the Ghanaian context.

Domestic sources of income can take the form of private giving, charging membership fees and obtaining government subsidies (Wang, 2006). In general, Sub-Saharan Africa represents the least favourable region for local fundraising, whereas Asian developing countries have more favourable indicators. Although Ghana scores better on many indicators than other Sub-Saharan countries, it still scores lower than Indonesia (Kluijver, 2010). On average, Indonesians earn about three times more than Ghanaians, with a per capita income (purchasing power parity, 2010) of US\$4,300 compared to US\$1,600.29 In both countries, wealth is spread unequally among the population, but because of the higher level of income, there is a smaller percentage of the population living below the poverty line in Indonesia (13%) than in Ghana (29%).30 The highest concentration of wealth can be found in urban centres on Java, such as Jakarta and Yogyakarta. These cities see a rising middle class with more disposable income (Asian Development Bank, 2010). Along with the growing wealth, there is a growing culture of corporate social responsibility, which creates opportunities for NGOs to raise funds (Ibrahim, 2006). Although Ghana has a comparable pattern of concentration of wealth in urban centres (mainly in the south), this has not yet translated into a stable urban middle class (Government of Ghana, 2007). Because of the widespread poverty, Ghanaians have less disposable income for membership dues or private donations to NGOs (Darkwa et al., 2006). In

<sup>29</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, CIA World fact book 2011, available at: https://www.cia.gov/library/ publications/the-world-factbook [accessed May 2011].

Ibid.

addition, there is virtually no culture of corporate philanthropy (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004). Finally, state support as a source of income is hardly available in either Ghana or Indonesia. Although it is possible to get government contracts for social service delivery activities, it is very unlikely to receive funding for the more politically sensitive activity of promoting democracy (Darkwa et al., 2006; Ibrahim, 2006). Summing up, in Ghana, donor-dependency can be related to the absence of local resources, whereas this is not the case for Indonesia.

#### 3.5 Conclusion and Discussion

The main aim of this chapter was to contribute to the debate by giving substance to the elusive concept of context-specificity. Based on our exploration, we have created a framework for judging the extent to which an NGO can be classified as contextspecific. First, based on the premise that each country follows its own path to democracy and encounters different obstacles on its way, we expect these different obstacles to manifest themselves in the mission statements of the NGOs. In other words, a mission statement is context-specific when an NGO focuses on problems with democracy which are relevant for their country. Second, although the appropriate strategy (i.e. confrontational or non-confrontational) always depends on the specific situation, it is possible to say something more in general about strategy and context. Each country has its own type of (political) culture and state-society relations with a repertoire of acceptable and unacceptable ways of reacting to a problem. A strategy which works in Ghana might, for instance, be counter-productive in Indonesia. Third, based on the premise that NGOs act as vehicles for involving citizens, we link context-specificity to having democratic structures which are open to membership participation of all kinds of citizens. In this sense we equate context-specificity with being open to societal input. Fourth, in terms of human resources we find a useful distinction in non-profit literature, namely between professionals and volunteers/ activists. Without becoming too deterministic, we would expect a context-specific NGO to not only work with professionals, but to also have some staff that maintains a link with society (broadly defined as volunteers and activists). Finally, raising your own income and independence from external donors are used as a benchmark for determining financial context-specificity. To this principle we add a 'reality check' by looking at various economic indicators which represent the potential for raising an income locally.

If we relate our empirical findings to this framework, we are presented with a mixed picture in terms of context-specificity. The different contexts in which the NGOs are situated are well reflected in their mission statements, so in that sense the organisations can be classified as being context-specific. When looking at strategy,

the non-confrontational approach of Ghanaian NGOs fits with the state-society relations, while this was not the case in Indonesia. The organisational structures of both Indonesian and Ghanaian NGOs lack context-specificity, as most have hierarchical structures which are closed to societal input. In terms of human resources, we find NGOs which mainly rely on professionals rather than on volunteers and activists. Finally, none of the NGOs is able to raise enough income locally to sustain its organisation. However, the resulting donor-dependence was more expected in Ghana than in Indonesia because of the lack of financial resources within the country. In summary, based on our framework, we can conclude that NGOs in Ghana are more in tune with their context than Indonesian NGOs.

At the same time, the similarities we find across both countries are striking. Apart from what they aim to achieve (mission), when looking at how they do it (strategy), who is doing it (human resources) and with what kind of structure and financial resources, context seems to be of no importance. Regardless of the context, the dominant organisational configuration is that of a hierarchic non-membership organisation, which is dependent on donors for its finances and owned and run by an academic elite with a bias for doing research and non-confrontational advocacy. The similarities between both countries are so strong that it seems as if the NGOs were cut from the same cloth.

How can we explain these similarities across such different contexts? One possible explanation might be the fact that all NGOs in our sample are donordependent. To shed light on this issue we need to elaborate on the aspect of financial resources. Within our framework, financial resources can be seen as an overarching aspect, potentially affecting the 'context-specificity' of all other organisational characteristics. This is the case because finance directly relates to organisational autonomy. We can show how this works by translating the critiques of donor funding mentioned in the introduction into the terminology of our framework. These studies basically argue that donor-dependence and upward accountability have caused mission to follow money, structures and human resources to conform to particular organisational paradigms, and strategies to become less confrontational. One could say that donor-dependence inhibits the danger of replacing context-specificity with donor-specificity. A pure donor-specific NGO would be a professional organisation (structure and human resources) which is able to apply and account for funding (financial resources), which reacts to donor priorities (mission), and which does not act in a way that puts donors in a difficult position (strategy). Although our analysis does not permit us to draw firm conclusions about the effect of donor-dependence on the organisational form of NGOs, our findings in Ghana and Indonesia seem to indicate a high degree of donor-specificity. So despite the pledge of donors to adapt their funding strategies to the local context and to promote local participation and ownership, this has not yet resulted in context-specific partner organisations.

# Appendix 3.1: Overview of interview data

#### Overview of interview data Ghana

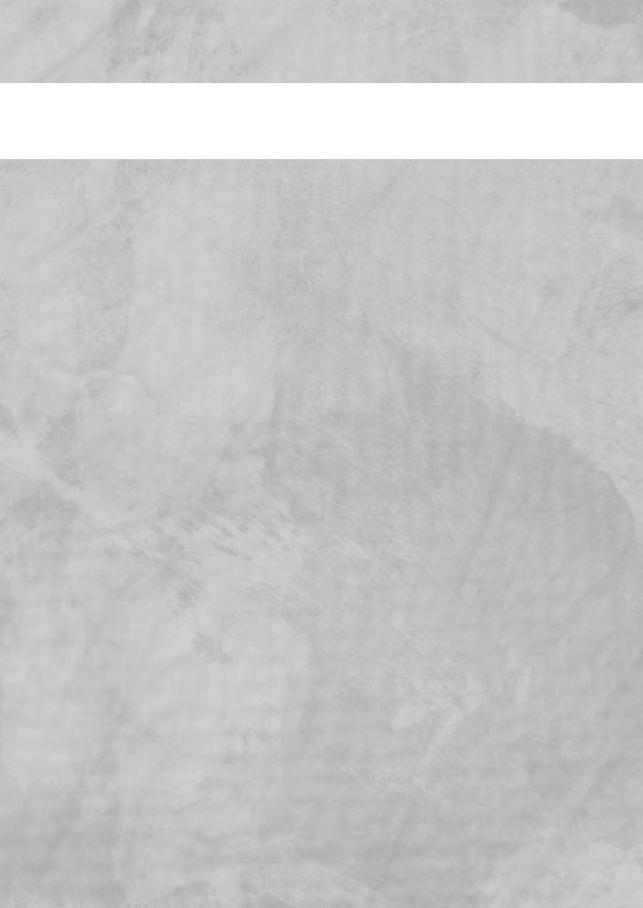
Organisation	Туре	Respondents / interviews	Date(s)
Center for Democratic Development (CDD)	NGO	2 persons / 3 interviews	11/30/2007 12/03/2007 12/11/2008
Institute of Democratic Governance (IDEG)	NGO	3 persons / 3 interviews	12/04/2007 12/05/2007 12/10/2008
Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA)	NGO	2 persons / 3 interviews	12/11/2007 11/06/2008 12/12/2008
Integrated Social Development Center (ISODEC)	NGO	3 persons / 5 interviews	12/06/2007 11/05/2008 11/10/2008 12/12/2008
Abantu for development	NGO	2 persons / 3 interviews	12/13/2007 11/06/2008 11/11/2008
GAPVOD (Umbrella organisation for Ghanaian NGOs)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	11/29/2007
IBIS Ghana	International NGO	1 person / 1 interview	12/14/2007
Netherlands Embassy	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	11/28/2007
Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	01/23/2008
Ghana Research and Advocacy Program (G-RAP)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	11/19/2007
Faculty of Law – University of Ghana	University	1 person / 1 interview	11/28/2007
Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) – University of Ghana	University	2 persons / 2 interviews	11/19/2007
Department of Political Science – University of Ghana	University	2 persons / 2 interviews	11/26/2007 11/27/2007

Note: a total of 27 interviews with 21 respondents (one respondent works for both university and for one of the selected NGOs).

#### Overview of interview data Indonesia

Organisation	Туре	Respondents / interviews	Date(s)
Demos - Centre for democracy and human rights studies	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	03/31/2008
Centre for Indonesian Law and Policy Studies (PSHK)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	04/03/2008
Partnership for Democratic Governance Reform	NGO	3 persons / 1 interview	04/03/2008
Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (Elsam)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	04/07/2008
Yappika - The Civil Society Alliance for Democracy	NGO	3 persons / 2 interviews	04/09/2008
Indonesian Community for Democracy (KID)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	04/10/2008
Institute of Research, Education and Information of Social and Economic Affairs (LP3ES)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	04/04/2008
Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)	NGO	2 persons / 2 interviews	03/19/2008 03/31/2008
NGO consultant Jakarta	NGO expert	1 person / 1 interview	03/18/2008
United Nations Development Program (UNDP)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	04/01/2008
Netherlands Embassy	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	03/26/2008
Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	01/23/2008
Asian Development Bank (ADB)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	03/25/2008
Faculty of Social and Political Science - Universitas Indonesia (Jakarta)	University	2 persons / 2 interviews	03/26/2008 04/02/2008
Center for Population and Policy Studies – Gadjah Mada University (Yogyakarta)	University	1 person / 2 interviews	03/11/2008 03/11/2009
Faculty of Social and Political Science – Gadjah Mada University (Yogyakarta)	University	1 person / 1 interview	04/20/2009

Note: a total of 20 interviews with 22 respondents.



# Chapter 4

# Worlds apart but much alike: Donor-funding and the homogenisation of NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia\*

A version of this chapter has been accepted for publication as: Kamstra, J., & Schulpen, L. Worlds apart but much alike: Donor-funding and the homogenisation of NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia. Studies in Comparative International Development (forthcoming).

#### **Abstract**

In the field of civil society and democracy promotion, the relevance and effectiveness of donor strategies is often linked to their ability to adjust to local contextual factors. Despite the importance attached to tailor-made approaches, donor-sponsored democracy promoting NGOs in such different parts of the world as Ghana and Indonesia have very similar organisational characteristics. This paper explores the question of why they are so similar. We draw on institutional theory and use the concepts of organisational field and organisational isomorphism to illustrate how different pressures result in the homogenisation of organisational characteristics. We find that besides the more commonly identified unequal power relation between donor and recipient, homogenisation also stems from the NGOs themselves and from the relation between their various organisational characteristics (i.e. mission, staff, strategy and structure). Furthermore, we argue that the process of homogenisation can be seen as the institutionalisation of trust between donor and recipient. In our discussion we reflect on what our findings mean for donor support to NGOs and democracy.

#### Keywords

Civil society, democracy, organisational isomorphism, international development aid, Ghana, Indonesia.

#### 4.1 Introduction

In the 1990s the international aid system embraced civil society organisations such as NGOs as the panacea for democracy and development. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, they were welcomed "as an antidote to state expansion" (Fowler, 2000, p. 7) and "as the seedbeds of democracy" (Sørensen, 1993, p. 57). A critical and vibrant civil society was generally perceived as a positive force for democracy (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000a). The many desirable functions of NGOs include serving as a check on state power, fostering public deliberation, helping to include the poor and marginalised, educating citizens on the norms and values of democracy, and being able to cater to local circumstances and local needs (Diamond, 1999; Edwards, 2004; Fowler, 2000; Hendriks, 2006; Houtzager & Lavalle, 2010; Warren, 2001).

This positive image deteriorated when studies from around the world showed that many donor-funded NGOs were not able to live up to these high expectations. Moreover, they linked this failure to the nature of the international aid system. Donorfunding had various negative effects such as accountability to donors instead of constituencies, NGOs maintaining rather than challenging the status quo, and NGOs following donor priorities rather than their own (Elbers & Arts, 2011; Fagan, 2005; Hearn, 2000, 2007; Henderson, 2002; Parks, 2008). In addition, several authors noted the tendency of donors to apply blueprint approaches and enforce a particular Western organisational paradigm in very different countries (Blaug, 2002; Easterly, 2006; Evans, 2004). The outcome of these processes was that donor-sponsored NGOs around the world started resembling each other, a phenomenon which has been described by several names, such as 'NGOisation' (Alvarez, 1999) and 'institutional monocropping' (Evans, 2004).

The aid system has been identified as an important factor in causing NGOs to homogenise. It is "a powerful structural force, impacting organisational landscapes and civil societies all over the world in complex ways we do not yet understand" (Tvedt, 2002, p. 363). This lack of understanding is often linked to a lack of value-free systematic academic research on NGOs (Kopecky & Mudde, 2003; Mercer, 2002; Opoku-Mensah, 2007; Ottaway & Carothers, 2000a). Opoku-Mensah (2007, p. 13) for instance, argues that NGO research "has remained largely normative and 'actionoriented', paying relatively little attention to questions of power". To incorporate these questions of power, an analytical approach is needed which recognises that NGOs in developing countries do not necessarily express the societal needs and values of the country, but often "mirror the needs and values expressed at donor conferences" (Tvedt, 2007, p. 45).

This study aims to contribute to our understanding of why NGOs are so similar by looking at how donor-funding affects the concrete organisational characteristics of NGOs (their mission, staff, strategy and structure). We analyse these processes for

donor-sponsored NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia. The analysis in chapter 3 has shown that the NGOs are strikingly similar in their organisational characteristics despite major contextual differences. This study builds on the outcomes of that analysis and focuses on finding an explanation for such similarities.

We look at mission, staff, strategy, and structure because these are the organisational characteristics for which (in theory) it would be logical to find differences rather than similarities between NGOs from different countries. Like all formal organisations, NGOs "need structures for defining goals, making decisions, mobilizing resources and directing resources towards goals" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 316). Successful organisations, i.e. the ones that survive, have a structure and a strategy that best serve the purpose of the organisation and are consistent with the environment in which it operates (Mintzberg, 1983). For NGOs this means that they need to adapt their "mission, their functions and their structures" to the social and political context in which they operate (Diamond, 1999, p. 230). Based on these ideas, one would not expect to find many similarities between NGOs from different continents.

To uncover the processes stimulating the homogenisation of organisations we use the concepts of institutional isomorphism and organisational fields (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995, 2008). These concepts have been widely applied in business, non-profit and administrative science literature to tackle questions of organisational similarity (see for instance: Benders, Batenburg, & van der Blonk, 2006; D'Aunno, Sutton, & Price, 1991; Dacin, 1997; Fiss & Zajac, 2004; Frumkin & Galaskiewicz, 2004; Reay & Hinings, 2009; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). In contrast, there are only a few empirical studies on development NGOs devoted to this phenomenon (these include: Aksartova, 2009; Ebrahim, 2002, 2005; Ramanath, 2009). None of these studies, however, uses variation in context as a starting point for their analysis. For our analysis this is important because, as Ghana and Indonesia are such different countries, we minimised the chance that the similarities in organisational characteristics are actually caused by similarities in the social, cultural, economic and political environments.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. First, we explain our research methodology and summarise the outcomes of our previous analysis of the Ghanaian and Indonesian democracy promoting NGOs. Second, we introduce the concepts of organisational field and institutional isomorphism. Third, we show that in both the Ghanaian and Indonesian organisational fields, international actors have become more important for NGO survival than national actors. Fourth, we use the notion of institutional isomorphism to analyse how donor-dependency affects the organisational characteristics of NGOs in terms of mission, staff, strategy and structure. We find that besides the more often identified imposition of rules and regulations by donors, there are many more subtle processes stimulating homogenisation, which are not necessarily imposed by donors. We conclude our

empirical analysis with a flowchart showing the various forces at work, and more importantly, how they are interrelated and reinforce each other. In our discussion we reflect on what our findings mean for donors wishing to support NGOs and democracy.

#### 4.2 Data and methods

The chapter is based on extensive fieldwork in Ghana (Accra) and Indonesia (Jakarta) between November 2007 and April 2009. The fieldwork consists of 47 in-depth interviews with 43 respondents, principally with directors, researchers and founding members of the NGOs. To balance their stories, interviews were conducted with local experts, i.e. political scientists, NGO consultants and representatives of major bi- and multilateral donor agencies in the country (for an overview see appendix 4.1). In addition to interview data, the analysis uses the annual reports, funding reports, internal documents, and websites and publications of the selected NGOs. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and subsequently analysed through a process of thematic coding in the software package Atlas.ti.

The research was organised so as to maximise the chance of finding different NGOs by looking in two different parts of the world. The underlying idea was that democracy and civil society are context-specific phenomena and that supporting them therefore requires a tailor-made approach (Howell & Pearce, 2001). To study the NGOs within their specific contexts, the research employed a comparative case study design. By contrasting the contexts, it is possible to examine how different conditions cause different outcomes of the phenomenon (Yin, 2003). Ghana and Indonesia represent the different contexts and the democratisation NGOs represent the phenomenon.

We found that the Ghanaian and Indonesian NGOs are very similar despite major contextual differences. Although mission statements echo national differences, there are remarkable similarities in terms of strategies, structures and resources. Regardless of the context, the dominant organisational form is that of a hierarchic non-membership organisation (structure), which is dependent on donors for its finances (financial resources) and which is owned and run by an academic elite (staff) that focuses on doing research and non-confrontational lobby and advocacy work, such as organizing seminars, roundtables and debates (strategy). This contrasts with the image of an 'ideal' democracy promoting NGO, which is financially independent, has a leadership that is elected by and accountable to its members, is open to membership participation in the process of decision-making, has a membership that is open to all kinds of citizens, and can act as a countervailing power because confrontational advocacy tactics such as mass demonstrations are also part of its repertoire. We

conclude that despite the pledge of donors to adapt their funding strategies to the local context and to promote local participation and ownership, their partner organisations do not conform to this ideal (Kamstra, Knippenberg, & Schulpen, 2013). This paper builds on this study by exploring the role of donor funding in the similarities we encountered.

The NGOs have been selected by means of criterion sampling (Miles & Huberman. 1994). It is a qualitative sample, and as such it is not randomised and not representative in statistical terms. The purpose of this sampling technique is to capture the variety of a phenomenon within the boundaries of the criteria. Three criteria guided the selection. The first criterion was that the NGOs work in the field of promoting (aspects of) democracy. The second criterion was that they are supported by international donors, which ensures that they are in fact related to the international aid system. Although we did not restrict our selection to one type of donor, bi- and multilateral agencies such as the UNDP, USAID, SIDA are the most prominent donors behind the selected NGOs.31 Furthermore, it is important to note here that the level of donordependency was not part of the second selection criterion, i.e. high donor-dependency was an outcome, not an input. The third criterion was that the aforementioned local experts had to consider them to be important players in the field of democratisation in their country. Based on these criteria, a shortlist of organisations was compiled which captured a diverse group in terms of the focus, age and size of the organisation. Table 4.1 provides an overview.

# 4.3 Organisational fields, institutional isomorphism and democracy promoting NGOs

Within the field of organisational institutionalism the concepts of *organisational field* and *isomorphism* are used to explain how and why organisations tend to become more similar over time. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified the socially constructed 'organisational field' as the context in which the process of homogenisation takes place. An *organisational field* refers to "those organisations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognised area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organisations that produce similar services or products" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148). Scott (1995, p. 56) rephrased it into "a community of organisations that partakes of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than

<sup>31</sup> Some of the NGOs are also supported by other types of donors, such as foundations and private aid agencies. ISODEC for instance has a long term funding relation with the NGO Oxfam NOVIB, and Elsam is supported by a consortium of international NGOs, including EED (Germany), MISEREOR (Germany), HIVOS (Netherlands) and 11.11.11 (Belgium).

Table 4.1 Basic characteristics of the NGOs

	Organisation	Full name	Establishment	Main focus	Size (No. of staff)*
	IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs	1989	Political and economic issues	Medium
	CDD	Center for Democratic Development	1998	Political and economic issues	Medium
ยนย	IDEG	Institute of Democratic Governance	2000	Political issues	Medium
ер	ISODEC	Integrated Social Development Center	1987	Social service delivery and social inequalities	Big
	Abantu	Abantu for development	1998	Gender inequalities	Small
	Partnership	Partnership for Democratic Governance Reform	2000	Civil society building and political and administrative issues	Big
	YAPPIKA	The Civil Society Alliance for Democracy	1991	Civil society building and human rights	Medium
sia	Z D	Indonesian Community for Democracy	2004	Political education and political party dialogue	Small
uopu	PSHK	Centre for Indonesian Law and Policy Studies	1998	Legal reform	Medium
	Demos	Centre for democracy and human rights studies	2002	Democracy and human rights	Medium
	ELSAM	Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy	1993	Democracy and human rights	Medium

\*Small: n < 10; Medium: 10 < n < 40; Big: n > 40 Sources: Interviews, NGO websites, NGO documents

with actors outside the field". Both definitions emphasise a group of organisations in a shared institutional environment, but Scott's definition adds the importance of field-level interactions.

Field-level interactions are important because they are both the cause and the effect of the institutionalisation of an organisational field. On the one hand, interacting organisations develop common understandings and practices which in time structure the rules and resources of the organisational field, and, on the other hand, the rules and resources of the field shape and guide field-level interactions (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2000). These interactions do not necessarily produce a stable equilibrium. Organisational fields are simultaneously characterised by continuity and change, because there is a shared interest of key actors in preserving and reproducing the field, while at the same time there is an endless struggle over dominating the field and its resources (Borum, 2004). Besides intra-field conflicts, there can also be inter-field conflicts, that is, organisations can be part of different organisational fields and as such be faced with conflicting institutional demands. When faced with conflicting demands, organisations will usually respond to the strongest and most important one for their survival (D'Aunno et al., 1991; Reay & Hinings, 2009; Seo & Creed, 2002).

The organisational field provides the context for the process of organisational homogenisation which DiMaggio and Powell (1983, pp. 194-152) termed *institutional isomorphism*. Some argue that isomorphism is the result of a competitive struggle between organisations. The environment can sustain only a limited number of organisational set-ups, so non-isomorphic organisations are selected against (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). In contrast, Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that organisations tend to be isomorphic because they incorporate institutional rules which function as rationalised myths in society. Organisations do so because it increases their legitimacy, their access to resources and, as such, their chances of survival, even if the adopted practices and procedures are not directly conducive to the core activity of the organisation. In other words, adaptation is important because it increases legitimacy rather than performance.

Three mechanisms drive isomorphic change: coercive isomorphism, mimetic isomorphism and normative isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Coercive isomorphism stems from unequal power relations. The formal and informal rules and expectations of powerful actors can have a strong homogenising effect on the groups of organisations who depend upon them. The most powerful actor in this respect is usually the state. Failure to comply with the rules can result in punishment, loss of resources and/or loss of legitimacy. Mimetic isomorphism is the result of uncertainty. In fields where it is difficult to measure performance, there are no clear indicators for what is the best or most desirable practice. Organisations react to this uncertainty by attempting to model themselves after organisations in their field that are perceived to be successful and legitimate. Finally, normative isomorphism is related to the concept

of professionalisation. Organisations conform to what is perceived to be the right thing to do. Two main sources of professionalisation are formal education and the growth and elaboration of professional networks and bodies. Both instil individuals with almost identical norms and values about best practices. Coercive isomorphism is the result of vertical relations between organisations, whereas mimetic and normative isomorphism stem from horizontal relations between peers (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008).

The concepts of organisational field and organisational isomorphism have not often been used to describe the aid system. Nevertheless, they are very relevant for understanding some of the existing structures and processes which lead to the homogenisation of actors within this field. If we take the perspective of democratisation NGOs, we can identify several important actors within their organisational field, namely the state, citizens, fellow NGOs and international donor agencies. With each type of actor, both horizontal and vertical relations are possible, and interaction with these actors can initiate all three forms of isomorphism. The state can be seen as a regulatory agency, but also as a target for NGOs advocacy activities, and sometimes even as a 'customer' of NGO service delivery, research and/or consultancy. Similarly, international donors can impose rules and regulations which accompany funding, but can also be strategic partners and 'customers' of NGO service delivery, research and/or consultancy. Citizens can be passive, as constituents, customers or targets of the NGOs. At the same time they can also be active, as the members (or even owners), volunteers, supporters or financial contributors to NGOs. Finally, fellow NGOs can be important as partners, as competitors or as donors.

All these actors put different demands on NGOs, but the strongest demands come from actors which can influence the survival of the NGOs. As Meyer and Rowan (1977) have pointed out, organisations adapt to gain legitimacy and access to resources and to thereby increase their chances of survival. In other words, either adaptation will bring rewards (resources/legitimacy), or lack of adaptation will have negative consequences for an NGO (loss of resources/legitimacy). In the next section we will shortly evaluate the importance of each actor for NGOs in terms of resources and legitimacy.

# 4.4 Shifting importance from national to international actors for NGO survival

The state is not an important actor for NGOs in terms of resources, as state support is hardly available in either Ghana or Indonesia. While in many European countries the government is one of the biggest financers of NGO activities, this pattern does not apply to poorer countries (Wang, 2006). In Indonesia, state support is unlikely because state-civil society relations are characterised by a sense of mutual suspicion and distrust, which had been building up in the decade before the fall of Suharto in 1998 (Hadiwinata, 2004). Many NGOs opposed the hegemony of the Indonesian state (Clarke, 1998). State officials therefore generally see civil society actors as destabilising, and many NGOs still perceive the state as an adversary (Ibrahim, 2006). In Ghana, state-civil society relations also started out from low levels of mutual trust, but since the transition to democracy there has been a growing space for interaction between NGO leaders, government officials and even activists (Darkwa et al., 2006). This has not translated into government funding for NGOs, however, as the government itself is underfunded. Although it is possible to get government contracts for social service delivery activities, NGOs are very unlikely to receive funding for the more politically sensitive activity of promoting democracy (Darkwa et al., 2006; Ibrahim, 2006).

Conforming to state demands is mainly important in terms of legitimacy. In both Ghana and Indonesia the state has long been the most powerful actor, regulating and controlling NGO activity. Both countries have a history of NGO repression. During the military regimes of Suharto (Indonesia) and Rawlings (Ghana), only de-politicised NGO activities such as relief and community welfare activities were permitted. All other independent NGO activity was looked upon with suspicion and vocal NGOs were actively repressed or co-opted (Gyimah-Boadi & Oquaye, 2000; Hadiwinata, 2004). To fight for democracy in such a context is dangerous and NGOs adopted non-confrontational tactics in order to avoid persecution. In Indonesia, NGOs had to act like chameleons and adopt the state ideology as their own ideology (Hadiwinata, 2004). In short, to be able to exist (at least officially), conforming to state demands was of utmost importance.

Although NGOs still need to conform to the rules and regulations of the state, the rules have become less restrictive. As a result, the influence of the state over the shape and direction of NGOs has decreased considerably. Towards the end of the military regimes in Ghana and Indonesia, societal groups became more vocal, openly confronting the regimes with demands for change. In both countries, the transition to democracy opened the space for NGOs to pursue their own agendas and have their own ideologies. Currently, the legal framework of both countries allows for many different organisational forms, both membership and non-membership, centralised or decentralised and formal or informal organisations, to exist. Furthermore, in terms of strategies, in both Ghana and Indonesia non-confrontational as well as confrontational forms of advocacy are allowed (Darkwa et al., 2006; Ibrahim, 2006). In other words, the state allows for a lot more variation in organisational characteristics than the actual variation encountered.

In Ghana and Indonesia NGOs do not depend upon each other for survival. Fellow NGOs could be important for survival if they are gatekeepers for access to

various kinds of resources such as funding and network resources (i.e. contacts with politicians). In times of repression in particular, survival can also depend upon collaboration with groups of like-minded and trusted organisations. Although some of the NGOs in our sample are gatekeepers for access to resources with regard to partner organisations at the local level, this is not the case at the national level. At the national level, the democratisation NGOs in both Ghana and Indonesia can be considered as peers. They have interdependencies, either as competitors and/or partners, but they do not directly rely upon each other for resources or legitimacy. Collaboration for survival is also not as necessary as there is no systematic repression.

Citizens can be important actors for the survival of NGOs both in terms of resources and legitimacy. As (active) members, as volunteers and as financial contributors they have the potential to influence the shape and direction of an organisation. During the democratic turnover in Indonesia especially, citizen participation in NGOs played an important role (Schwarz, 1999). Nowadays, however, citizens have no major part to play in them. This becomes very clear if we look at the organisational constellation of the NGOs in our sample. They are hierarchically structured (mostly) non-membership based organisations, working with a professional staff, using (mostly) non-confrontational strategies and depending on donors for most of their income. In other words, citizens are not active as members, they are hardly ever used as volunteers because NGOs work with professionals, they are rarely mobilised as supporters in mass protest actions to legitimise NGO claims because NGOs employ non-confrontational advocacy strategies, and finally, citizens are not used for contributions as the money comes from donors.

International donors are currently the single most important actors for the survival of the selected NGOs, both in terms of legitimacy and resources. None of the NGOs manages to raise more than 20% of their income locally. In contrast, donors provide substantial resources which would have otherwise been unavailable to NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia. In order to access these resources, NGOs need to gain legitimacy in the eyes of donors. This puts donors in a position to exert a lot of influence over NGOs because lack of adaptation to donor requirements risks the loss of legitimacy and funding.

The source of homogenisation can now be pinpointed by going back to the notions of organisational field and conflicting field demands. NGOs in both Ghana and Indonesia can be pictured as part of a national and an international organisational field. The two most prominent forces which could have rooted NGOs in their national organisational field, and which could have caused NGOs to organise differently in Ghana and Indonesia, are the state and citizens. These actors could have confronted NGOs with important demands. In the current setting, however, national demands have been largely absent. The state has the power to make demands, but their regulation is not very restrictive anymore. Citizens can make demands, but as NGOs do not depend upon them for their survival, these demands are not of crucial importance. In contrast, demands from international donors are crucial for the survival of NGOs.

# 4.5 Donor-dependence and the process of homogenisation

Our field-level analysis firmly points to international donors as a potential source of homogenisation. This finding is not particularly new as we know that donors "are positioned to influence nonprofit mission and activity [...] because of their close control of the financial resources or inputs needed by nonprofits to survive" (Frumkin & Galaskiewicz, 2004, p. 290), and "civil society organisations often have to alter their missions and characters to obtain such incomes" (Wang, 2006, p. 25). Our analysis adds that this position of international donor has to be related to the absence or weakness of national actors and their demands. Furthermore, although donor-funding has been pointed out as a source of homogenisation, we do not have a detailed understanding of how this process works. This section therefore analyses how donor-dependence affects the way NGOs organise in terms of their mission, their structure, their staff and their strategy. Besides the direct imposition of rules and regulations, homogenisation can also be the result of more subtle and less explicit forces at work (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). It is especially important to unravel these indirect forces because they are key to understanding the process of homogenisation and the role of both donors and NGOs in it.

#### Mission, agenda setting and the importance of language

Although the mission statements of the NGOs relate to different problems in Ghana and Indonesia, the terminology they use to frame their work is very similar. Consider for instance the mission of the Indonesian NGO Partnership:

"Disseminating, advancing and institutionalizing the principles of good and clean governance among government, civil society and business, while considering human rights, gender balance, the marginalised and environmental sustainability."<sup>32</sup>

Compare it with the mission of the IEA in Ghana:

<sup>32</sup> Partnership for Governance Reform, vision and mission, available at: http://www.kemitraan.or.id/vision-and-mission [accessed January 2013].

"Our mission is to promote good governance, democracy and a free and fair market economy. We believe that the creation of an environment in which economic, social, political and legal institutions function openly and freely is the key to sustainable economic growth and human development."33

Both rely heavily on what Craig and Porter (2006) call 'NGO terminology', which is common in Western debates on (neoliberal) democracy and development and features terms like 'sustainability', 'empowerment' and 'good governance'.

Having a mission statement and using the right language is important for getting access to funding. For instance, the term 'good governance' can be found in mission statements in both Ghana and Indonesia. According to one respondent this is not strange because "good governance is the mantra. If you use the word good governance, you can make money" (Interview NGO consultant Jakarta, March 2008). Similarly, one Indonesian NGO director notes that finding support "is not always easy because we have to find the right language. I mean, maybe our ideas are in line with what they want, but sometimes we have to find the right language in the proposal" (Interview PSHK, April 2008). In Jakarta you can hire people who are specialised in proposal writing to make sure you use the right language. This strategy of framing is a good example of how isomorphism can work indirectly. It is not something which is directly imposed on the NGOs by donors, but NGOs choose to adopt it in order to get access to resources.

Besides adopting donor language, in Ghana we find some evidence of NGOs adopting each other's language and programmatic focus to get access to funding. There are three policy think-tanks (IEA, CDD and IDEG) with almost identical mission statements, namely to promote "democracy and good governance" in Ghana. Furthermore, the kind of programmes they implement to attain this mission also resemble each other. One respondent expressed frustration about this copying behaviour:

"If you are working in training parliamentarians, suddenly everybody thinks let's also go into parliament. [...] Whereas you could collaborate and get better results, people are just doing very similar things" (Interview NGO Ghana, December 2007).34

Later on in the interview, the respondent explains that it is the strong competition for funding and the resulting distrust between the NGOs which hampers collaboration and stimulates duplication. This could be explained by the fact that it is difficult to measure performance in the field of democratisation. This introduces a lot of

<sup>33</sup> Institute of Economic Affairs, vision and mission, available at: www.ieagh.org [accessed January 2013].

Anonymous because of the sensitivity of the issue.

uncertainty for an NGO, which needs to show its donors that what it is doing is relevant. Therefore, modelling oneself after a successful peer can be used as a strategy to gain legitimacy and access to resources. In the case of these three think-tanks, the link between the three is very direct because some of IEA's former employees went on to become founding members of IDEG and CDD.

Earmarking is the name given to the most direct form of interference by donors with the mission and programmatic focus of an NGO. Many of the NGOs in Indonesia observe the tendency of donors to earmark more of their funding. In this way they directly influence what an NGO should do in order to get funding. According to one respondent, donors used to be more flexible, but nowadays "they are more concerned that we use the money for a particular issue like the poverty issue or the issue of pluralism" (Interview Elsam, April 2008). The tendency of donors to spend their money according to their own priorities also affects a big institution like Partnership:

"In the donor coordination meeting they usually present their programmes, their priorities. We can have some information on that [...] and then we basically draft our proposals based on their guidelines" (Interview Partnership, April 2008).

Crawford (2003) argues that international donors played an active role in setting Partnership's agenda, not only by putting certain topics on the agenda, but also by keeping some sensitive issues off the agenda, like the role of the military. While respondents in Ghana did not use the term earmarking, the processes they describe are very similar:

"I still believe that there are donors who push the agenda. You can send your strategic plan and if they are not interested they won't give you anything. You know, they will still try to tilt it a little bit to themselves" (Interview IEA, December 2007).

ISODEC mentioned that their most important donor (Oxfam Novib) changed their focus to other West-African countries, "to make ourselves relevant to Oxfam Novib, we had to develop a programme that had West-Africa as a focus". Not conforming to what donors want is risky, because "if what you are doing does not fall within their priorities, they can decide to stop funding at any time and then they just leave you hanging there" (Interview ISODEC, December 2007). This clearly illustrates the impact of donor-dependence: if there are no other funding-sources available, you have to adapt your organisation to suit donor demands or face bankruptcy.

These processes put NGOs between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, they want to keep their integrity, pursue their own mission and set their own agendas, while on the other hand they need money to sustain their organisations. Throughout

the interviews with the NGO directors, researchers and project managers in both Ghana and Indonesia, a similar pattern kept returning. Respondents would state that their organisation pursues its own agenda and deny following donor demands, while later on in the interview they would acknowledge or vent their frustration about the influence of donors on their agenda. The following quote of a Ghanaian NGO staff member shows this struggle in a nutshell:

"We don't go in the direction of where the wind is blowing. Because sometimes there is a lot of money out there, but you would have to alter your mandate to be able to access it. We don't shift our agenda to be able to access funding" (Interview Abantu, December 2008).

Nevertheless, the same respondent also states that:

"A lot of times, if we had our own way, we would do things differently. A lot of times we wish we did not have to take anybody's money to work with" (Interview Abantu, December 2008).

The NGOs are not powerless however. They use several strategies to reduce the influence of donors (Elbers & Schulpen, 2011). First, they attempt to avoid being dependent on one donor by seeking support from multiple donors. This is especially an issue for KID, which relies on the Netherlands Institute of Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) for most of its funds. As a result, "sustainability is a big challenge, and I think we are now trying to expand the possibility of funding from other donors, in order to anticipate this question of sustainability" (interview KID, April 2008). Second, they can approach the donors that are most likely to fund their activities. This is how Demos operates: "Following our agenda, we have to see which donor agencies have a track record in doing this kind of work. We try to approach them and to convince them about the importance of these programmes" (Interview Demos, March 2008). Third, they try to earn some of their own income, mostly by selling their expertise through consultancy work for the government. Finally, the use of donor language can also be a strategy to reduce donor influence. By defining a broad mission, which "deals with democracy and good governance", CDD anticipates shifts in donor focus. This kind of mission statement captures many different topics, like "transparency, representation, participation, integrity and nowadays the topic of decentralisation. So at any point in time most of the focus of donor support will align nicely with the CDD objective" (Interview CDD, December 2007). This last strategy can be labelled as a form of decoupling because it functions as a buffering strategy which enables the NGO to protect the core of their work from external influence (Ebrahim, 2002, p. 104). Nevertheless, at CDD they also argue that the bottom line remains that "there is a

power relation when somebody is supporting you", which means there will always be "a limit to the extent in which you can make significant input and change the direction of whatever proposal the donor is making" (Interview CDD, December 2007).

#### Professional staff as outcome and driver of isomorphism

In terms of personnel the NGOs are dominated by an (often) internationally educated academic elite. On the one hand, donors actively contribute to this by encouraging their partner organisations to hire high quality staff. The Ghana Research and Advocacy Program (G-RAP)<sup>35</sup> provides a good example. This consortium of bilateral donors, which provides funding to all the Ghanaian NGOs in our sample, states in its mid-term review that the organisations they fund should be "more able to attract, retain, motivate and develop capable staff" and that with this staff NGOs will be able to "generate high quality evidence-based research based on robust primary sources". <sup>36</sup> According to one respondent, donors can be very rigid in this respect:

"Some of their requirements are quite constraining. For example you know a very good economist without a PhD, but they say they want an economist with a PhD. [...] You end up picking an inexperienced PhD. [...] They have very rigid requirements, and you have to fit" (Interview IDEG, December 2007).

On the other hand, NGOs use acquiring qualified staff as a strategy to gain the trust of donors, because: "I believe that if we have a high quality of work, then many donors will trust us" (Interview PSHK, April 2008). This trust is needed not only to gain funding, but also to account for it. One interviewee claims, for instance, that "you need very qualified chartered accountants to be able to report to your donors" (Interview CDD, December 2008). The opposite is also true, if you are not able to hire competent staff, donors might lose their trust. One organisation which struggles with this problem is ISODEC. Due to a lack of finances they experience problems hiring and retaining highly educated staff, which complicates their ability to meet donor requirements.<sup>37</sup>

Again the issue of language is important. If you do not speak the language of the donor, you will not be able to access funding. For the NGOs it is important to have staff members who "graduated from European or American universities. They can write a proposal in good English and present it in a very sophisticated PowerPoint. Without that you cannot get any money" (Interview NGO consultant Jakarta, 2008). Furthermore, it is one thing to speak English, but it is another thing to be able to relate to the international debates on good governance, democratisation, legal reform and

<sup>35</sup> Currently G-RAP is called STAR-Ghana.

<sup>36</sup> Internal document: Brown, D. and Atampugre, N. Ghana Research and Advocacy Programme (G-RAP): Mid-term Review 2004-6. Accra: G-RAP; 2007, p. 9-10.

<sup>37</sup> Internal document: ISODEC. Narrative Progress Report: July – December 2005. Accra: G-RAP; 2006.

gender mainstreaming. In this respect it greatly helps NGOs that many of their staff members studied these subjects abroad and are educated in the terminology used by donors. An additional advantage is that because of their expertise and their ability to justify their work in donor terminology, professionals strengthen the bargaining position of NGOs in relation to their funders (Ebrahim, 2002).

Having a highly educated staff which speaks the 'donor language' also has its drawbacks. According to one respondent, the problem with NGO staff in Jakarta is that "it has become too elite" and as a result:

"Their language is not something that people understand. [...] For instance, it is very difficult to use the word good governance in Indonesian. People don't understand what it is, it is very difficult for you to sell the governance issues. We have an Indonesian translation, but what does it really mean?" (Interview Asian Development Bank, March 2008).

In other words, the disadvantage of using donor terminology is that it alienates local constituencies. Furthermore, it indicates that donors end up sponsoring NGOs which are led by a quite homogenous group of local elites who know each other very well. In Accra "everybody knows everybody" (Interview IEA, December 2007) and in Jakarta "it is a small development world. So if you draft a proposal, you would meet the same persons all over again" (Interview Partnership, April 2008). This reduces the plurality of inputs and increases the chances of copying behaviour. Thus one donor notes: "There are so many actors now in the governance scene, working on very similar areas" (Interview UNDP, April 2008).

As pointed out by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), education is an important source of homogenisation. Through education, people internalise shared norms and terminology which makes it easier for them to communicate with each other. The fact that most of the NGO personnel have a university education and that many studied in donor-countries is a strong sign of normative isomorphism. Education and professionalisation does not only influence the language the staff use, but also their perception of the world, its problems and the kind of solutions available to these problems (mission and strategy). A group of academics in Jakarta or Accra will define different problems and goals than a group of farmers or urban poor in the same country. In the next section we show that this is also the case for strategy.

### Strategy follows support and education

Besides influencing the focus areas of NGOs, donor-funding also influences the kind of strategies NGOs use to tackle these topics. In Ghana for instance, in order to be able to get funding from the aforementioned G-RAP programme, an organisation must employ the strategy of research and advocacy. Furthermore, our finding that confrontational advocacy strategies, such as mass protest actions, are less utilised indicates that they are not popular among the selected NGOs. There are several reasons why they would rather employ non-confrontational strategies. First, and unrelated to donor-funding, many of the NGOs have close relations with the state officials they try to influence and resorting to confrontational advocacy would therefore damage their access to the state. Second, many of the bi- and multilateral donor agencies also cooperate with the state. NGOs that are funded by these donors do not use confrontational strategies towards the state because, as Partnership in Indonesia points out, their donors "would not approve of it" (Interview Partnership, April 2008). Because of their frequent high-level interactions with both the international community and the state, it is not in Partnership's interest to put both themselves and their donors in a difficult position with regards to the state. Third, donors can have their own sensitivities, like an NGO which mentioned that it was not allowed to advocate against Canadian companies because it received funding from CIDA.

The kind of strategies organisations pursue is also influenced by the process of professionalisation. The Indonesian NGO Elsam provides a good example of how professionalisation of staff affects the way you work:

"Before, we had the activists from the 90s generation, but since 2000 we see a different character. [...] I think the new generation has more expertise about human rights [...] but they lack the experience of organizing the basis, like peasants, workers, or the urban poor. [...] So we have a staff which is very skilful in dealing with the government and which has very much experience in legal drafting, but they have a very limited knowledge about society" (Interview Elsam, April 2008).

This shows that having a highly educated staff produces a bias with regard to the type of problems that are being tackled and with regard to how they are tackled. While activists might seek to mobilise the community, academics would probably prefer to organise a seminar with government officials. This bias reinforces itself because it also works the other way around. To attain a certain mission and execute a certain strategy, you need a staff which is capable of doing so. So when your mission is to promote good governance and attain this by doing research and advocating the results at high level seminars and roundtables with government officials, you will need to employ a highly educated staff.

#### Organisational structure and upward accountability

In terms of organisational structure we do not find any evidence of the direct interference of donors. Donor-dependence does have an indirect effect, however. In both Ghana and Indonesia the dominant organisational structure is that of a

hierarchical non-membership organisation. For some NGOs there are signs that their structure is the result of mimicking peers, like the three very similar think-tanks in Ghana, or of mimicking donors, like the Indonesian NGO Partnership which mimics the departmentalisation of their most important donor the UNDP (Interview UNDP, April 2008). Nevertheless, this does not necessarily explain the general absence of members.

The absence of members can be best explained by our earlier observation that they are not crucial for NGO survival. This is exactly what Abantu experienced when they wanted to set up a membership-based organisation:

"We tried to establish a self-sustaining membership organisation, called Netright. but the membership dues could not sustain it. We had to turn to donors, and once you become dependent, the social-movement character of your organisation is compromised [...] then you become more of an NGO" (Interview Abantu, December 2007).

Another respondent explains why becoming donor-dependent causes an NGO to lose touch with its constituency:

"A lot of these NGOs rely on donors. Therefore they should be accountable to the donor who gives them money, but they should also be accountable to their constituencies. A lot of these NGOs don't have a clear constituency, and they don't have a strong feeling that they should be accountable to their constituencies. They are serving the donor more, and that is why they are busy with this report on good governance rather than looking at what it really means for the people" (Interview Asian Development Bank, March 2008).

It basically means that once an NGO applies for funding, the rigorous tasks of proposal writing and conforming to upward accountability standards shift the attention away from constituencies and towards donors. Democratic membership and downward accountability are not necessary for gaining access to funding or for being perceived as legitimate by the donor community. Furthermore, for their strategy of non-confrontational advocacy, they do not need a membership. Having expertise and having the right contacts with state officials is more important for this strategy because "they [the state] need our brain anyway" (Interview PSHK, April 2008). Membership consultation and participation would not be conducive to this strategy because it is time consuming and can result in conflicting ideas about what should be done. In contrast, a hierarchic organisation can decide quickly where and when to lobby politicians.

Although the lack of citizen participation and representation hardly creates problems of legitimacy in the eyes of donors, it does sometimes create problems with regard to the state. For instance, the Government of Ghana has the tendency to "always come out and say: hey, you don't represent anybody" (Interview ISSER, November 2007). NGOs can only overcome this accusation if they manage to link up with partner organisations and mobilise community based organisations. Another danger comes from the upward accountability to donors, which introduces the risk that organisations become detached from their domestic political system (Sabatini, 2002). This is especially the case in Indonesia: "When we talk to some government agencies, who of course sometimes still do not like us, they would say 'You are like the agent of the USA', or 'You work for the agent of Australia'" (Interview PSHK, April 2008). It is for this reason that organisations must also sometimes refuse funding or resist donor conditionalities. For instance, "USAID wanted to put their name and logo in all the publications. We said no, because if we do that, parliament members or the public will see YAPPIKA as an American agent" (Interview YAPPIKA, April 2008). In short, funding creates a trade-off between legitimacy in the eyes of donors and in the eyes of the state.

### 4.6 Isomorphism as the institutionalisation of trust

Our analysis consists of two parts. In the first part we looked at the organisational fields of Ghanaian and Indonesian NGOs, and we concluded that in both fields international actors (donors) have become more important than national actors (the state and citizens) for NGO survival. In the second part we therefore focused on donor-funding as the most important source of homogenisation. Here we showed the various ways in which donor-dependence affects an NGO's mission, staff, strategy and structure. Figure 4.1 provides a summary of some of the forces at work. It is important to note that it focuses on the process of homogenisation of the organisational characteristics of NGOs under the influence of donor funding. Thus, it does not include some of the aspects we indentified: it does not depict how strategy is also influenced by the kind of relations an NGO has with the state, how relatively small NGO communities stimulate mimicry and duplication, or how NGOs use several strategies to mitigate the influence of donors.

When we look at figure 4.1, four observations stand out. First, it shows that donor funding has a direct influence on the mission statement through agenda setting and earmarking, on staff by stimulating and sometimes forcing NGOs to hire professionals, and on strategy by approving non-confrontational strategies while disapproving confrontational ones. We have not drawn a relation between structure and funding, because we found that funding has only an indirect influence in the sense that having a membership based organisation is not necessary for getting access to funding. Second, it shows that homogenisation is not only a matter of imposition. On the one

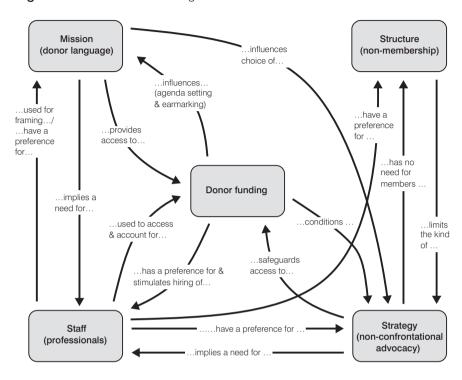


Figure 4.1 The drivers of homogenisation

hand, funding conditions push NGOs to adapt, but, on the other hand, the NGOs are active actors in their quest for funding. They frame their mission statements in donor language and use professional staff to get access to and account for funding. Using non-confrontational strategies is also a way of retaining this access. Third, the organisational characteristics also influence each other. Having the promotion of legal reform as a mission statement, for instance, requires professional staff with a profound knowledge of the legal system. Furthermore, working with professionals increases the bias for non-confrontational strategies, which in turn reduces the need of having a membership organisation. Fourth, it shows that the combination of these three processes produces multiple series of feedback-loops which reinforce the process of homogenisation. These loops are not solely donor-driven, but can also be attributed to the NGOs themselves. Furthermore, they are strengthened by the interrelatedness of the organisational characteristics of the NGOs.

Although donor-funding catalyses the process of homogenisation, it is the *dependence* on donors that seems to be the driving force behind these feedback-loops. The coercive power of donors stems not from their own power per se, but from the lack of alternative resources for NGOs. Applying for funding can be seen as the first step in the process of homogenisation. Once NGOs become part of the system, there is a big chance that they will be "absorbed by this logic of industry" (Interview NGO consultant Jakarta, March 2008). This is especially due to the process of professionalisation. As the NGOs start working from modern offices with an academic staff, they also become more in need of money to pay for these things. At present, only donors are willing to provide NGOs with such money. This is how the feedback-loops reinforce each other: in order to get access to donor money, you need to speak the donor-language, know the donor priorities, be able to write funding reports and preferably behave in a non-confrontational manner. In sum, it is a self-reinforcing process which stimulates dependency rather than ownership and sustainability.

The outcome of this process of homogenisation can be characterised as the institutionalisation of trust between donor and recipient. It means that the more an NGO conforms to donor standards, the more it can be trusted with donor money. In many of the interviews, respondents (both donors and NGOs) used the term 'trust' when talking about access to and accounting for funding. For Partnership, for instance, "having UNDP's name as backing has been really useful for them in getting money and getting trust basically" (Interview UNDP, April 2008). Trust of donors is something which you have to earn by building a track-record. In Ghana some of the NGOs mentioned that their donors have become more flexible over time. Whereas before they were "micromanaging our things [...] it gets better when you establish yourself and develop an expertise in a certain area. They become suggestive, rather than demanding a certain outcome" (Interview CDD, December 2007). The more an NGO complies with donor standards, the more it becomes a 'trustworthy' organisation. As one respondent states: "I think that the trust and confidence in us also comes from our ability to conform with the standards of transparency and accountability that they [the donors] wish us to deliver" (Interview Yappika, April 2008). The bi- and multilateral donors of the pooled funding mechanism STAR-Ghana (formerly G-RAP) are quite explicit about this in their eligibility requirements for NGOs who wish to apply for funding: "Must demonstrate standards of good organisational governance". 38 Thus, conforming to the organisational paradigm which is promoted by donors makes you a legitimate organisation which can be entrusted with grant money.

#### 4.7 Discussion

We first need to discuss the limitations of our findings before discussing their implications for donor agencies. Figure 4.1 should not be seen as a model which applies to all donors and NGOs in the same way. It is a summary of the various processes we encountered in Ghana and Indonesia, which, taken together, provide the first building blocks for a theoretical model on the homogenisation of NGOs around the world. Further research is needed to test and refine the relations depicted in figure 4.1. It would be especially important to include different types of NGOs and to differentiate between different types of donors because: "Every donor has their own procedures. There are donors who are a little bit flexible and there are donors who are very rigorous", adding that "European Union partnerships are the ones who are very rigorous" (Interview Demos, March 2008). The current findings are mostly applicable to these more bureaucratic bi- and multilateral donor agencies, as they provide most of the funding for the selected NGOs. Some of the relations depicted in figure 4.1 might change for private aid agencies or foundations. For instance, a Dutch NGO sponsoring an Indonesian NGO might be less concerned with their Indonesian counterpart pursuing a confrontational advocacy strategy against the state because they are not involved in high-level interactions with state agencies.

When we focus on these bi- and multilateral agencies, our analysis leaves donors wishing to support NGOs and democracy with a mixed picture. Our findings largely confirm the image "that these internationally supported groups are different from the civil society groups that have been described as being so crucial to democracy" (Sabatini, 2002, p. 9). They are largely closed to citizen participation, led by elites and have agendas that are influenced by international donors at the expense of local priorities and needs. This situation is not in the interest of donors (assuming they are serious about their attempts to promote genuine democracy, rather than advancing their own paradigms), nor is it in the interest of the NGOs (assuming they are concerned about the needs of their constituencies, rather than the needs of donors). However, our analysis has shown that it is very difficult to get out of the current system because it causes NGOs and their donors to be entangled in a tight grip.

One way for donors to overcome this problem is to extend their funding to organisations with a different set of characteristics, which are probably less professional and would certainly be less predictable in cases where their decision making is based on membership participation. This would require flexible funding schemes with less technical accountability requirements. For these bigger bi- and multi lateral donors in particular, this would have fundamental implications for the way they organise themselves. As one bilateral donor noted:

"The strange thing about development aid is that there is a pressure to spend a lot of money in a limited time. Here at the embassy we have a comparatively big budget and a small staff to manage it. So for efficiency reasons, we channel most of our money to big organisations like the World Bank, the UNDP, Unicef and the ADB. We do support some NGOs, but the problem is that an Indonesian NGO can never spend ten million Euros annually in an accountable way" (Interview Netherlands Embassy Jakarta, March 2008).

We should not forget that, in the current system, donors are also actors who are part of a larger organisational field in which they usually also depend on other actors for their survival. As one respondent noted, "if it is a country-tied donor, then the politics of that country will play a role as well. So you cannot really blame them entirely as it is taxpayers' money" (Interview Abantu, December 2008). Therefore, a change in the way they operate would require a more fundamental change in upward accountability procedures to the parliaments of donor countries. In other words, in the short term we cannot expect this type of donors to go beyond their current type of partners as their room to manoeuvre is also bound by conditionalities.

## Appendix 4.1: Overview of interview data

Overview of interview data Ghana

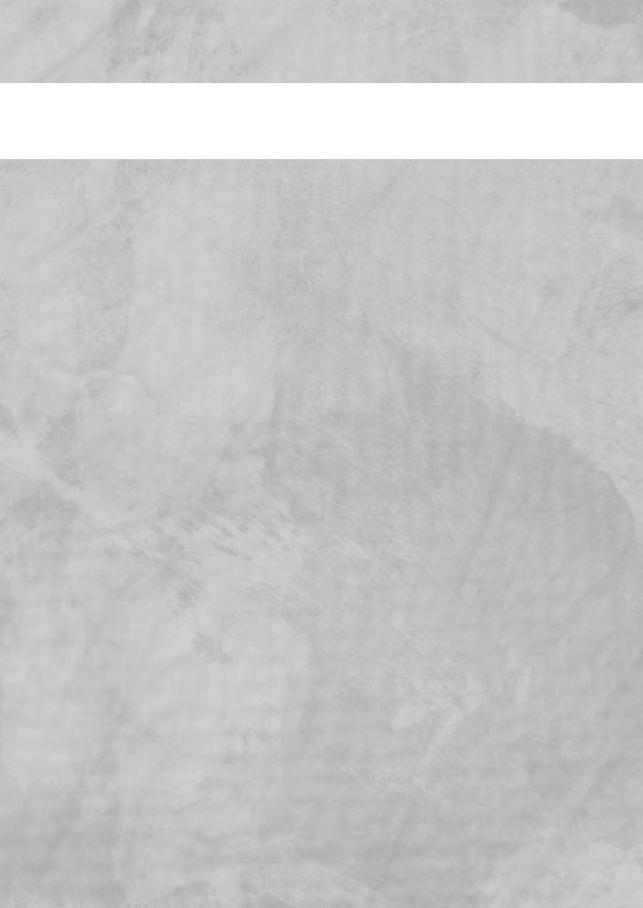
Organisation	Туре	Respondents / interviews	Date(s)
Center for Democratic Development (CDD)	NGO	2 persons / 3 interviews	11/30/2007 12/03/2007 12/11/2008
Institute of Democratic Governance (IDEG)	NGO	3 persons / 3 interviews	12/04/2007 12/05/2007 12/10/2008
Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA)	NGO	2 persons / 3 interviews	12/11/2007 11/06/2008 12/12/2008
Integrated Social Development Center (ISODEC)	NGO	3 persons / 5 interviews	12/06/2007 11/05/2008 11/10/2008 12/12/2008
Abantu for development	NGO	2 persons / 3 interviews	12/13/2007 11/06/2008 11/11/2008
GAPVOD (Umbrella organisation for Ghanaian NGOs)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	11/29/2007
IBIS Ghana	International NGO	1 person / 1 interview	12/14/2007
Netherlands Embassy	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	11/28/2007
Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	01/23/2008
Ghana Research and Advocacy Program (G-RAP)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	11/19/2007
Faculty of law – University of Ghana	University	1 person / 1 interview	11/28/2007
Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) – University of Ghana	University	2 persons / 2 interviews	11/19/2007
Department of Political Science – University of Ghana	University	2 persons / 2 interviews	11/26/2007 11/27/2007

Note: a total of 27 interviews with 21 respondents (one respondent works for both university and for one of the selected NGOs).

#### Overview of interview data Indonesia

Organisation	Туре	Respondents / interviews	Date(s)
Demos - Centre for democracy and human rights studies	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	03/31/2008
Centre for Indonesian Law and Policy Studies (PSHK)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	04/03/2008
Partnership for Democratic Governance Reform	NGO	3 persons / 1 interview	04/03/2008
Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (Elsam)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	04/07/2008
Yappika - The Civil Society Alliance for Democracy	NGO	3 persons / 2 interviews	04/09/2008
Indonesian Community for Democracy (KID)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	04/10/2008
Institute of Research, Education and Information of Social and Economic Affairs (LP3ES)	NGO	1 person / 1 interview	04/04/2008
Centre for strategic and International Studies (CSIS)	NGO	2 persons / 2 interviews	03/19/2008 03/31/2008
NGO consultant Jakarta	NGO expert	1 person / 1 interview	03/18/2008
United Nations Development Program (UNDP)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	04/01/2008
Netherlands Embassy	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	03/26/2008
Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	01/23/2008
Asian Development Bank (ADB)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	03/25/2008
Faculty of Social and Political Science - Universitas Indonesia (Jakarta)	University	2 persons / 2 interviews	03/26/2008 04/02/2008
Center for population and policy studies – Gadjah Mada University (Yogyakarta)	University	1 person / 2 interviews	03/11/2008 03/11/2009
Faculty of Social and Political Science – Gadjah Mada University (Yogyakarta)	University	1 person / 1 interview	04/20/2009

Note: a total of 20 interviews with 22 respondents.



## Chapter 5

## Promoting democracy in Ghana: Exploring the democratic roles of donor-sponsored NGOs\*

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#### **Abstract**

This chapter examines the democratic roles performed by Ghanaian nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). Drawing on a comparative case study approach, it explores how the organisational characteristics of five donor-sponsored NGOs relate to their ability to perform different democratic roles. Our analysis reveals that some of the democratic roles require contradicting organisational characteristics, which are therefore difficult to combine within one organisation. Furthermore, it demonstrates that these NGOs do not contribute to democracy as predicted by theory. In particular, they are weak at providing channels of communication between state and society, and at directly representing, involving, and being accountable to ordinary citizens. We argue, nevertheless, that they perform these functions in a different way.

#### Keywords

Civil society, NGOs, democratisation, democratic roles, international development aid, Ghana.

#### 5.1 Introduction

Supporting non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to stimulate democratisation is a prominent strategy among donors of international development aid. This strategy is firmly rooted in a normative conception of the merits of civil society: "In the eyes of many donors and recipients, and even of many democratic theorists, the idea that civil society is always a positive force for democracy, indeed even the most important one, is unassailable" (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000a, p. 4). Its desirable functions include serving as a check on state power, helping include the poor and marginalised, and educating citizens on the norms and values of democracy (Diamond, 1999; Edwards, 2004: Fowler, 2000: G. White, 1994).

Donor policies based on these positive assumptions have been criticised. Empirical studies have shown the negative effects of external funding of NGOs, such as accountability to donors instead of constituencies and NGOs maintaining rather than challenging the status quo (Fagan, 2005; Hearn, 2007; Henderson, 2002). Aside from donors, civil society researchers are also criticised for letting ideals obscure reality. The dominant Western conceptions of liberal democracy "betray a normative view on how democratic development should be done" (Mercer, 2002, p. 20). This calls for a new research agenda, based on descriptive rather than normative concepts (Tvedt, 2006). Empirical research should focus on studying "the nature of the relationship between civil society organisations and democracy" (Kopecky & Mudde, 2003, p. 1). This chapter answers that call by exploring the link between organisational characteristics and democratic roles. It aims to contribute to understanding what kind of roles NGOs actually perform and what organisational characteristics enable them to do so.

The study focuses on a group of donor-sponsored NGOs in Ghana. Ghana provides a "good case" because it is often seen as a textbook example for democratisation in Africa and enjoys the status of "donor darling". It has a "particularly favourable context for democracy promotion measures, if performance is poor here, it [...] is unlikely to be better elsewhere in Africa" (Crawford, 2005, p. 572). The Ghanaian state actively involves NGOs in important social, economic, and governance initiatives, and international donors are keen on supporting this development (Hughes, 2005). Despite growing criticism in the academic literature, donor support to Ghanaian NGOs has actually been increasing.39

We start by identifying four democratic roles in existing literature: an educational; a communicative; a representational; and a cooperative role. Using Warren (2001) and Hadenius and Uggla (1996), we link the performance of these roles to

<sup>39</sup> The largest funding scheme for promoting NGO involvement in democracy in Ghana (called G-RAP) grew from about US\$2 million in 2005 to over US\$3.25 million in 2009 (http://www.G-RAP.org, accessed November 2011).

organisational characteristics such as structure, strategy, resources, and relations with the environment. In the empirical analysis we focus on two related questions: (1) what kind of democratic roles do donor-sponsored NGOs perform in Ghana?; (2) what organisational characteristics enable them to perform these roles? The analysis reveals, first, that the roles of Ghanaian NGOs differ from the ones described in theory. In fact, some theoretical roles are not performed by any of the NGOs. Second, we find that none of the NGOs performs all roles simultaneously, which is mainly due to contradicting organisational demands. Third, although the roles they perform are criticised in terms of donor-dependence, accountability, and legitimacy, our findings put this criticism in a new perspective. To better capture our findings, we then propose a new framework with adaptations to the educational, the communicative and the representational roles. In the conclusion we use this new framework to question the common assertion whereby NGOs should be democratic themselves in order to be able to contribute to democracy. Finally, we link our findings to the debate on donor support for NGOs.

#### 5.2 Democratic roles of NGOs

Civil society can be defined as an intermediate social sphere distinct from government, business, and the private sphere. This social sphere is occupied by voluntary organisations, such as clubs, associations, social movements, and informal networks (G. White, 1994). These interconnected formal and informal organisations and groups are referred to as NGOs. This definition is neutral as it does not attribute any positive role or function to NGOs. However, when related to democracy, NGOs are generally seen as a positive force. Their democratic roles are presented here as analytically distinct categories although they overlap in practice.

#### The educational role

Since Tocqueville, civic associations have been labelled as "schools of democracy" (Tocqueville, 1998 [1835-1840]). The central aspects of the educational role are providing information, nurturing civic virtues, and teaching political skills. By widening the flow of information available to citizens, associations can enhance transparency and public accountability (Diamond, 1999). Associations can also foster a culture of

<sup>40</sup> This assertion stems from a neo-Tocquevillian interpretation of the democratic role of NGOs. Its commonality can be explained by the fact that this interpretation has received the most contemporary attention (Fung, 2003). Examples include Hadenius and Uggla (1996: 1623), who state that "to serve as an organ of socialisation into the practice of democracy, the associations in question must themselves be democratically structured", or Robinson and Friedman (2007: 644), who hypothesise that internally democratic NGOs "can make a positive contribution to the process of democratisation by fostering pluralism, promoting democratic values, and enhancing political participation".

democracy and civility by nurturing civic values (Fowler, 2000). According to Putnam (2000), the most important civic values are generalised reciprocity and trust. Associations can teach these values by bringing people together into cooperative ventures (Sabatini, 2002). The experience of cooperation within associations also increases political skills like speaking in public, negotiating, and building coalitions, and is therefore considered as a stepping stone for future political leaders (Diamond, 1999; Edwards, 2004).

To fulfil an educational role, ideally, an organisation should have a democratic structure and a voluntary membership with a broad popular base amongst common citizens (Diamond, 1999; Edwards, 2004). The process of membership participation stimulates "socialisation into democratic norms through a process of learning by doing" (Hadenius & Uggla, 1996, p. 1622). By participating in democratic structures members gain experience in debating, negotiating, and voting. These processes familiarise members with norms of reciprocity and trust, respect for minority rights, and peaceful resolution of conflicts (Warren, 2001). These educational effects are only achieved through interaction, if members choose to subscribe to an organisation without participating, few of them will be achieved (Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003).

#### The communicative role

The underlying idea of the communicative role is that NGOs safeguard a democratic public sphere wherein citizens debate the means and ends of governance (Edwards, 2004; Fung. 2003). The communicative role should be understood as the provision of a communication structure, rather than communication itself. According to Habermas. a communication structure does not refer "to the contents of everyday communication, but to the social space generated in communicative action" (cited in: Warren, 2001, p. 79). Associations foster public deliberation because they can signal the concerns of individual members and communicate them to a broader public. By acting "as an intermediary or (two-way) transmission belt between state and society" (G. White, 1994, p. 384), they provide the communication structure between the individual citizen and the formal political system. The content of communication is considered part of the representational role of civil society.

For the communicative role it is important that an organisation has relations with both society and the state (Hadenius & Uggla, 1996). If an organisation is not open to popular demands and has no relations with the state, it cannot function as a channel of communication between state and society. Being open to popular demands implies having a constituency for whom you work and to whom you are accountable. In relation to the state, NGOs should be autonomous without being disconnected (Warren, 2001). Hence, the communicative role requires that NGOs maintain the right balance between state and society because becoming too close to one would risk disconnecting with the other.

#### The representational role

Representation refers to voice and resistance. Besides political parties and elections, NGOs are an alternative channel that allows citizens to present the democratic system with a more differentiated and constant flow of input. NGOs serve as a catalyst by advocating for government policy changes on behalf of their constituencies (Lewis & Kanji, 2009). As such, they complement voting and tend to equalise representation as time and commitment are more equally distributed than money (Fung, 2003). NGOs also stimulate political participation, improving the functioning of democratic institutions (Diamond, 1999). With respect to resistance, associations can act as a watchdog and provide their members with veto power. By opposing government, associations offer a check on the abuse of state power, safeguarding standards of public morality and improving accountability (Edwards, 2004; Lewis & Kanji, 2009; G. White, 1994).

This role implies active participation in a public debate. Having a large voluntary membership, preferably among common citizens, is an important asset for fulfilling this role. It provides a direct link with societal groups and, especially when combined with a democratic decision-making structure, it legitimises claims of representation. If mobilised, a membership also serves as a source of countervailing power. Not being dependent upon the state is crucial for actually using this veto power against it (Hadenius & Uggla, 1996). Finally, representation requires a carefully chosen strategy to advocate constituency interests. There is a broad range of possible advocacy tactics; whether a confrontational or non-confrontational strategy is most effective depends on the specific situation (Jenkins, 2006).

#### The cooperative role

Aside from opposing the state, NGOs can also cooperate with it. Warren (2001) distinguishes two types of cooperation, subsidiarity and coordination. Filling gaps in the service-delivery role of the government is a particular form of subsidiarity. Within developing countries in particular, NGOs can "help to build pockets of efficiency within government agencies, provide strategic partners for reform oriented ministries", and "fill voids in the government's social service-delivery role" (Clarke, 1998, p. 49). Associations have also become more important for coordinating complex policy problems, especially those involving multiple actors. Their networks connect stakeholders, generate expert knowledge, mobilise support, and negotiate policy directions (Warren, 2001). In order to be an interesting partner, an NGO needs to have something special to offer, like a strong network or service-delivery capacity. To complement the government in areas such as education or health care, an NGO needs ample capacity and expertise in their field of work. Providing coordination in complex policy areas requires specialised knowledge and being able to bring together different groups.

Table 5.1 summarises the most important organisational conditions for fulfilling each of the democratic roles.

**Table 5.1** Organisational characteristics for performing democratic roles

Democratic role		Organisational characteristics
Educational	Information Civic virtues Political skills	<ul><li>Large voluntary membership among common citizens</li><li>Democratic decision making structure</li></ul>
Communicative	Channels of communication between state and society	- External and mutual relations with the state and society
Representational	Voice Resistance	<ul> <li>Large voluntary membership among common citizens</li> <li>Democratic decision making structure</li> <li>Mobilisation capacity (membership)</li> <li>Independence from state</li> <li>Advocacy strategy (confrontational or non-confrontational)</li> </ul>
Cooperative	Cooperation Subsidiarity	<ul><li>Expert knowledge &amp; network</li><li>Service delivery capacity</li></ul>

## 5.3 Methodology

This chapter is based on extensive fieldwork in Ghana (Accra) in 2007 and 2008. The research employs a multiple case study design in which the NGOs represent different cases. Five key organisations were purposively selected, capturing a variety of donor-sponsored democracy-promoting NGOs. All selected NGOs are part of the Ghana Research and Advocacy Programme (G-RAP), a funding scheme aiming at enhancing the democratic quality of political processes by stimulating NGO engagement.41 In 2007, 17 organisations were supported by G-RAP, classified as think-tanks, development organisations and advocacy networks. 42 The selected organisations cover these three categories: three think-tanks (CDD, IEA, IDEG), one development organisation (ISODEC), and one advocacy network (Abantu). This sample captures both the diversity of the funding scheme and the dominance of the think-tanks within it. Table 5.2 provides a basic overview of the selected NGOs.

The organisational characteristics and democratic roles of the selected organisations were discussed in 27 in-depth interviews with 21 respondents (see Appendix 5.1 for an overview). All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically coded. The

G-RAP was established in 2004 and is financed by the UK, Denmark, Canada, and the Netherlands; Interview G-RAP, November 2007. Currently G-RAP is called STAR-Ghana.

<sup>42</sup> G-RAP, available at: http://www.G-RAP.org [accessed December 2007].

Table 5.2 Basic organisational characteristics of the NGOs

	Full name	Establishment	Establishment Type of organisation	Size*	Office locations	Annual Budget**
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs	1989	Think-tank on political and economic issues	Medium Accra	Accra	1.5 MLN USD
СОО	Center for Democratic Development	1998	Think-tank on political and economic issues	Medium	Accra	1.4 MLN USD
IDEG	Institute of Democratic Governance	2000	Think-tank on political issues Medium	Medium	Accra	0.65 MLN USD***
ISODEC	Integrated Social Development Center	1987	Social service delivery and social advocacy organisation	Big	Accra, Tamale, Kumasi, Sunyani, Bolgatanga	1.0 MLN USD
Abantu	Abantu for development	1999	Gender advocacy network	Small	Accra, London, Nairobi, Kaduna	0.4 MLN USD

 $<sup>^{\</sup>star}$  No. of staff: Small: n < 10; Medium: 10 < n < 40; Big: n > 40

Source: Interviews, NGO websites, NGO documents, G-RAP website

<sup>\*\*</sup> Estimate 2007

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> This only includes core funding from G-RAP and the Africa Capacity Building Foundation

majority of interviewees were directors, researchers, and founding members of the selected NGOs. To balance their stories, additional interviews were conducted with local scientists, government (related) agencies, donors, and an international NGO. Moreover, interview data was complemented with annual reports, funding reports, NGO websites, and secondary literature.

#### 5.4 Democratic roles of the think-tanks

Because IEA, CDD, and IDEG are strikingly similar in many respects, we group them in our analysis. One possible reason for this similarity is that some of IEA's former employees would become founding members of IDEG and CDD (Interviews: ISSER, November 2007; IDEG, December 2007; IEA, November, 2007). The think-tanks all see promoting democracy and good governance as their main mission, are hierarchically structured, and have an academically trained core staff. Their main strategy focuses on doing research and advocating the results through meetings and workshops, mainly for parliamentarians and policy-makers of the central government. They work on macro-political issues such as decentralisation, constitutional reform, and electoral procedures. Finally, all think-tanks have close relations with the government, universities, and international donors. None of them have extensive grassroots connections. According to an employee of CDD this is because "we are looking at systems and processes and therefore our main interest is to look at the central government and how policy is made and implemented" (Interview CDD. December 2007).

#### The educational role of the think-tanks

The educational activities of the think-tanks are shaped by their strategy of research and advocacy, and propagate their profile as knowledge institutions. Their whole organisation is geared towards generating and disseminating expert knowledge. Each think-tank has its own library and employs academic researchers qualified in fields like political science, economy, or law. Sometimes, they also cooperate with university-based researchers, and some think-tank employees have part-time positions at universities (Interview IDEG, December 2007).

Despite difficulties in obtaining and maintaining quality staff, the think-tanks have been able to carve out a reputation as expert institutions. Qualified researchers are scarce in Ghana, and NGOs compete with each other, the state, and companies to attract them. Because "most good researchers don't live in Ghana, bringing them here is very expensive" (Interview IEA, December 2007). The loss of staff to better-paying organisations is a common problem among NGOs in Ghana (Interview ISODEC, November 2008). Despite these problems, the calibre of their personnel

remains their most important feature (Ohemeng, 2005). They are respected for it by both the general public and by government officials who use them for consultation (Arthur, 2010; Kpessa, 2011; Stapenhurst & Pelizzo, 2012). In comparison to most NGOs in Ghana, the think-tanks are an exception to the rule of a weak track record and understaffing (Arthur, 2010; Interview IBIS, December 2007):

"Institutions like CDD or IDEG are heavyweights. They have the manpower and expertise, so they can actually engage government in debate. If we take an NGO from outside Accra, say Tamale, they don't have the capacity to engage government in discussion" (Interview APRM, November 2007).

The think-tanks use non-confrontational advocacy tactics to advance their research findings. Through roundtables, conferences, seminars, book launches, radio, TV, and newspapers, all kinds of stakeholders are educated on policy issues. Research provides the content for these educational activities. For instance, at IEA:

"We prepare policy briefs, identifying an issue, and making recommendations. You send this to the most influential people across the country. Parliamentarians, District Chief Executives, universities, the media and so on, and you hope that they get the message" (Interview IEA, December 2007).

Educational activities mainly target state officials: "A minister may not have a degree in economics or finance, so you have to educate them, that is the basis of our work" (ibid.). Parliamentarians are frequently targeted because the think-tanks perceive the position of parliament as weak vis-à-vis the executive. To strengthen parliament, they give parliamentarians courses on subjects ranging from technical issues to the very basics of "teaching new parliamentarians about the rules and procedures of parliament" (Interview CDD, November 2007). For their part, parliamentarians and other government officials contact the think-tanks for consultation, research, and education (Kpessa, 2011; Interview MMYE, November 2007; Interview Department of Political Science (UG), November 2007; Ohemeng, 2005; Stapenhurst & Pelizzo, 2012).

The think-tanks also try to educate Ghanaian citizens about their democratic rights and duties, mainly through the popular media. IDEG also started working at the district level because: "we realised that people are unable to advocate their own issues, so we need to build that ability at the local level" (Interview IDEG, December 2008). However, their outreach to ordinary citizens is limited. Their institutions are Accra-based, and most of their publications have a technical nature and are not geared towards ordinary citizens. While many observers consider their capacity to interact with the state as a merit, they also see their limited connections to society as

a shortcoming (Interviews: ILGS, December 2007; APRM, November 2007; Department of Political Science (UG), November 2007; G-RAP, November 2007). We will discuss this further under the representational role.

#### The communicative role of the think-tanks

The think-tanks provide channels of communication with the state. This directly relates to their main strategic and educational focus, i.e. scrutinizing and influencing government policy. Political advocacy usually targets governmental decision-makers for recommendations to be adopted (Reid, 2000). The IEA provides a typical example: "Our number one targets are parliamentarians and policymakers because when they make new policies we hope that they use our work to improve the governance system. in this country" (Interview IEA, December 2007).

The importance of parliamentarians and policy-makers is reflected in the efforts the think-tanks put in building and maintaining relations with these groups. The IEA regularly invites "ministers, members of parliament and ambassadors for an informal lunch", which is "very important, because formal meetings are easier if you already have this informal relationship" (Interview IEA, November 2008). Lobby and advocacy are best facilitated by personal friendships:

"For instance, our director is a good friend of the former Minister of Education. He comes here and they chat and take a drink, and in the process our director mentions what is on his mind, which works very well in pushing some issues through" (Interview CDD, November 2007).

Such relations are commonplace because "Accra is a very small world" where "everybody knows everybody" (Interviews: IEA, December 2007; IDEG, December 2007; Abantu, November 2008). Although "government, civil society, and university all have their own roles", the separation between them is less pronounced because "they know each other from school or from their village, so personal connections are easily made" (Interview Netherlands Embassy, November 2007).

Because having access to the government is so important, the think-tanks adjust their advocacy strategy accordingly. Although they can be critical of government policies, their approach mainly consists of non-confrontational forms of communication and advice based on research outcomes. According to an employee of IDEG, confrontational strategies would damage the relationship of trust with the government (Interview IDEG, December 2008). Instead, IDEG presents its criticism as a "sugarcoated tablet, because they are trying to work with all the political parties, so they try not to antagonise anybody" (Interview ISSER, November 2007). This form of self-censorship can be explained by the privileged position the think-tanks have in terms of access to the government. By building a reputation as research institutes,

CDD, IEA, and IDEG have earned their seat at the table: "We get a lot of invitations from various ministries to sit on their board and to talk at their workshops and retreats" (Interview IEA, December 2008). The Ministry of Manpower Youth and Employment confirms this: "We quite appreciate what they are doing and we have been working with them. We invited them to meetings and seminars and they have invited us [to meetings and seminars], and we have responded to their invitations" (Interview MMYE, November 2007). As the think-tanks benefit from the status quo, they are less likely to resort to radical forms of action against the state. Besides benefitting from privileged access, getting too close to the government also has its drawbacks, which we discuss in the next section.

#### The representational role of the think-tanks

The think-tanks are weak in terms of representation, which raises concerns about their accountability, legitimacy, and independence. Three related issues are addressed, namely their lack of connection to Ghanaian society, their close links with the government, and their high dependence on international funding.

First, the think-tanks do not have the organisational characteristics to represent ordinary citizens. They only have an office in Accra<sup>43</sup>, have no membership, and do not represent anyone in particular. Furthermore, they are often characterised as urban elites with a limited connection to the wider Ghanaian society (Interviews: ILGS, December 2007; APRM, November 2007; Department of Political Science (UG), November 2007; ISSER, November 2007; G-RAP, November 2007). Because they have no local branches. "the level at which they can touch base with the districts is very limited. And you cannot sit in Accra and say that you are assessing governance in Ghana, you need to go to the local level" (Interview APRM, November 2007). The executive director of CDD describes this "over-concentration of prominent and technically strong NGOs in the urban rather than rural areas" as one of the problems affecting the overall effectiveness of Ghanaian civil society (Gyimah-Boadi & Yakah, 2012, p. 17). Particularly the rural and urban poor remain excluded (Arthur, 2010; Haynes, 2003; Mohan, 2002; Porter, 2003). As these think-tanks frequently influence the national policy agenda and have become one of the main avenues for government consultation with the citizenry (Kpessa, 2011), their lack of accountability to ordinary citizens creates a problem of legitimacy. The question remains in whose name they are influencing government.

A second concern relates to their independence vis-à-vis the state. In contrast to many think-tanks in the developed world, CDD, IEA, and IDEG adhere to the principle of non-partisanship. According to an employee of IEA, being perceived as neutral by both the state and societal actors is important because "otherwise your research

<sup>43</sup> In October 2010, after the fieldwork period, CDD opened an additional office in the northern regional capital Tamale, thereby reducing their Accra bias.

goes to nothing" (Interview IEA, December 2007). However, according to Ohemeng this neutrality is questioned by many Ghanaians. He finds many personal links between the (then) ruling New Patriotic Party and the IEA and CDD (Ohemeng, 2005). This compromises their independence from the government, which undermines their ability to be a watchdog.

A final concern is their donor-dependence. In Ghana, "the NGO sector is basically donor-driven" (Interview ISSER, November 2007), which affects sustainability and accountability. International funding is the lifeline of the Ghanaian think-tanks. Without foreign assistance they would probably not even exist, as "internal sources [for our kind of work] in Ghana are zero" (Interview IDEG, December 2007), and "the bulk of our finance comes from donor support" (Interview CDD, November 2007). As they have few sources of local income, "the big problem is how sustainable they are after donor funds dry up" (Interview Department of Political Science (UG), November 2007). Furthermore, overdependence on external funding draws accountability (even further) away from the ordinary Ghanaian citizen and inhibits the danger of co-optation (Abdulai & Crawford, 2010; Darkwa et al., 2006; Porter, 2003; Porter & Lyon, 2006).

#### The cooperative role of the think-tanks

With their research capabilities and expertise, the think-tanks are useful partners for the state. Because the Ghanaian state has limited capacity for gathering and processing policy information, the think-tanks supplement the government's effort in developing appropriate policies and institutions (Ohemeng, 2005). Many Ghanaian parliamentary committees and individual members of parliament maintain ties to policy think-tanks to compensate for this lack of "in-house" research staff and resources (Stapenhurst & Pelizzo, 2012, pp. 342-343). The think-tanks see it as one of their main tasks "to assist policymakers in implementing good policies for the nation" (Interview IEA, November 2008). The IEA even drafted several laws, the "Right to Information Bill" and the "Whistleblowers Bill". The frequent meetings with state officials, as described in the communicative role, show that the think-tanks are very active at this kind of cooperation.

The think-tanks also provide coordination in complex policy issues with multiple actors. By organizing seminars and round tables, the think-tanks provide platforms where the state and societal groups can debate (Stapenhurst & Pelizzo, 2012). For societal groups, these can be valuable meetings that offer them a chance to present their issues directly to state officials. In this way, CDD helped the Ghana Federation for the Disabled (GFD): "They initiate a bill, but cannot take it far. As CDD has direct contacts with parliament, we can take it from there" (Interview CDD, November 2007). Studying this particular case, Oduro (2009, p. 637) finds a division of labour, while GFD organises demonstrations to pressurise the government: "CDD became the intellectual powerhouse of the GFD, doing all the lobbying for the law to be passed".

#### 5.5 Democratic roles of ISODEC

"Every life matters" is the motto of ISODEC, which aims to enhance sustainable human development by empowering the less fortunate. ISODEC is a democratically structured membership organisation with a general assembly of members as its highest decision-making body. Membership is, however, limited to about forty former employees and individuals supporting the values of ISODEC. Unlike the think-tanks, ISODEC focuses on their constituency at the grassroots and has offices throughout the country. Their work is rooted in community level service-delivery for both the urban and rural poor. Since 1987 they have been working in basic education, health, water, and sanitation. In 2000 they initiated a research and advocacy programme, promoting alternative development strategies with campaigns addressing issues like transparency, trade, and public goods.

#### The educational role of ISODEC

ISODEC primarily educates less-empowered citizens and their organisations. This approach directly relates to their mission that "poor and marginalised people [...] have an effective voice in decisions affecting their lives, and develop the capacity to exercise these rights". 44 Education has always been an important part of their service-delivery work. It ranges from teaching communities about health and sanitation to programmes for raising political awareness and skills. ISODEC's Centre for Budget Advocacy, for example, teaches citizens how to read the national budget, because "no one really understands what the budget is about, [while] it is the biggest document that controls how things move around in this country" (Interview ISODEC, December 2007). By teaching marginalised citizens skills to comment on the budget, ISODEC hopes that "their issues are also being forwarded to the public domain" (ibid.; see also: Abbey, Azeem, & Kuupiel, 2010).

The educational activities of ISODEC mainly rely on their close relations to the grassroots and on staff that can translate complex issues into simple messages. Their countrywide service-delivery activities provide ISODEC with access to local communities. In these deprived communities, their approach has to take into account high illiteracy rates, which are generally above the Ghanaian average of 35%. Making policy information accessible to these groups requires "translating policy documents into local languages, and using pictures and cartoons to explain some of the issues" (Interview ISODEC, December 2007).

<sup>44</sup> Internal document: ISODEC (2006), The ISODEC Rights-based Advocacy Programme (RBAIII) 2007-2009 (Accra: ISODEC), p. 18.

<sup>45</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, CIA world fact book 2011, available at: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook [accessed May 2011].

#### The communicative role of ISODEC

Whereas the think-tanks provide channels of communication with the state, ISODEC focuses on the grassroots. The think-tanks' "starting point is reviewing government policy while our starting point is listening to communities" (Interview ISODEC, November 2008). Their extensive grassroots connections and strong presence outside Accra make ISODEC "a unique case" within the Ghanaian NGO sector (Interview ISSER, November 2007).

"They are one of the few examples of a national organisation with competence in macro-economic issues which, at the same time, is rooted at the local level. They cover the whole range, [...] Compared to that, typical research institutes like IEA and CDD are much less rooted" (Interview G-RAP, November 2007).

This countrywide presence enables ISODEC to signal problems at the grassroots level and communicate them to the central government, which brings us to the representational role.

#### The representational role of ISODEC

ISODEC provides the poor and marginalised with a voice in the public domain. Through their service-delivery activities they learn about the needs of their constituency and feed this into their advocacy activities (Interview ISODEC, December 2007). ISODEC wanted to give their constituency a direct voice by recruiting them as members, but failed in doing so: "Membership remains institutional, there is no membership of the masses" (Interview ISODEC, November 2008). This raises a legitimate concern: "ISODEC tries to represent the poor, but whether they are genuinely representative is a different question" (Interview ISSER, November 2007). Accountability is not institutionally embedded and therefore depends on goodwill. Despite the absence of a broad membership base, ISODEC gets enough support to make its voice heard and to mobilise resistance. This is crucial for their advocacy strategy: "Advocacy is about numbers. If you cannot raise numbers and make the noise that politicians will hear, you will not have an impact" (Interview ISODEC, November 2008).

ISODEC combines confrontational and non-confrontational forms of advocacy. They usually start with non-confrontational forms and use confrontational strategies as a last resort, like their campaign against the privatisation of drinking water. It started with a workshop with policy-makers and the community, "but when the minister wanted to go ahead with privatisation, [...] something had to be done to stop it, and the only way was to demonstrate. So our mode of advocacy may be different from the other NGOs" (Interview ISODEC, November 2008). Through mass-mobilisation, they managed to block most of the plans and forced a seat at the government table (Agyeman, 2007; Yeboah, 2006). This is an example of exercising veto power against the government, because "they realised that we have the capacity to pull back their policies" (Interview ISODEC, December 2007).

ISODEC can resort to confrontational action not only because of their mobilisation capacity, but also because they are more distant from the state. In fact, "they have to be independent from the central government, because how would they otherwise be able to turn around and criticise them?" (Interview ISSER, November 2007). In contrast to the think-tanks, ISODEC has "not really worked on using informal contacts very much" (Interview ISODEC, November 2008). As good relations are not their first priority, their message is usually more critical of government policy. They are therefore generally "perceived [by the government] as a very critical watchdog" (Interview G-RAP, November 2007).

#### The cooperative role of ISODEC

Their grassroots connections and service-delivery experience make ISODEC an interesting partner for the government. They have a history of performing a subsidiary role by taking over and complementing government services (Interview G-RAP, November 2007). For instance, in the area of reproductive health they cooperate with the Ministry of Health: "The ministry provides technical staff, and ISODEC provides the network resources that allow the ministry to work in that area" (Interview ISODEC, December 2007).

Good relations with the government are crucial for performing a cooperative role. Especially during the 1990s, ISODEC "always had a budget surplus because of doing service-delivery and consultancy for the government" (Interview ISODEC, December 2007). This relation changed in 2000 when ISODEC refocused from service-delivery to advocacy at the same time as a new government came to power: "It was as if we all of a sudden became vocal, because we started dealing with policy issues. People thought we had become political and were against the new government" (Interview ISODEC, December 2007). The timing of this shift combined with the confrontational nature of their advocacy harmed their relationship with the new government, and "affected our income because we lost all those contracts" (Interview ISODEC, December 2007).

As a result of this income loss, they became more donor-dependent, reducing their freedom to set their own agenda. For instance, when Oxfam-Novib shifted to other West-African countries, "we had to develop a West-African programme to make ourselves relevant to them" (Interview ISODEC, December 2007). It also affected their ability to attract qualified staff: "Our salaries are not competitive, so we are losing competent staff to international NGOs" (Interview ISODEC, December 2007). By raising some domestic income, ISODEC reduces its dependence, especially in comparison to other NGOs:

"They publish a newspaper, have a microfinance institution and do community service-delivery. This allows them to generate money on their own rather than relying solely on donors. If you look at the other NGOs, from the computers to the building, everything comes from donors" (Interview ISSER, November 2007).

These activities could not however cover their losses. In the end, losing income. competent staff, and part of one's independence impact negatively on each of the aforementioned roles.

#### 5.6 Democratic roles of Abantu

Abantu is part of an international network with offices in London, Nairobi, and Kaduna. The office in Accra operates as an independent organisation, coordinating programmes in West Africa. Most of their work, and hence our analysis, focuses on Ghana. Abantu aims to promote the position of women in Ghanaian society by supporting women's organisations, "to build their capacity for influencing policy" (Interview Abantu, December 2007). As a non-membership organisation with a hierarchical structure, they keep in touch with their constituency by networking with women's groups throughout the country. To empower women, Abantu employs three strategies: (1) training and capacity-building; (2) advocacy and public awareness-raising; and (3) research and publication.46

#### The educational role of Abantu

Educating women and their organisations lies at the heart of Abantu's work. The marginalisation of women and their low political participation is considered a major challenge to democratic consolidation in Ghana (Abdulai & Crawford, 2010; Ofei-Aboagye, 2004). Therefore, Abantu targets "all women", in order "to make them aware of their rights", and "policymakers who must make sure that change happens for women" (Interview Abantu, November 2008). Women and their organisations at the grassroots level receive training ranging from technical issues, like ICT training, to political issues, such as "running public forums in the regions to educate the general public about why to vote for women" (Interview Abantu, November 2008). Female politicians are trained in democratic principles and skills, i.e. negotiation, presentation, and dealing with the media.<sup>47</sup> Female District Assembly members are especially targeted, "because of the unequal position of women in local communities" (Interview Abantu, December 2007).

<sup>46</sup> Internal document: Abantu (2005), Strategic Plan 2005 – 2007 (Accra: Abantu).

Internal document: Abantu (2006), Strengthening NGOs' Capacities for Engaging with Policies from a Gender Perspective, interim report to Ford Foundation, (Lagos: Abantu).

Abantu's educational activities mainly rely on their network. They do not have enough staff to implement all their activities by themselves. Furthermore, working at the local level is difficult because "we only have an office in Accra, and we cannot pretend to know everything about the regions" (Interview Abantu, December 2007). Abantu therefore contacts likeminded organisations in the regions: "We partner up with them because they have regional offices. They do the mobilisation and then we deliver the programme" (Interview Abantu, December 2007).

#### The communicative role of Abantu

Like ISODEC, Abantu mainly provides channels of communication to the grassroots, namely women's groups throughout the country. Their network is part of the broader Ghanaian women's movement, which some describe as "one of the most impressive civil society networks in Ghana" (Interview G-RAP, November 2007). It enables them to collect information on the needs of women and "bring their issues into the public domain" (Interview G-RAP, November 2007). Although Abantu is less well connected to the central government than the think-tanks, they have good connections to the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, because the minister (at the time of interviewing) "was a former activist who worked with a lot of women's groups, so she virtually is their friend" (Interview ISSER, November 2007).

The Women's Manifesto for Ghana project shows how Abantu connects women's groups to the national political system. The manifesto outlined "critical issues for women and ways to address them" (Interview Abantu, December 2007). In order to write it, Abantu consulted stakeholders throughout the country, including women's groups, NGOs. District Assembly women, media personalities, and political parties. This project is therefore:

"a showcase of how broad-based political processes and partnerships involving mass-membership organisations can enable small organisations to transcend their limitations, maximise their resources, create a productive division of labour and, most significantly, give their projects legitimacy and grounding" (Tsikata, 2009, p. 190).

This grounding and legitimacy helps the 'Coalition on the Manifesto' in advocating the use and acceptance of the manifesto by the government.

#### The representational role of Abantu

Besides stimulating women to represent themselves, Abantu also represents the voice of women in the public domain. Their strategy involves both confrontational and non-confrontational advocacy methods. Like ISODEC, they use coalitions to pressurise the government: "For instance, when the Economic Partnership Agreements were

signed, we [the coalition] were pitch-camping at the place where the ministers were meeting EU delegates, to make sure that they do not make the wrong decision" (Interview Abantu, November 2008). In this way, Abantu strives to keep gender issues on the agenda. Some of these coalitions have been successful in bringing about new legislation, most notably the passing of a Bill against domestic violence (Adomako Ampofo, 2008; Gyimah-Boadi & Yakah, 2012; Tsikata, 2009).

In contrast to ISODEC, Abantu is nowadays more careful about maintaining good relations with the government: "In the eighties people perceived women's work as antagonistic. Although we are still fighting, strategies are more humane, so the government is accessible to us" (Interview Abantu, November 2008). As a result:

"Hard forms of action no longer constitute a major part of our advocacy work. [...] Now it is more lobbying and advocacy in the form of strategy meetings and such. You do not want it to look like you are against them" (Interview Abantu, November 2008).

Abantu now attaches more importance to informal contacts with state officials because "the informal connections do a greater part of the work" (Interview Abantu, November 2008). In this sense, their mode of advocacy resembles that of the think-tanks.

Because Abantu is a non-membership organisation, they do not directly represent the voice of their constituency. Instead, projects like the manifesto are used to gather information on women's needs at the grassroots level. Legitimacy and grounding then has to come from mass-membership organisations mandating Abantu to speak on their behalf. This backing is important because the Government of Ghana has the tendency to "always come out and say: hey, you don't represent anybody" (Interview ISSER, November 2007). Lack of finances and donor-dependence make it harder to organise direct forms of representation:

"We tried to establish a self-sustaining membership organisation, called Netright, but the membership dues could not sustain it. We had to turn to donors, and once you become dependent, the social-movement character of your organisation is compromised" (Interview Abantu, December 2007).

It means having to deal with "frustrating accountability procedures" and with donors who "lack sufficient understanding of the needs and concerns of our people" (Interview Abantu, December 2007). While signalling that donors have become more open for negotiation, they still influence Abantu's work: "A lot of times, if we had our own way, we would do things differently" (Interview Abantu, November 2008).

### The cooperative role of Abantu

Abantu is a typical example of an advocacy group with a low capacity for performing a cooperative role. They are a relatively small organisation in terms of both staff and budget which limits their capacity for cooperation. In addition, their strategy to work at both the national and the district level has overstretched their resources. Therefore, rather than offering their own capacity, they try influencing the allocation of state capacity: "We do not do service-delivery, it is just policy advocacy backed by research" (Interview Abantu, November 2008).

# 5.7 To each, its own: comparing the NGOs

Table 5.3 presents an aggregation of our empirical findings, answering our empirical questions. It shows what kind of democratic roles are performed, and what organisational characteristics enable the NGOs to perform them. Comparing the NGOs to each other reveals that none of them performs all roles simultaneously. They each specialise in certain roles, which is mainly due to contradicting organisational characteristics. Furthermore, it reveals that the roles they perform are affected by donor-dependence.

## Causes and consequences of specialisation

The NGOs specialise in some roles at the expense of others. The think-tanks focus on communicating with, cooperating with, and educating state officials, but have weak links with society and represent nobody. Abantu educates female politicians but, like ISODEC, is not as closely connected to the state as the think-tanks. Instead, Abantu and ISODEC have stronger links to society, aiming to represent and educate their constituency. Whereas ISODEC cooperates with the government in the field of service-delivery, Abantu does not perform any cooperative role.

Careful examination of Table 5.3 reveals that performing each democratic role requires different and sometimes contradictory characteristics, which are difficult to combine within one organisation. The NGOs in our sample illustrate that providing channels of communication with the state is difficult to combine with confrontational actions against the same state. The think-tanks refrain from confrontational strategies to protect their good relations with the state. For Abantu, confrontational strategies have become less common because they want to improve their relations with the state. ISODEC's confrontational approach resulted in a loss of access to the state. Similarly, organisations performing a representational role are less suited to perform a cooperative role of coordination. Because the think-tanks do not represent a certain constituency, they can bring together different stakeholders in policy debates. Because ISODEC and Abantu represent the voice of their constituency, they are more

Table 5.3 Aggregated empirical findings

Democratic role		Organisational characteristics
Educational	Educating state officials	<ul> <li>Research as input</li> <li>Non-confrontational advocacy strategy</li> <li>Close relations with state</li> <li>Relations with universities</li> <li>Professional staff (expert knowledge / research capacity)</li> </ul>
	Educating citizens	<ul><li>Close relations with grassroots</li><li>Network with other NGOs</li><li>Ability to translate complex issues into simple messages</li></ul>
Communicative	Channels of communication with state	<ul><li>Close relations with state</li><li>Informal contacts with state officials</li><li>Non-confrontational advocacy strategies</li></ul>
	Channels of communication with society	<ul><li>Close relations with grassroots</li><li>Network with other NGOs</li><li>Presence throughout the country</li></ul>
Representational	Indirect voice	<ul> <li>Demarcated constituency</li> <li>Close relations with constituency</li> <li>Network with other NGOs</li> <li>Advocacy strategy (confrontational or non-confrontational)</li> </ul>
	Resistance	<ul> <li>Confrontational advocacy strategy</li> <li>Mobilisation capacity (membership, constituency, coalitions with other NGOs)</li> <li>Independence from state</li> </ul>
Cooperative	Coordination	<ul> <li>Close relations with state</li> <li>Relations with universities</li> <li>Organizing seminars and roundtables</li> <li>Not representing any group ('neutrality')</li> <li>Professional staff (expert knowledge / research capacity)</li> </ul>
	Subsidiarity	<ul><li>Close relations with state</li><li>Service delivery capacity</li></ul>

likely to be one of the stakeholders in such debates. So, each NGO understandably occupies its own niche.

This also explains why they are susceptible to criticism. In fact, they are often criticised in terms of roles they do not perform. The characteristics which make an organisation strong in one role potentially weaken them in other roles. For instance, ISODEC's confrontational approach enables them to independently voice the needs of the marginalised, but being too confrontational provokes the criticism of being anti-government. This undermines their legitimacy in the eyes of the government,

which also undermines their access. Similarly, their professional staff and close (informal) relations with the state enable the think-tanks to educate and influence state officials, while provoking the criticisms of having an urban elite bias, being co-opted by political parties, and not representing ordinary citizens. So, getting too close to the government undermines their legitimacy in the eyes of the general public. This shows that NGOs have to perform a balancing act to prevent an asset becoming a liability.

#### Democratic roles and donor-dependence

Dependence on donor funding affects all the NGOs in our sample. As Ghanaians have little disposable income for membership dues or private donations (Darkwa et al., 2006), and there is virtually no culture of corporate philanthropy (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004), financial resources for NGOs are scarce in Ghana. Paradoxically, while donor support enables most of them to exist in the first place, it also negatively impacts upon their work. First, the case of the think-tanks highlights the issue of sustainability, potentially affecting the performance of each role. Second, as evinced by the case of Abantu, donor-dependency replaces downward accountability with accountability towards the donor, thus damaging representation. Third, as was evident in the case of ISODEC, it reduces freedom to set your own agenda. For instance, donors can be sensitive about confrontational strategies, limiting the extent to which donor-funded NGOs can pose a countervailing force. Finally, competition for funds can divide the Ghanaian NGO community (Interview IBIS Ghana, December 2007):

"There is very little collaboration amongst the organisations, I think as a result of rivalry and competition. Because the country is so small, and we are so underdeveloped, there is a lot of backstabbing. Just for funding people would lie. So now you find that that collaboration is not there yet" (Interview with one of the NGOs, anonymous because of sensitivity).

To overcome this, G-RAP provides core funding rather than project funding. As a result, "people are beginning to feel comfortable with each other" (Interview with one of the NGOs, anonymous because of sensitivity). This does not however solve the underlying problem of dependency, which is ultimately a problem of sustainability.

# 5.8 Comparing theory and practice: towards a new framework

We now turn to comparing each theoretical role presented in table 5.1 to the practices presented in table 5.3. Two observations stand out. First, our empirical analysis revealed that Ghanaian NGOs perform different kinds of democratic roles and use different organisational characteristics for performing them than the ones presented in table 5.1. Second, some of the theoretical roles are not performed by any of the NGOs. Based on these findings we propose a new theoretical framework.

### The educational role in theory and practice

Theoretically, the educational role requires democratic membership organisations with a broad popular base amongst common citizens because the education of citizens takes place through the process of membership participation. None of the NGOs in Ghana perform this kind of educational role. The organisational constellations of the think-tanks and Abantu represent the exact opposite, namely hierarchically structured non-membership organisations. Even ISODEC does not fulfil this kind of educational role because, while having a democratic structure, their membership does not include the poor and vulnerable for whom they work. Instead of an educational role shaped by processes of membership participation, they each perform a different kind of educational role. Education takes the form of organizing training sessions, seminars, radio programmes, workshops and research presentations, with different NGOs targeting different kinds of groups (e.g. policymakers, women, urban poor). Based on these findings, it seems important to divide the educational role into an internal and an external domain. The internal educational role then focuses on processes of 'learning by doing' within the organisation, whereas the external educational role focuses on teaching people outside the organisation 'how to do it'. An organisation does not need to have members or a democratic structure for performing an external role, it is more important to have access to the groups you want to educate (state officials or citizens), and to have the right strategy, qualified staff (expertise) and enough resources.

# The communicative role in theory and practice

The idea that NGOs provide a two-way transmission belt between citizens and the political system fails to describe the NGOs in this study. We found organisations that focus mainly on one end of the belt. The think-tanks have close connections to the government, while ISODEC and Abantu maintain close linkages with the grassroots. If we isolate a citizen-oriented channel, on the one hand, and a state-oriented one, on the other, it would provide a better description of our findings, in which none of the organisations proved strong at providing a channel of communication in both directions at the same time.

### The representational role in theory and practice

Ideally, an NGO performs a representational role by allowing citizens to organise and speak for themselves. This is best achieved by a democratic membership organisation which voices the needs of its members. None of the NGOs in Ghana performs this kind of representational role. Neither the think-tanks nor Abantu have a membership at all, whereas ISODEC's membership does not include the people they aim to represent. Instead of directly representing the voice of members, both Abantu and ISODEC perform a different kind of representational role, which can be characterised as trusteeship. Their mode of representation is indirect; they speak for those who do not speak for themselves. Therefore, we divide the aspect of 'voice' into direct and indirect forms of representation. An important strategy for (indirectly) representing your constituency is campaigning. In a survey on the relationships of Ghanaian NGOs with issue-based advocacy coalitions, Davies (2007) found that ISODEC belongs to seventeen, Abantu to eight, CDD and IDEG to three, and IEA to only one advocacy coalition. This finding confirms that Abantu and ISODEC are more active at contributing a voice to the public sphere than the think-tanks. It also shows that voice without membership is possible, but without solving the underlying question of legitimacy.

### The cooperative role in theory and practice

To perform this role, theory stresses the importance of having resources and capacities that are useful for the state. This accurately describes what we have found in Ghana. In addition, we found that having a good relation with the state is a prerequisite for fulfilling this role. In terms of subsidiarity, the cooperative role is only performed by ISODEC. Their experience in the field of service delivery resulted in joint programmes with some ministries. The think-tanks and Abantu are weaker in terms of subsidiarity because they do not possess the capacity to take over or complement state functions. Within the cooperative role, the main strength of the think-tanks lies in providing coordination. The research capacity of the think-tanks is not matched within the state. Therefore, their papers and policy-briefs often serve as input for national policy discussions. Informal relations with state-officials facilitate this cooperation. Abantu and ISODEC do not possess a similar research capacity. Their strength lies in network resources which are mainly used for representation or resistance.

#### Towards a new Framework

The findings of Ghana suggest that we should alter the democratic roles of our theoretical framework in three ways: (1) divide the educational role into an internal and an external role; (2) separate the communicative role into distinct state-oriented and society-oriented channels; and (3) split the aspect of 'voice' into direct and

indirect forms of representation. With these adaptations the model better explains what is going on in Ghana. As Ghana is often considered a good case, these theoretical adaptations, which acknowledge shortcomings in practice, are likely to be applicable to other African countries as well. Table 5.4 summarises the new framework (see appendix 5.2 for the complete version, including organisational characteristics).

**Table 5.4** Adapted theoretical framework of democratic roles

Democratic role			
Educational	Internal External	Information, Civic virtues, Political skills Educating state officials Educating citizens	
Communicative	Channels of communication with state Channels of communication with society		
Representational	Voice Resistance	Direct Indirect	
Cooperative	Coordination Subsidiarity		

# 5.9 Conclusion

Democracy-promoting NGOs have been frequently criticised for not practicing what they preach. While promoting democracy, they often have an urban elite bias, are co-opted by the state and donors and lack societal accountability structures. As our analysis showed, the NGOs in Ghana are no exception to this criticism. If we take the four theoretical roles as a benchmark, we can conclude that they do not deliver what is expected from them. They do not perform an educational role in the sense of a Tocquevillian "school of democracy"; none of them has strong channels of communication with the state and the citizens simultaneously; and perhaps most importantly, none of them directly represents the voice of ordinary citizens. While this critique is justified, our analysis revealed that this is only one part of a bigger picture.

We found that Ghanaian NGOs perform different versions of the theoretical roles, with different organisational characteristics. We also found that none of them performs each role simultaneously, because different roles require different and sometimes contradictory organisational characteristics. Based on these findings, we show why the NGOs are so vulnerable to criticism, and that avoiding it requires careful manoeuvring both within and between roles. Finally, our findings help to understand

why NGOs do not necessarily need to practise what they preach for being able to contribute to democracy. To substantiate this claim we first assess how democratic the NGOs in our sample are, before turning to the question of how this affects their ability to perform democratic roles.

In its most ideal form, we could define "being democratic" as having an independent organisation where the leadership is elected by, and accountable to, its members, where the process of decision-making is transparent and open to membership participation, and where membership is open to all kinds of citizens. If this is the standard, then the think-tanks are particularly susceptible to the charge of being undemocratic. They have hierarchical organisational structures, an urban elite profile, and are neither accountable to citizens nor open to their participation. ISODEC comes closest to this ideal, but because there is no direct participation of the poor and marginalised, they lack a direct link between voice, constituency, and accountability. Finally, as an Accra-based non-membership organisation with an extensive countrywide network, Abantu seems to occupy a middle position between the think-tanks and ISODEC. So although all of the NGOs are promoting (aspects of) democracy and good governance, none of them are themselves fully democratic.

In contrast to the 'practise what you preach' argument, we argue that contributing to democracy does not necessarily depend on being democratic yourself. Rather than it being a question of whether or not you can make a contribution, it is a question of what kind of contribution you can make. Only a 'Tocquevillian' educational role and a direct representational role require organisations with a membership and internally democratic structures. The other roles can be performed with different organisational setups. Representation without direct membership participation is possible by mobilizing one's constituency and building networks with other NGOs. Education of state officials depends more on expertise and access to the state than on accountability to a membership. Similarly, legitimacy can be derived from sources other than direct membership participation, like from coalitions, from expertise, from independence, and from transparency.<sup>48</sup> Judgements concerning the democratic nature of an NGO therefore require careful consideration.

Finally, we found that donor funding affected all the NGOs in our sample, so we now turn to discussing the practical use of our findings for donor agencies wishing to improve their support to civil society and democracy. By breaking it down to the level of organisational characteristics, our analysis makes the relation between civil society and democracy more tangible. It provides insight into which factors enable and limit

<sup>48</sup> This does not however mean that legitimacy derived from these alternative sources automatically translates into legitimacy in the eyes of state officials. In day-to-day politics, not having a membership and not being democratic yourself still renders NGOs vulnerable to criticism, because, on any occasion, it provides state officials with ammunition to question their credibility as "genuine" democracy promoters.

NGOs in performing certain democratic roles. Because of this tangibility, donor agencies can use the adapted framework (see appendix 5.2) as a tool for rethinking their civil society and democracy promotion strategies. First, by identifying the repertoire of democratic roles for NGOs, it enables donors to identify blind spots in their funding strategy. Second, by linking the roles to specific organisational characteristics, it enables donors to specifically target their activities as it shows what kind of NGOs they should sponsor for each role and where NGOs could complement each other. For instance, if donors want to overcome the blind spots identified in this study, they could alter their funding in two ways. First, they could stimulate cooperation between the NGOs they support, as existing funding schemes have often led to competition and distrust. Providing ISODEC and the think-tanks with incentives to cooperate in certain areas could strengthen the link between state and society as one has close relations with the people and the other with the state. Second, to promote genuine 'schools of democracy' and direct forms of representation, they could loosen their conditions and expand funding to less professional democratic membership organisations at the grassroots level. The guestion remains, however, whether this is feasible for donors and desirable for grassroots organisations, because as chapter 4 showed, being included in the aid-system might very well change the essence of these more informal types of organisation.

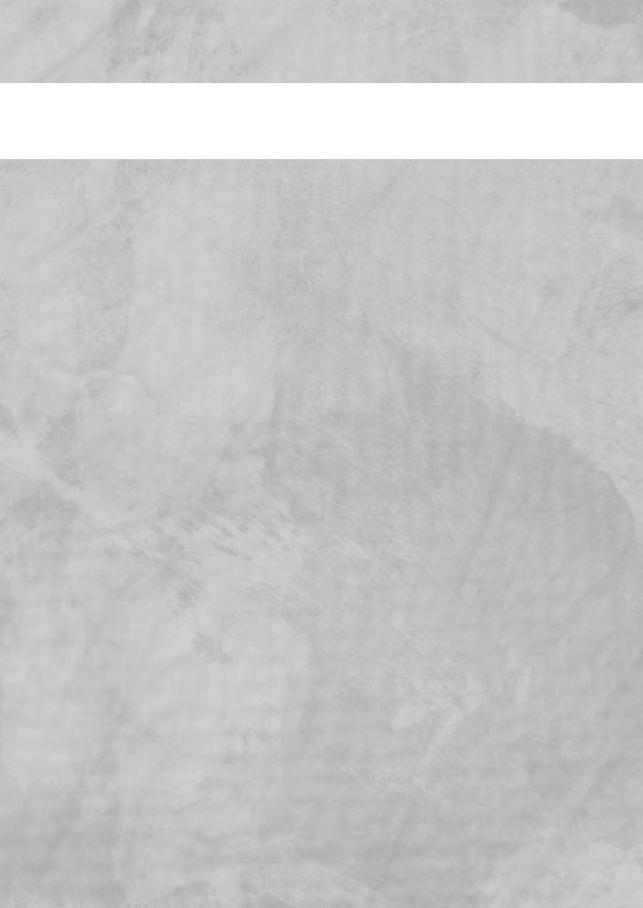
# Appendix 5.1: Overview of interview data

Organisation	Туре	Respondents / interviews	Date(s)
Center for Democratic Development (CDD)	NGO	2 persons / 3 interviews	11/30/2007 12/03/2007 12/11/2008
Institute of Democratic Governance (IDEG)	NGO	3 persons / 3 interviews	12/04/2007 12/05/2007
Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA)	NGO	2 persons / 3 interviews	12/11/2007 11/06/2008 12/12/2008
Integrated Social Development Center (ISODEC)	NGO	3 persons / 5 interviews	12/06/2007 11/05/2008 11/10/2008 12/12/2008
Abantu for development	NGO	2 persons / 3 interviews	12/13/2007 11/06/2008 11/11/2008
IBIS Ghana	International NGO	1 person / 1 interview	12/14/2007
Netherlands Embassy	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	11/28/2007
Ghana Research and Advocacy Program (G-RAP)	Donor	1 person / 1 interview	11/19/2007
Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) – University of Ghana	University	2 persons / 2 interviews	11/19/2007
Department of Political Science – University of Ghana	University	2 persons / 2 interviews	11/26/2007 11/27/2007
African Peer Review Mechanism Ghana (APRM)	Government agency	1 person / 1 interview	11/20/2007
Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS)	Government agency	1 person / 1 interview	12/12/2007
Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment - NGO office (MMYE)	Governmental ministry	1 person / 1 interview	11/29/2007

Note: a total of 27 interviews with 21 respondents (one respondent works for both university and for one of the selected NGOs)

# **Appendix 5.2: Combining theory and practice**

Democratic role			Organisational characteristics	
Educational	Internal	Information Civic virtues Political skills	<ul><li>Large voluntary membership among common citizens</li><li>Democratic decision making structure</li></ul>	
	External	Educating state officials	<ul> <li>Research as input</li> <li>Non-confrontational advocacy strategy</li> <li>Close relations with state</li> <li>Relations with universities</li> <li>Professional staff (expert knowledge / research capacity)</li> </ul>	
		Educating citizens	<ul><li>Close relations with grassroots</li><li>Network with other NGOs</li><li>Ability to translate complex issues into simple messages</li></ul>	
Communicative	Channels of communication with state		Close relations with state Informal contacts with state officials Non-confrontational strategies	
	Channels of communication with society		<ul> <li>Close relations with grassroots (membership)</li> <li>Network with other NGOs</li> <li>Presence throughout the country</li> </ul>	
Representational	Voice	Direct	<ul> <li>Large voluntary membership among common citizens</li> <li>Democratic decision making structure</li> <li>Advocacy strategy (confrontational or non-confrontational)</li> </ul>	
		Indirect	<ul> <li>Demarcated constituency</li> <li>Close relations with constituency</li> <li>Network with other NGOs</li> <li>Advocacy strategy (confrontational or non-confrontational)</li> </ul>	
	Resistanc	ce	<ul> <li>Confrontational advocacy strategy</li> <li>Independence from state</li> <li>Mobilisation capacity (membership, constituency, coalitions with other NGOs)</li> </ul>	
Cooperative	Coordina	tion	<ul> <li>Close relations with state</li> <li>Relations with universities</li> <li>Organizing seminars and roundtables</li> <li>Not representing any group ('neutrality')</li> <li>Professional staff (expert knowledge / research capacity)</li> </ul>	
	Subsidiar	ity	<ul><li>Close relations with state</li><li>Service delivery capacity</li></ul>	



# Chapter 6

# Conclusion

# 6.1 Introduction

Based on the idea that a critical and vibrant civil society is essential for the development and consolidation of young democracies, many bi- and multilateral donor agencies have funding programmes aimed at strengthening civil society sectors in developing countries around the world. Among the desirable effects of a strong civil society are that it serves as a check on state power, that it promotes a plural society, and that it protects a democratic public sphere (Diamond, 1999; Edwards, 2004; Fowler, 2000; G. White, 1994). Within civil society, donors direct most of their funding to NGOs for bringing about all the merits of civil society. NGOs are believed to be able to do so by being flexible, closely connected to citizens, fostering public deliberation, helping include the poor and marginalised, educating citizens on the norms and values of democracy, and by being able to cater to local circumstances and local needs. What began to emerge from many studies, however, was that this positive image of NGOs did not correspond with the actual roles, forms and contributions of donor-funded NGOs in developing countries (Diamond, 1999; Edwards, 2004; Fowler, 2000; Hendriks, 2006; Houtzager & Lavalle, 2010; Warren, 2001). The aim of this thesis was to contribute to understanding why this is the case.

All the studies relate to the central question of how policy assumptions regarding civil society and democracy development turn out in practice and what explains the discrepancies between them. The focus on policy assumptions is a strategic choice. Aside from donors, civil society researchers are also criticised for letting ideals obscure reality (Kopecky & Mudde, 2003; Mitlin et al., 2007; Robins et al., 2008; Tvedt, 2007). The debate on civil society and democracy is dominated by Western conceptions of liberal democracy, and the language of the debate "betrays a normative view on how democratic development should be 'done'" (Mercer, 2002, p. 20). The focus on policy assumptions bypasses this problem because by using the assumption as a benchmark, and by analysing how this benchmark relates to the empirical practice, the research becomes concrete, contextualised and less valueladen. Furthermore, the underlying policy assumptions are key to understanding the complexity of success and failure in the field of civil society and democracy aid. For instance, if policy assumptions do not relate to the local setting of associational life, then it is they themselves that are problematic rather than the way they are implemented.

The theoretical section in chapter 1 discussed several interpretations of the concepts of civil society and democracy, and the various ways in which the two concepts relate to each other. An important conclusion from this section was that there is a wide range of ideas, interpretations and conceptualisations of civil society and democracy, many of which are contradicting. Instead of choosing one of these theoretical views, the studies in this thesis use the policy assumptions as a starting point for defining civil society and democracy. In this way, the research stays closest

to the way the concepts are actually being applied. Following Blair (1997), this means looking at the enabling environment of civil society, and looking at NGOs, as support to these two entities are the two basic donor-strategies in the field of civil society and democracy promotion.

The studies in this thesis look at the assumptions underlying these two basic donor strategies. First, chapter 2 looks at the strategy of supporting civil society's enabling environment and at the underlying assumption that civil society needs an enabling environment to flourish. This is an important subject because it has received less attention than the more popular strategy of direct funding to NGOs. The main reason for this neglect is that it is far more difficult to conceptualise (Anheier, 2005; Blair, 1997; Heinrich, 2005; Howard, 2005). Chapter 2 contributed to the debate by exploring the relation between national environmental factors, such as the level of economic development of a country, and the level of civil society development. The study analyses data on national environmental factors and membership levels in civil society organisations for 53 countries around the world.

The rest of the empirical studies (chapters 3, 4 and 5) focus on the main assumptions underlying the strategy of direct funding to NGOs. Chapter 3 looked at the assumption that NGOs are locally embedded democracy promoters. This study explores the meaning of embeddedness and analyses to what extent donor-funded democracy promoting NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia live up to the image of being context-specific. The comparison of NGOs from such different countries as Ghana and Indonesia increases the chance of finding context-specific differences between NGOs. Chapter 4 looked at the assumption that donor-funding to NGOs is a good instrument to promote 'home-grown' civil society and democracy. It analyses how the organisational configuration of Ghanaian and Indonesian NGOs is influenced by their dependence on donor-funding. Chapter 5 looked at the assumption that donor-funded NGOs fulfil various democratic roles. This study analyses how the organisational form of an NGO impacts on the kind of democratic roles it can fulfil. The analysis uses Ghanaian democracy promoting NGOs because Ghana is often seen as a textbook example for democratisation in developing countries. Finally, it must be noted that the NGOs are the starting point of the analysis of these three studies, rather than their donors. However, while the donors themselves are not the object of study, the ideas on which donor-policies are based are. The use of the term 'donor' mainly relates to bi- and multilateral donor agencies, such as the UNDP, USAID, SIDA, DFID and the Royal Netherlands Embassy, as these are the most prominent donors behind the selected NGOs.

The following two sections present an answer to the central research question. First, section 6.2 summarises the main empirical findings of each of the studies, answering the question of how policy theories of civil society and democracy development turn out in practice. Second, section 6.3 discusses the theoretical

implications of the findings. Here the several parts are linked, thereby offering a comprehensive explanation for the discrepancies that were found between policy assumption and practice. Third, section 6.4 deals with the policy implications of the research. Finally, section 6.5 outlines the limitations of the analysis and its implications for future research.

# 6.2 Main findings

# The importance of an enabling environment for civil society development

The idea that civil society needs an enabling environment in order to thrive is a deeply rooted one. One of the available measures of the strength of civil society worldwide, Civicus' Civil Society Index, for instance, even includes civil society's enabling environment as one of four key dimensions for determining the strength of civil society (Clarke, 2011). Nevertheless, the actual relation between an 'enabling' environment and civil society development remains difficult to grasp. This is due to the combination of the fact that defining and measuring the context of civil society is a difficult and multi-interpretable topic which has received little attention with the fact that concrete indicators for cross-national empirical measurement of the strength of civil society are scarce (Anheier, 2005; Heinrich, 2005; Howard, 2005). Therefore, this chapter aims to contribute to the debate by posing the following question:

1) What national contextual factors explain for differences in civil society development in countries around the world?

Associational membership was used as a proxy for measuring the strength of civil society. Particularly in the field of sociology, many studies have been conducted on the relation between national contextual variables and associational membership. These studies mostly focused on post-communist transition countries and Western democracies. Therefore it was not certain whether their findings would apply in a similar way to developing countries. To overcome this omission, the analysis explicitly starts from a development perspective. It does so in three ways: first, by including developing countries in the analysis; second, by including contextual variables which are particularly relevant for developing countries (political stability and rule of law), besides the more generally applied contextual variables (level of democracy and economic development); and third, by examining alternative explanations for membership levels in developing countries.

The analysis, which covers data from 53 countries, resulted in some counterintuitive findings. Contrary to theoretical assumptions, democratic rights and political stability do not appear critically important for civil society affiliation. Two main factors affecting associational membership emerge from the multilevel regression models: the rule of law and economic development. However, unlike previous studies, this study shows that both relations are quadratic (u-shaped) instead of linear (see figure 2.1 and 2.2). This means that whereas existing theories predict a drop in membership levels in situations of low economic development and a weak rule of law, the analysis shows that the opposite is the case. Improvement in both the rule of law and the economic situation in a country first 'causes' associational membership to drop and after a certain threshold to rise again. Because of the use of cross-sectional data, it is difficult to predict whether individual countries will actually follow this path. Howard (2003), for instance, argues that low numbers of membership in the post-communist countries, which are located at the bottom of the u-shape, are actually related to the communist legacy, rather than to GDP or rule of law. Testing for this option, however, showed that this group of countries (while having a significantly lower number of memberships) does not affect the quadratic explanation.

To explain these findings, it is argued that reasons for membership are essentially different in the developed and in the developing world. A descriptive analysis of the data supports the idea that in highly developed countries, motives for membership seem to be more connected to self-actualisation and self-esteem, whereas in developing countries they seem to be more connected to physiological and safety needs. In both developed and developing countries, high membership scores are mainly based on membership of religious organisations. In developing countries however, churches are very often involved in the provision of basic needs, and often play a developmental role (Barro & McCleary, 2003; Grier, 1997). When looking at the kind of organisational memberships asides from religious organisations, there is a clear difference between both groups of countries. In developing countries the memberships are more connected to the basic needs in life (health and peace groups) or to fighting for rights which are not yet incorporated into the legal environment (local political initiatives and women's rights). Western countries, on the other hand, score a lot higher on membership of labour unions and the residual category of 'other groups'. In this group of countries, where basic rights are safeguarded by law and basic needs are covered by social welfare regimes and high income levels, existing theories seem to apply.

The misfit between current theories of civil society and democracy and the actual situation in developing countries can be partly explained by the observation that they are mainly geared towards the middle-classes. Whereas "virtuous citizenship may seem plausible to middle class 'civil society' actors, it is less likely to hold for poor and working class people who tend to have mixed motives for participating, i.e. they desperately need services and whatever other resources they can get to improve their lives" (Robins et al., 2008, p. 1078).

### The principle of context-specificity and the practice of donor-funded NGOs

The importance of context is often stressed in the debate on promoting civil society and democracy in developing countries. Context is here not only used in the sense of an enabling environment for civil society organisations, but also the other way around. That is, in order to be successful promoters of democracy, civil society organisations should be embedded in their national context. This premise is based on the idea that "civil societies in any context have a history and must develop in tune with their particular historical, cultural and political rhythms" (Howell & Pearce, 2001, p. 121). This is a strong and compelling idea, but it does not offer any guidance on what it means for individual NGOs. When is an NGO 'in tune' with its environment, for instance? And what is meant by 'historical, cultural and political rhythms'? In order to make these matters more tangible, the following question aims at exploring the meaning of context-specificity at the level of organisational characteristics:

2) What are the similarities and differences between Ghanaian and Indonesian democracy-promoting NGOs in terms of their organisational characteristics and to what extent do these similarities and differences indicate context-specificity?

The comparison between such different countries as Ghana and Indonesia serves a specific purpose, namely to maximise the possibility of finding context-specific differences between the NGOs.

The exploration of the meaning of context-specificity resulted in a framework for judging the extent to which an NGO can be classified as context-specific for each of the selected organisational characteristics, namely: mission, strategy, structure and resources. First, based on the idea that each country has its own path to democracy, a mission statement is context-specific when it focuses on a problem which is relevant for the given context. While some countries struggle with their electoral system, others struggle with decentralisation. NGOs should be sensitive to these differences. Second, an NGO's strategy is context-specific when it fits with the range of most appropriate strategies given the kind of political culture or state-society relations in a country (i.e. confrontational or non-confrontational). Third, an organisational structure is context-specific when it is open to societal input. In its most ideal form this is a democratic structure which is open to membership participation of all kinds of citizens. Fourth, human resources are context-specific when an NGO not only works with professionals, but also has some staff with whom to maintain a link with society (broadly defined as volunteers and activists). Fifth, financial resources are contextspecific when an NGO is able to raise its own (domestic) income independent from international donors. To this principle a 'reality check' is added which looks at various economic indicators, representing the potential for raising an income locally.

Compared to this framework, NGOs in Ghana show a somewhat higher degree of context-specificity than the ones in Indonesia. A more striking finding however is that the fieldwork data from Accra and Jakarta only partly confirm the expectation of finding differences between NGOs. At a first glance the NGOs seem to be very different as their mission statements focus on very different topics in Ghana and Indonesia. But delving deeper into their organisational setup, one finds remarkable similarities in terms of strategies, structures and financial and human resources. Regardless of the context, the dominant organisational configuration is that of a hierarchic non-membership organisation, which is dependent on donors for its finances and owned and run by an academic elite with a bias for doing research and non-confrontational advocacy. So despite the pledge of donors to adapt their funding strategies to the local context and to promote local participation and ownership, such commitments have not yet resulted in context-specific partner organisations.

The fact that none of the NGOs is context-specific in terms of financial resources is used as a tentative explanation for why they are so similar across such different contexts. Financial resources are such an important element because they directly relate to an NGOs' autonomy. It has been argued that donor-dependence and upward accountability can cause mission to follow money, structures and human resources to conform to particular Western organisational paradigms, and strategies to become less confrontational. Although the analysis does not permit one to draw firm conclusions on this matter, the findings from Ghana and Indonesia do seem to indicate a high degree of 'donor-specificity' instead of 'context-specificity'. To investigate this claim, chapter 4 analysed the relation between donor-funding and organisational form.

# The relation between donor-funding and the organisational form of an NGO

This chapter confronts the assumption that donor-funding to NGOs is a good instrument for promoting 'home-grown' civil society and democracy in developing countries. NGOs are believed to promote plurality and inclusion (Biekart, 1999; Clarke, 1998). It is also believed that NGOs have the capacity to cater to local circumstances and local needs because they are flexible and closely connected to people's life-worlds (Diamond, 1999; G. White, 1994). As such, NGOs are the perfect vehicles to ensure that democracy becomes locally rooted and widely accepted by different segments of a population (Hadenius & Uggla, 1996). At the same time, the aid system has been identified as an important factor in causing NGOs to homogenise. It is "a powerful structural force, impacting organisational landscapes and civil societies all over the world in complex ways we do not yet understand" (Tvedt, 2002, p. 363). This chapter aims to contribute to our understanding of why NGOs are so similar by looking at how donor-funding affects the concrete organisational

characteristics of NGOs (i.e. their mission, staff, strategy and structure). These processes are analysed for donor-sponsored NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia. The previous chapter concluded that they are strikingly similar in their organisational characteristics despite major contextual differences. This chapter builds on the outcomes of that analysis and focuses on finding an explanation for such similarities with the following sub-question:

3) How does donor-funding affect the concrete organisational characteristics of Ghanaian and Indonesian democracy-promoting NGOs?

To uncover the processes stimulating the homogenisation of organisations, the concepts of institutional isomorphism and organisational fields are used (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995, 2008). According to institutional theory, groups of organisations in the same organisational field tend to become isomorphic over time. The main reason for this process of organisational adaptation is survival. Actors adapt themselves in order to gain legitimacy and resources from the actors on which they depend for their survival. Therefore, it is important to pinpoint the kind of actor which is most important for NGO survival.

The first part of the analysis reveals a shifting importance from national to international actors for NGO survival. In the past, during the military regimes in Ghana and Indonesia, NGOs were largely suppressed. The ones that did exist were mainly dependent on the state for their survival. Non-adaptation to state requirements brought the risk of prosecution. During the time of reform, both countries opened up their political space to NGOs. In Indonesia especially, many citizens were involved in NGOs during this transition from military rule to a democratic system. During this time citizens were important actors for NGO survival. Currently, however, as the previous chapter concluded, international donors are the single most important actor for their survival. In both the Ghanaian and Indonesian organisational fields international actors (donors) have thus become more important than national actors (the state and citizens). Although the observation that they depend on the same type of actor for their survival offers an explanation for why they are so similar, it does not explain the process of homogenisation.

The analysis therefore illustrates how the process of homogenisation works at the level of organisational characteristics (i.e. mission, staff, strategy and structure). Four findings stand out. First, the analysis shows that donor-funding indeed directly interferes with how NGOs organise themselves. It influences mission statements through agenda setting and earmarking, it influences staff by stimulating and sometimes forcing NGOs to hire professionals, and it influences strategy by approving non-confrontational strategies while disapproving confrontational ones. Donor-funding has no direct influence on the organisational structure of an NGO. It can however be concluded that, as a democracy promoting NGO, having a membership-based structure is not a condition for getting access to funding. Second, the analysis also shows that homogenisation is not only a matter of imposition. Besides the more commonly identified unequal power relation between donor and recipient, homogenisation also stems from the NGOs themselves. They frame their mission statements in donor language and use professional staff to get access to and account for funding, and the use of non-confrontational strategies safeguards this access. Third, the analysis shows that homogenisation is also caused by the interrelatedness of the organisational characteristics of the NGOs. The fact that they are all run by academics, for instance, produces a bias with regard to the type of problems being tackled and with regard to how they are tackled. While activists might seek to mobilise the community, academics would probably prefer to organise a seminar with government officials. This bias reinforces itself because it also works the other way around. When an NGO's mission is to promote good governance and attain this by doing research and advocating the results at high level seminars and roundtables with government officials, it needs a highly educated staff. Finally, the analysis reveals that the combination of these three processes produces multiple series of feedback-loops which reinforce the process of homogenisation. A detailed visual summary of the various forces at work can be found in figure 4.1.

Although donor-funding catalyses the process of homogenisation, it is the dependence on donors which is the driving force behind these feedback-loops. The coercive power of donors stems not from their own power per se, but from the lack of alternative resources for NGOs. This is especially due to the process of professionalisation. This process can be characterised as the institutionalisation of trust between donor and recipient. It means that the more an NGO conforms to the professional organisational model which is promoted by donors, the more it can be trusted with grant money. This is where the feedback-loop starts, because having a professional organisation also makes an NGO more dependent on funding. Working from modern offices with an academic staff costs a lot of money, which, at present, only donors are willing to provide. The result is a self-reinforcing process which stimulates dependency rather than ownership and sustainability. This situation is difficult to change because donor agencies are themselves also bound by conditionalities.

#### The democratic roles of donor-funded NGOs

The NGOs which have been studied in this book, receive donor-funding with the aim of stimulating the democratisation processes in Ghana and Indonesia. This strategy is firmly rooted in a normative conception of the merits of civil society: "In the eyes of many donors and recipients, and even of many democratic theorists, the idea that civil society is always a positive force for democracy, indeed even the most important

one, is unassailable" (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000a, p. 4). Despite having positive connotations, there is no consensus on the role civil society should play (Robinson & Friedman, 2007). Its wide range of desirable functions include serving as a check on state power, helping include the poor and marginalised, and educating citizens on the norms and values of democracy (Diamond, 1999; Edwards, 2004; Fowler, 2000; G. White, 1994).

The analysis focuses on NGOs in Ghana and uses four democratic roles which can be commonly found in the existing literature as a benchmark: (1) an educational role; (2) a communicative role; (3) a representational role and; (4) a cooperative role. In describing these roles, many authors use metaphors like, civil society "acts as an antidote to state expansion" (Fowler, 2000, p. 7) or that "associations can be seen as the seedbeds of democracy" (Sørensen, 1993, p. 57). Such claims remain abstract and provide few clues for what it means for individual organisations. Therefore, this study explores the importance of organisational characteristics such as structure, strategy, resources and relations with the environment for performing democratic roles. It poses the following question:

4) What kind of democratic roles do Ghanaian donor-sponsored NGOs perform, and what organisational characteristics enable them to perform these roles?

The analysis demonstrates that the NGOs do not contribute to democracy as predicted by theory. Theory accurately describes the empirical findings in Ghana only in terms of the cooperative role, namely, that NGOs indeed complement the state in various ways. But when looking at the other roles, it could be concluded that they do not deliver what is expected from them. None of the NGOs performs an educational role in the sense of acting as a Tocquevillian 'school of democracy', none of the NGOs has strong channels of communication towards both the state and the citizens simultaneously, and finally, none of them directly represents the voice of citizens. Furthermore, as Ghana is considered to be a 'good case' in terms of democratic development, NGOs probably fulfil these roles to an even lesser extent in other developing countries.

Nevertheless, as stated in the introduction, focusing too much on idealised theoretical notions obscures what is going on in reality. The empirical analysis shows that NGOs perform a different kind of educational, communicative and representational role, and explains what organisational characteristics enable them to do so. First, instead of being shaped by processes of membership participation, the educational role takes the form of organising training sessions, seminars, radio programmes, workshops and research presentations, with different NGOs targeting different audiences (e.g. policymakers, women, urban poor). Second, instead of providing a 'two-way transmission belt' between citizens and the political system, the NGOs in this study mainly focus on one end of the belt: either on communication with citizens or on communication with state officials. Finally, instead of directly representing the voice of members, representation is indirect and is achieved by mobilising one's constituency and by building networks with other NGOs.

The analysis also revealed that conflicting organisational demands make it difficult for one NGO to perform all of the roles simultaneously. Performing each democratic role requires different and sometimes contradictory characteristics, which are difficult to combine within one organisation. For instance, the NGOs in Ghana illustrate that providing channels of communication with the state is difficult to combine with performing a critical watchdog function towards the same state. Refraining from confrontational advocacy tactics safeguards or improves access to state officials, while a confrontational approaches result in a loss of access. Similarly, performing a representational role is difficult to combine with performing a cooperative role in the sense of coordinating national policy debates with the state. While NGOs which do not represent a certain constituency can bring different stakeholders together in policy debates, NGOs which represent the voice of their constituency are more likely to be one of the stakeholders in such debates. Thus, each NGO understandably occupies its own niche.

These conflicting demands also explain why democracy promoting NGOs are so susceptible to criticism. In fact, they are often criticised in terms of roles they do not perform. The characteristics which make an organisation strong in one role potentially weaken them in other roles. For instance, a confrontational approach enables an NGO to independently voice the needs of their constituency, but being too confrontational provokes the criticism of being anti-government. This undermines their legitimacy in the eyes of the government, which also undermines their access to government. Similarly, having a professional staff and close (informal) relations with the state enables an NGO to educate and influence state officials, while provoking the criticisms of having an urban elite bias, being co-opted by political parties and not representing ordinary citizens. So, getting too close to the government undermines their legitimacy in the eyes of the general public. This shows how NGOs have to perform a balancing act to prevent an asset becoming a liability.

# 6.3 Civil society and democracy aid: a crash of assumptions

The optimistic view that civil society is always a positive force for democracy and must therefore be supported by international donors, conceals an ever more difficult reality. The simple idea that civil society and democracy should be home-grown entities is basically very complex. As each country embarks on its own path to

democracy, each country will need a different kind of civil society to support or complement this development. As the chapter on the enabling environment showed, different national settings seem to correspond with different types of civil society memberships. Chapter 3 has shown that the NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia are confronted with very different socio-political and economic environments. Nevertheless, the only organisational aspect mirroring this environment was the organisational mission, and even this was formulated in donor-terminology. The subsequent chapter has shown that donor-funding is central to this homogenisation of organisational form. Here too the idea that donors one-sidedly impose a certain organisational paradigm has proven to be an overly simplistic explanation. The relation is instead a tangled web in which donors and NGOs are bound up with one another and donors themselves are also part of a system of upward accountability. While claiming to promote such inherently good things as local ownership. sustainability, diversity, inclusion and participation, this situation causes the opposite outcomes. Chapter 5 has shown that the consequence of this outcome is that due to their particular organisational configuration the NGOs can only perform a limited set of democratic roles, which are far less ideal than the ones described in theory. It can thus be concluded that the main assumptions underlying civil society and democracy aid need serious rethinking in light of the findings of this thesis. Table 6.1 summarises the discrepancies by comparing the policy assumptions to the practices.

So what explains these discrepancies between policy assumptions and practices? The short answer to the central question would be that the empirical reality is more complex and does not behave as straightforwardly as would have been expected by the assumptions underpinning civil society and democracy aid. While true, this observation does not offer a deeper understanding of why these discrepancies occur. To gain this understanding, the answer to the central question has to be put in a much broader perspective. The introduction of this thesis offers this perspective by discussing various theories about the meaning of civil society and democracy. It shows some of the complexities and contradictions involved in this theoretical field. By putting our findings in this broader theoretical perspective it becomes clear that the discrepancies are caused by the several steps which are taken to translate theory into policy practice. Figure 6.1 provides a graphical representation of the argument. It depicts the idea that there is a vast difference between, on the one hand, the complexity of civil society and democracy, both in theory and in practice, and, on the other hand, how it is promoted within the aid system. To understand how this works it is necessary to zoom in on the translation process which consists of roughly three steps, which are depicted by the three arrows.

**Table 6.1** The discrepancies between policy assumptions and practices

	Policy assumption	Practice
1	Civil society organisations need an enabling environment to flourish (i.e. the better the environmental factors, the more associational memberships).	The relation between environmental factors and associational membership is not linear, but u-shaped. When environmental factors improve, there is no simple growth of the number of associational memberships. It is rather a transformation of civil society affiliation as improvements in environmental factors change the necessity and type of civil society affiliations.
2	NGOs are locally-embedded democracy promoters.	Donor-funded NGOs are not very well embedded in their context as they are not open to membership participation, almost exclusively run by an academic elite and almost totally dependent on donor-funding. This is a pattern which repeats itself across very different contexts (countries).
3	Donor-funding to NGOs is a good instrument to promote 'home-grown' civil society and democracy in developing countries.	Donor-funding catalyses a process of homogenisation which is reinforced by the NGOs themselves. This process tends to move them towards donors and away from local priorities, local constituencies and local accountability.
4	Donor-funded NGOs fulfil democratic roles (educational, communicative, representational and cooperative).	Donor-funded NGOs do not perform the roles which are commonly found in literature, but perform different versions of these roles.

The first step consists of the translation of theories and ideologies of civil society and democracy into policy assumptions. This step entails the selection of both positive and abstract ideas from the theoretical debate. There is a striking difference in the level of complexity between, on the one hand, the full range of theories on civil society and democracy and, on the other hand, the rather simplistic and one-dimensional policy assumptions which seem to be taken from this debate almost at random. In figure 6.1 this difference is depicted by a wide range of theories and a much smaller range of policy assumptions. In theory there is no consensus on what civil society is, how it contributes to democracy and whether it is essentially a good thing or not. Similarly, there are many contesting ideas about what democracy is or should be, and how the process of democratisation does or does not work. In contrast, donor strategies are based on a firm belief that civil society is always a positive force for democracy and good governance (Brown et al., 2008; Hendriks, 2006; Roy, 2008; Sabet, 2008). The underlying policy assumptions mainly portray an optimistic outlook and are straightforward in their explanations. One of the reasons for this discrepancy is that policy makers pay relatively little attention to the vast body of academic

Theories and ideologies on civil society and democracy Policy assumptions Range of possible NGOs organisational forms of CSOs Range of possible democratic contributions Democratic roles of CSOs

Figure 6.1 From theory to policy practice

knowledge, while scholars invest little in producing policy-relevant knowledge (Walt, 2005). The result is that theory is used as a grab bag from which some ideas are picked and others are conveniently left out. The ideas of Tocqueville have been picked because they portray civil society positively as a school of democracy, while the ideas of Gramsci have been mainly left out because they see civil society as a representation of the conflicts and cleavages in wider society. Furthermore, the positive idea of democratisation as a process of several progressive stages, as presented by theorists of the 'third wave' of democratisation, is much more appealing than Carothers' analysis of messy democratisation processes which do not necessarily end in democracy.

As Walt (2005) concludes, this is not the sole responsibility of policy makers, but also of scholars. The theoretical field of civil society and democracy is a highly normative one where theory can sometimes be equated with hopes and dreams and where it has remained rather abstract. This can be both a strength and a weakness for policymakers. By being 'positive-minded', so to speak, theories of civil society and democracy development provide an inspiring and hopeful ground for action in developing countries. Furthermore, by being abstract, they are applicable to very different socio-political settings around the world. At the same time these points have also proven to be the main analytical weakness. The notion that civil society is something which is inherently good for the development of democracy obscures civil society's actual role. The downside of being abstract is that that it offers few concrete starting points for donor agencies wishing to support civil society and democracy development.

This brings us to the next step in the translation process, namely the translation of policy assumptions into a concrete policy strategy. Like the first step, this step again entails a simplification of matters. Supporting civil society and democracy is reduced to supporting NGOs, and within NGOs it has been reduced to a particular professional organisational form. The first box with the dotted line in figure 6.1 symbolises the broad range of civil society organisations which could be supported to stimulate various aspects of democratisation. Besides professional NGOs, civil society can consist of a multitude of formal and informal organisations and networks, such as social movements, community-based organisations, labour unions, and so on. Out of this range donors have picked a rather small segment of professional NGOs as their primary policy target, represented by the small box in the middle of figure 6.1. This means that essentially non-political associations such as sport clubs and choral societies are left out. According to Putnam (2000; 1994) these are the kind of organisations which prove to be so important for the generation of social capital. Nevertheless, many donor policies are still based on a neo-Tocquevillian argument, which presupposes that supporting NGOs also fosters the accumulation of social capital. It is believed that a growing number of NGOs will bring about the horizontal linkages, generalised trust and collective action which are necessary for making democracy work (Brown et al., 2008). The reason for the continued prominence of NGOs seems to be two-sided. On the one hand, professional NGOs are suitable partners because they can comply with the conditionalities which accompany donor-funding. On the other hand, as chapter 4 revealed, organisations which become part of the aid-system tend over time to be transformed into professionalised NGOs. This situation is difficult to change because donors themselves are often also stuck in a system of upward accountability.

While the first step in the translation process can be described as a normative one (selecting 'the good'), the second step loses this normative content by reducing the norm to an organisational form. At the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the choice of supporting NGOs was a highly ideological one. Nowadays, it seems to have become a more practical one for the accountability reasons just mentioned. There seems to be a dominance of form over content. NGOs which comply with a professional organisational form almost automatically become legitimate democracy promoters. Again this relates to the tendency of donors to "think of NGOs as the heart of Civil Society", which is "part and parcel of their ahistorical approach in this domain"

(Ottaway & Carothers, 2000b, p. 295). As such the issue of civil society and democracy promotion has been stripped of its ideological content and reduced to a rather empty organisational shell. This is exactly the kind of "one-size-fits-all development recipe" which has contributed to the term civil society becoming an apolitical and empty buzzword (Cornwall & Brock, 2005, p. 1043).

The last step in the translation process from theory to practice is the actual application of a strategy. The bottom part of figure 6.1 depicts the idea that, as a result of their organisational form (that of a professional NGO), the NGOs only manage to contribute a rather narrow set of democratic roles within the range of possible democratic contributions. At the same time these roles are depicted as being somewhat wider than one would expect. The reason for this is that ideas which seem pretty straightforward prove to be very complex when implemented in various developing countries around the world. Here, the dominance of form over content leads to a paradoxical outcome. On the one hand, focussing on professional NGOs reduces the range of possible democratic contributions. As chapter 5 showed, the kind of democratic contribution an organisation can make directly relates to its form. Policy assumptions which are derived from a Tocquevillian perspective are, for instance, difficult to implement with professional NGOs, simply because their organisational characteristics (lack of members) do not allow them to. Similarly, many advocacy NGOs are good at serving as watchdogs, but are not the type of organisation which brings citizens together and builds bridges across societal groups (Fung. 2003). Considering the broad range of possible organisational forms of CSOs. an equally broad range of possible democratic contributions can be conceived. By only focussing on professional NGOs, more radical and less predictable organisational forms such as social movements are left out. This can be considered a loss, as many theories stress the importance of their democratic role as watchdogs and as the voices of marginalised groups. The result is a range of democratic roles which is far less ideal and less comprehensive than those described in theory. Thus, as Encarnación (2012, p. 474) rightly notes, "much appears to have been sacrificed by reducing civil society almost exclusively to NGOs".

At the same time, the dominance of form over content creates room for ideological variation, hence the somewhat wider box of democratic roles in figure 6.1. Within critical approaches to the concept of development, NGOs are often seen as an externally imposed phenomenon that represents a new form of imperialism (Tandon, 1991). Therefore, the extent to which NGOs can really be agents for alternative approaches to democracy is open to question (Mitlin et al., 2007). In terms of democratisation especially, development is dominated by a particularly Western discourse which promotes the current hegemony of neo-liberal democracy (Escobar, 2007; Wright, 2012). Nonetheless, the Ghanaian and Indonesian NGOs which have been researched in this thesis only partly conform to this image. Although the constraints

of their organisational form allow for only a slim chance of radical outcomes that would create discomfort for the donor, the focus of their work actually relates to very different views on democracy. Besides NGOs which do convey a neo-liberal interpretation of democracy (i.e. CDD and IEA), there are also NGOs which adhere to the more comprehensive interpretations of democracy, like deliberative democracy (i.e. KID) and social democracy (i.e. Yappika and ISODEC). Hegemony, as such, does not manifest itself in the imposition of a dominant ideology, but rather in the imposition of a professionalised organisational form. The contradictory outcome is thus that the focus on organisational form creates room for diversification in ideology. This diversity seems to be less a product of neatly interpreted and imposed ideologies by donor-agencies, and more an unintended by-product of the dominance of form over content. As such, democratic diversity as a by-product of a process of organisational homogenisation is perhaps the best example of a complex reality which is difficult to grasp in theory, let alone to influence in practice.

# 6.4 Mind the gap: realism as the next stop in civil society and democracy promotion

The question remains whether there is a way of making civil society and democracy aid more context-specific. As argued in the introduction, each of the policy assumptions in this research embodies a rationale for overcoming the tension between, on the one hand, the fact that external aid by definition represents the mingling in internal affairs, and, on the other hand, the goal of promoting context-specific civil society and democracy. So will context-specific civil society and democracy aid remain a 'contradictio in terminis' or is there a way out? The findings of this thesis suggest two types of solutions, namely, a change in the way donors act and a change in the way donors think. As explained in the introduction of this thesis, these solutions are mainly geared towards bi- and multilateral donor agencies.

## A change in the way of acting

One strategy available to donors to make their actions more context-specific is to redirect funding to different types of organisations. The findings of the empirical study in chapter 5 help donors to better guide their actions. The analysis delivered a framework which provides insight into factors that both enable and limit NGOs in performing certain democratic roles. Donor agencies can use this framework as a tool for making their civil society and democracy promotion strategies more context-specific. First, identifying the repertoire of democratic roles of NGOs enables donors to pinpoint blind spots in their funding strategy. This analysis showed that their funding mainly goes to professional NGOs which are led by a Western educated elite and that

this limits the kind of representational and educational role they perform. Second, linking these roles to specific organisational characteristics enables donors to specifically target their activities, as it shows what kind of NGOs they should sponsor for each role. They can use this information to overcome their blind spots by expanding funding to less professional democratic membership organisations at the grassroots level, as these are the kind of organisations which are more likely promote genuine 'schools of democracy' and direct forms of representation of the poor and vulnerable.

This strategy however has its limitations, as chapter 4 clearly pointed out. To improve the context-specificity of their approach, donors could indeed expand funding to these less professional organisations. The question remains, however, whether this is feasible for donors and desirable for grassroots organisations. For donors, this would have fundamental implications for the way they organise themselves. To be able to extend their funding to less professional and less predictable partner organisations requires flexible funding schemes with less technical accountability requirements. It is questionable whether this is feasible as these biand multilateral donors usually depend on the consent of (supra)national parliaments. Therefore, a change in the way they operate would require a more fundamental change in upward accountability to the parliaments of donor countries. This is unlikely to happen in a time of economic crisis with shrinking budgets for development aid, combined with rising scepticism and demands for showing 'tangible' results. In other words, in the short term we cannot expect donors to go beyond their current type of partners as their room to manoeuvre is also bound by conditionalities.

It is also questionable whether being including is desirable for these locallyembedded grassroots organisations. The findings of chapter 4 indicate that being included in the aid-system might very well change the essence of these more informal types of organisation. Unless donors are able to fundamentally change their funding schemes, the mechanisms and incentives which drive the current schemes inhibit the danger of slowly transforming a locally embedded grassroots organisation into a professional NGO. This implies that while including grassroots organisations might improve the context-specificity of donor strategies in the short term, in the long term it will be undermined by the process of homogenisation. Given the fact that we cannot expect donors to be able to fundamentally change funding conditions in the short term, it is not currently advisable to extend funding directly to grassroots organisations.

So are there any alternatives left to improve the context-specificity of their approach? There are three more options which could be considered. First of all, instead of directly transferring money to grassroots organisations, donors have the option of sponsoring intermediary NGOs which support their partners at the grassroots. This strategy should be applied with care. On the one hand, it could turn out positively in cases where the intermediary NGO acts as a buffer against the pressure to professionalise. On the other hand, it could turn out negatively in cases

where the intermediary NGO channels funding conditions downwards to their partners at the grassroots. To prevent this from happening, the intermediary NGO should not become a donor itself by channelling money. Instead it should be more of a service delivery organisation focusing on activities like capacity building of their partners at the grassroots and acting as their channel to the national political system. This strategy is already being implemented by the bilateral donor-consortium STAR-Ghana (formerly G-RAP), which recently broadened funding to NGOs with many connections to community based organisations.

Second, the analysis in chapter 2 confirmed that country-level factors, namely the rule of law and economic growth, have a significant influence on civil society development. So in addition to the more popular strategy of funding NGOs in developing countries, the alternative of a more structural approach focusing on the creation of 'enabling conditions' deserves serious attention. However, the analysis suggests that improving these factors could actually lead to a drop in civil society affiliation. As argued in chapter 2, this drop in the amount of memberships can be interpreted as a good thing. As the situation in a country improves and more rights and basic needs are covered by a good rule of law and a good economic climate, people have less reason to be members of CSOs which are providing such things for them. It is only after a certain level of wealth and rule of law is reached that memberships start rising again, but this is probably due to different reasons, related to self-actualisation and self-esteem.

Finally, it should be considered that including a different type of partner might be best left to a different type of donor. It is important to note that different types of donors are bound by different types of conditionalities. Bi- and multilateral donors are tied to more rigid requirements because they have to account for taxpayers' money, whereas foundations which are in charge of their own money can make their own rules. Therefore it may be better for bi- and multilateral donors to leave supporting grassroots organisations to those who already are more flexible. They could also leave this kind of work to private aid agencies, which are already working at the local level, and might therefore be better suited to doing this kind of work.

# A change in the way of thinking

More fundamentally, donor agencies can make their strategies more context-specific by changing their way of thinking. To explain this approach, we need to go back to the observation that there is a gap between what is assumed and what actually is. The options for changing the way donors act are all based on insights into how things work and on why things go wrong. This knowledge helps them in the sense that as long as one minds the gap, one is less likely to fall into it. To reduce the gap more fundamentally, however, the assumptions behind their policies need to become more realistic. Although this sounds simple, it can be quite difficult because policy

assumptions often contain a mix of both theoretical arguments of how things work (let us call this 'theory' for now) and normative arguments about how things should work. Separating norms from theory is important, nevertheless, because adding this normative element to policy assumptions can cause the paradoxical situation of ending up further away from the desired situation. Policy assumptions guide concrete actions, and they therefore need to be very clear concerning what is actually happening and about how things actually work. In cases where policy actions are based on norms rather than on how things actually work, there is a big chance that they will not have the desired results or that they will even be counterproductive. The reason for this is that what is does not necessarily comply with what ought to be, or, as argued previously, mixing ideals with reality blurs what is actually happening.

This does not mean that we should do away with norms. First of all, this would not be very realistic for a field which has a strong normative component as a result of the intermingling of science and activism. Second, normativity is not necessarily a problem, just as long as one is explicit about it. In the end, all development aid is directed with a certain kind of 'ought'-ness. Even technical solutions such as drilling a well or providing electricity are based on ideas of what development should be, and administering them can have profound social consequences. It is not wrong to have norms and ideals, it is wrong to confuse them with how things work.

The ideal situation would therefore be one where theory shapes assumptions, where norms guide actions and where monitoring and evaluation is used to constantly fine-tune both aspects with regard to what is actually happening on the ground. A change in the way of thinking along these lines has a great potential for making the policies of donor agencies more context-specific, as goals and expectations will automatically become less grand and more down to earth. Instead of having overly ambitious visions of turning nascent democracies into ideal democratic societies, it is much more productive to analyse the actual social, political and economic situation in a country and pinpoint some key areas where intervention might be helpful. This requires being modest about what one might achieve. Development aid has often collapsed under its own pretentions. If even a relatively simple development strategy such as drilling wells has often not had the intended long term effects at community level, then what could one expect from strategies which aim at fundamentally changing whole socio-political systems of a country? Being realistic about what one can achieve with a limited budget probably is therefore the best way of making civil society and democracy aid more context-specific.

# 6.5 Limitations and implications for future research

While presenting many interesting findings, the studies in this thesis also suffer from some limitations, which relate to specific methodological choices. The main limitation of the quantitative method in chapter 2 has to do with the measurement of the dependent and independent variables, while the qualitative methods of chapters 3, 4 and 5 are mainly limited by choices concerning the qualitative sample of organisations and interview candidates.

In the study on civil society's enabling environment, the dependence on secondary data determines the way both civil society and its environment are being measured. While these large scale secondary data sources are positive in terms of the external validity of the research, this comes at the cost of internal validity. As a researcher you have no control over how these variables are being constructed. While the environmental variable of economic development is relatively straightforward, variables such as rule of law, political stability and level of democracy are much more complicated. They are composed of many different elements, both objective and subjective, quantitative and qualitative. Interpreting these variables therefore requires extreme caution. The introduction of this thesis, for instance, drew attention to the many different definitions of democracy, which implies that each definition would end up with a different 'score' on the variable of 'level of democracy'.

The dependent variable has a similar problem, but in the opposite direction. While the independent environmental variables are large and complicated constructs, the dependent variable of measuring civil society affiliation is relatively small and straightforward as compared to the concept it is supposed to measure. The strength of this variable is that it is measured at the level of individuals. This enables us to control for many composition effects and make a more 'fair' comparison of civil society membership between countries around the world. Nevertheless, civil society as a concept is very broad, and the use of civil society membership as a proxy for measuring its strength therefore is far from comprehensive. Measuring the strength of civil society in this way only covers the breadth of citizen participation in civil society organisations. This variable therefore does not include aspects such as civil society's political, economic and social roles, its functioning as a public sphere, or any of the other interpretations of civil society. This is basically a choice of availability; for the most part we must make do with what we have.

Although progress has been made in operationalising the abstract notion of civil society into tangible indicators, its empirical measurement remains problematic. In the past few years, various research projects have attempted to measure civil society empirically in a cross-national manner (see: Anheier, 2004; Howard, 2003; Hyden et al., 2004; Sokolowski & Salamon, 2005; Thindwa, Monico, & Reuben, 2003). Most of these projects suffer from several conceptual and/or methodological weaknesses

(see: Anheier, 2005; Heinrich, 2005; Howard, 2005). These shortcomings relate to the Eurocentric nature and limited 'travelling capacity' of civil society definitions, the failure to include the political, economic and socio-cultural context sufficiently in the analysis, the use of typologies of civil society organisations that do not adequately reflect reality, the inconsistent nature of the data used (qualitative vs. quantitative data) and the way this data has been collected. Considering these shortcomings, maybe the way forward is not to refine existing measurements, but to first ask a question about the assumption behind these measurements, namely, "can a single and valid index be constructed to assess the strength of civil societies in various regions?" (Biekart, 2008, p. 1171).

When looking at the qualitative studies, the limitations are of a different nature. Here the specific choices which were made in the selection of organisations and the selection of respondents resulted in a limitation of the findings. First of all, in terms of qualitative research, the sample of organisations was relatively large. The choice to compare five Ghanaian NGOs with six Indonesian NGOs was strong in the sense that it enabled the inclusion of a cross-section of donor-sponsored democracy promoting NGOs in both countries. This makes finding similarities between NGOs from Ghana and Indonesia remarkable, instead of it being the result of a biased sample. The relatively wide selection of NGOs was also necessary to be able to analyse how different organisational setups of NGOs result in the performance of different types of democratic roles in Ghana. This, however, is the level at which the analysis ends. Its strength is that it has been able to cover a wide range of NGOs, but this is at the cost of a detailed analysis of the daily operation of such NGOs. While having talked a lot about concrete projects the NGOs implemented, there has hardly been any time to actually visit these projects, let alone to evaluate their impact. The conclusion of this thesis already noted that despite the fact that these NGOs share some very similar organisational characteristics, they manage to promote different interpretations of democracy. It would therefore be interesting to see how the findings of this thesis apply at the level of project implementation. Are NGOs implementing very similar projects, something which has been stressed by several of the respondents, or do they manage to go their own way? Maybe at this level there will be more contextspecific differences between Ghana and Indonesia.

Related to the decision to include a large group of NGOs, is the decision to conduct most interviews with respondents from these NGOs. To ensure triangulation, interviews were also held at other NGOs, state (related) institutions, universities and donor agencies. Nevertheless, respondents from the selected NGOs clearly dominate the sample of interview candidates. This was a deliberate choice because the research aimed to focus the analysis on the NGOs themselves, on who they are, how they are organised and what they do. This delivered a lot of information, for example, on how they perceive their relation with their donors and on the complications of

donor-funding for their daily operation. More specific information on NGO-donor relations would require interviewing more respondents at donor agencies. This could be done by matching NGOs to their most important donors, and interviewing both sides. By including more donor agencies in the analysis, it also becomes possible to see whether different types of donors exert different types of pressures on NGOs, namely, whether the funding-conditions of private aid agencies have a similar homogenising effect as the funding conditions of bi- and multilateral donor agencies. A similar situation is the case with state institutions. To be better able to evaluate how they interact with NGOs, more of them would need to be included in the sample. Here many distinctions can be researched, for instance, between interaction with local or central government agencies, with legislative or executive bodies, between different ministries or different political parties. Last but certainly not least, research on civil society and democracy could also include more citizens. As the selected NGOs had no membership among common citizens, this type of respondent has not been included in the selection of interview candidates. This does not, however, make this rather diffuse group, which would include almost everybody, less important. In the end it is for them that the NGOs claim to work and it is they who form the basis of both civil society and democracy.

## **Epilogue**

After having completed the conclusion of this PhD thesis, I once again opened my copy of Tocqueville's study of democracy in America. To my surprise, I stumbled upon the following quote (my emphasis):

"Those who having read this book should imagine that my intention in writing it was to propose the laws and customs of the Anglo-Americans for the imitation of all democratic communities would make a great mistake; they must have paid more attention to the **form** than to the **substance** of my thought. My aim has been to show, by the example of America, that laws, and especially customs, may allow a democratic people to remain free. But I am very far from thinking that we ought to follow the example of the American democracy and copy the means it has employed to attain this end" (Tocqueville, 1998 [1835-1840]: XII).

The great philosopher appears to have been rightly concerned about the misinterpretations of his work. As the conclusion of this thesis has shown, the rich tapestry of thoughts and ideas of Tocqueville have also been translated into universally applicable policy assumptions and applied to NGOs. Alas, many have indeed seemed to pay more attention to the form than to the substance of his thought.



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## Summary in Dutch | Nederlandse samenvatting

Het promoten van het maatschappelijk middenveld en democratie: Op zoek naar idealen in de praktijk.

#### Hoofdstuk 1: Inleiding

Dit proefschrift gaat over het bevorderen van het maatschappelijk middenveld en democratie in ontwikkelingslanden. Er worden vele positieve eigenschappen toegedicht aan een sterk en actief maatschappelijk middenveld bestaande uit organisaties en netwerken van kritische burgers. Het centrale idee hierachter is dat een sterk en actief maatschappelijk middenveld een natuurlijk tegenwicht kan bieden. tegen een dominante staat. Wanneer een staat niet gecontroleerd wordt door haar burgers, dan kan een prille democratie in korte tijd weer ten onder gaan aan corruptie of andere vormen van machtsmisbruik. Door deel te nemen aan burgerinitiatieven of door zich te verenigen achter een gemeenschappelijk belang kunnen burgers hun stem laten horen. Op die manier wordt het democratische systeem constant gevoed door een pluriformiteit aan maatschappelijke wensen en belangen, wat een essentieel onderdeel van het democratisch proces is. Tevens worden maatschappelijke organisaties vaak aangeduid als 'democratiescholen' waar burgers leren om vreedzaam met elkaar te overleggen, te debatteren en te stemmen over voorstellen. Anders gezegd leren burgers door te participeren in maatschappelijke organisaties de spelregels van een democratie.

Formele en informele organisaties die niet onder de noemer van een bedriif of de overheid vallen kunnen tot het maatschappelijk middenveld worden gerekend. Enkele voorbeelden zijn vakbonden, sportclubs, natuur- en milieuorganisaties en sociale bewegingen zoals de 'occupy' beweging. Binnen dit scala aan organisatievormen hebben donoren zich vooral gericht op het ondersteunen van Niet-Gouvernementele Organisaties (NGOs). De reden hiervoor is dat er van NGOs wordt verondersteld dat ze lokaal geworteld en flexibel zijn, het vermogen hebben om de stem van gemarginaliseerde groepen te vertegenwoordigen, dat ze het publieke debat stimuleren en dat ze burgers de normen en waarden van een democratie bijbrengen.

De afgelopen jaren zijn er steeds meer studies verschenen die kritiek uiten op deze positieve voorstelling van zaken. Zoals in het theoretisch kader van dit proefschrift wordt omschreven, bestaat er in de theoretische literatuur geen overeenstemming over wat het maatschappelijk middenveld precies is, wat democratie is en hoe beiden met elkaar samenhangen. Zo is lang niet iedereen het er over eens dat het maatschappelijk middenveld altijd een positieve bijdrage levert aan democratiseringsprocessen. Daarnaast hebben auteurs die wel een positieve bijdrage zien uiteenlopende meningen over de manier waarop. Een achterliggend probleem is dat er een bepaalde hoop en verwachtingen meespelen, waardoor het debat een sterke normatieve lading heeft. In de praktijk blijken de NGOs vaak niet te kunnen voldoen aan deze verwachtingen. Het doel van dit proefschrift is bijdragen aan het begrip van waarom dit het geval is, door een antwoord te geven op de volgende centrale vraag:

Hoe pakken beleidsaannames op het gebied van maatschappelijk middenveld en democratiebevordering uit in de praktijk, en wat verklaart eventuele verschillen tussen aannames en praktijk?

Op het gebied van het promoten van het maatschappelijk middenveld en democratie zijn er twee belangrijke strategieën die donoren kunnen hanteren. Ten eerste is er de strategie van het creëren van een gunstige institutionele omgeving voor de ontwikkeling van een sterk maatschappelijk middenveld, en ten tweede is er de strategie van de rechtstreekse steun aan NGOs. Het zijn de aannames die aan deze strategieën ten grondslag liggen, die het vertrekpunt vormen van de studies in dit proefschrift.

Hoofdstuk 2 gaat in op de beleidsaanname dat een gunstige institutionele omgeving nodig is voor het opbloeien van een sterk maatschappelijk middenveld. Vervolgens wordt er gekeken naar de aannames achter de strategie van het financieel ondersteunen van NGOs. Deze strategie wordt het meest toegepast door donoren, en komt daarom ook uitgebreid aan bod. Hoofdstuk 3 behandelt de aanname dat NGOs goed zijn voor het promoten van contextspecifieke democratie. In het verlengde hiervan gaat hoofdstuk 4 in op de aanname dat het financieel ondersteunen van deze NGOs dus een goede strategie is om contextspecifieke democratie te bevorderen. Ten slotte wordt in hoofdstuk 5 gekeken naar de aanname dat NGOs goed zijn voor het bevorderen van democratie omdat ze bepaalde democratische rollen vervullen.

Wat de bovengenoemde aannames verbindt, is dat ze allen zijn gebaseerd op het idee dat het maatschappelijk middenveld lokaal geworteld moet zijn om een nuttige bijdrage te kunnen leveren aan het bevorderen van de democratie in een land. Veel studies hebben echter aangetoond dat juist bemoeienis van buitenaf deze lokale geworteldheid in de weg staat. Donoren hebben dus de bijna onmogelijke opgave om hulp zo contextspecifiek mogelijk te maken, terwijl internationale hulp per definitie een inmenging van buitenaf betekent. De studies in dit proefschrift brengen dit spanningsveld in kaart.

Voor hoofdstuk 2 wordt er gebruik gemaakt van kwantitatief onderzoek met behulp van secundaire data. Hoofdstuk 3 tot en met 5 zijn gebaseerd op uitgebreid kwalitatief veldonderzoek bij NGOs in Ghana en Indonesië. De geselecteerde NGOs werken allemaal aan het bevorderen van democratie in hun land, krijgen hiervoor financiële steun van internationale donoren, en worden door lokale experts omschreven als belangrijke spelers op het gebied van democratiebevordering.

Er is gekozen voor een vergelijking tussen Ghana en Indonesië omdat het twee erg verschillende landen zijn. Hierdoor is variatie in de context een expliciet onderdeel van de onderzoeksopzet. Op deze manier wordt het makkelijker om contextspecificiteit zichtbaar te maken. De bevindingen zullen nu per studie kort worden samengevat. Tenslotte zal in de conclusie de hoofdvraag beantwoord worden.

#### Hoofdstuk 2: Het belang van een gunstige institutionele omgeving

Hoewel er veel waarde wordt gehecht aan gunstige omgevingsfactoren voor het ontwikkelen van een sterk maatschappelijk middenveld, blijft het moeilijk om vast te stellen hoe deze twee zaken met elkaar samenhangen. Om hier meer inzicht in te kriigen, staat in deze studie de volgende deelvraag centraal:

Welke nationale contextuele factoren verklaren verschillen in de ontwikkeling van het maatschappelijk middenveld in landen over de gehele wereld?

Het beantwoorden van deze vraag is lastig omdat zowel de omgeving als de sterkte van het maatschappelijk middenveld moeilijk te definiëren en te meten zijn. In navolging van veel sociologische studies, is ervoor gekozen om de sterkte van het maatschappelijk middenveld in een land te meten aan de hand van het aantal lidmaatschappen dat burgers hebben bij maatschappelijke organisaties. Het gaat hier niet alleen om lidmaatschappen van NGOs, maar om het hele spectrum aan maatschappelijke organisaties. In dezelfde studies wordt het aantal lidmaatschappen vaak gekoppeld aan nationale contextuele factoren zoals de mate van economische en democratische ontwikkeling van een land.

Deze studie gebruikt dezelfde methode, maar voegt hier enkele zaken aan toe. Bestaande studies kijken namelijk vooral naar postcommunistische en Westerse landen. Het is echter maar de vraag of bestaande theorieën over de invloed van omgevingsfactoren op lidmaatschap ook gelden voor ontwikkelingslanden. Deze studie neemt daarom ontwikkelingslanden mee in de analyse en voegt daarnaast contextuele factoren toe die extra van belang zouden kunnen zijn in ontwikkelingslanden, namelijk de mate waarin de wet wordt nageleefd (rule of law) en de mate van politieke stabiliteit.

Het gangbare idee is dat burgers vaker lid zijn van maatschappelijke organisaties naarmate de bovengenoemde omgevingsfactoren gunstiger worden. In een politiek stabiel land waar de wetten worden nageleefd, waar het recht op organiseren stevig is verankerd in het democratische systeem en waar burgers voldoende geld verdienen om in hun bestaan te voorzien, is het makkelijker om maatschappelijke organisaties op te richten en om er lid van te zijn. Deze redenering gaat uit van een rechtlijnig stijgend verband tussen omgevingsfactoren en het aantal lidmaatschappen. Als men alleen kijkt naar postcommunistische en Westerse landen dan klopt deze redenering grotendeels. Het plaatie verandert echter als er ontwikkelingslanden aan de analyse worden toegevoegd.

Uit de multilevel regressie analyse met data uit 53 landen van over de hele wereld, blijkt dat er nauwelijks een rechtlijnig verband bestaat tussen het aantal lidmaatschappen en de vier omgevingsfactoren (economie, democratie, naleving van de wet en politieke stabiliteit). Opvallend is echter dat de economische situatie en het naleven van de wet een non-lineair (U-vormig) verband vertonen (zie figuur 2.1 en 2.2). Oftewel, daar waar bestaande theorieën een verdere daling voorspellen in het aantal lidmaatschappen in ontwikkelingslanden, laat de data juist een stijging zien.

De verklaring voor deze bevindingen wordt gezocht in de notie dat de situatie in ontwikkelingslanden wezenlijk anders is. Ten eerste is er in ontwikkelingslanden een veel grotere informele sector die ook zonder een goed wettelijk kader functioneert. Een slechte naleving van de wet hoeft dus niet te betekenen dat er ook daadwerkelijk minder maatschappelijke organisaties zijn waar mensen lid van kunnen worden. Ten tweede lijkt het erop dat er andere motieven meespelen bij het al dan niet lid worden. Daar waar vaak wordt gesteld dat mensen in rijke landen vooral lid worden vanwege zelfontplooiing, heeft dit in ontwikkelingslanden wellicht meer te maken met het voorzien in eerste levensbehoeften. Wanneer er geen sprake is van een goed wettelijk kader en de naleving ervan, is het voor burgers nodig om zich te beschermen tegen willekeur of om juist te gaan strijden voor het verbeteren van deze situatie. Lidmaatschap van een maatschappelijke organisatie kan hierbij helpen. Hetzelfde geldt voor een slechte economische situatie. Wanneer burgers een te laag inkomen hebben en niet kunnen terugvallen op een goed ontwikkeld sociaal zekerheidsstelsel. kan de hulp van een maatschappelijke organisatie van doorslaggevend belang zijn. Kortom, wanneer omgevingsfactoren erg verslechteren is er juist een grotere behoefte aan lidmaatschap.

#### Hoofdstuk 3: De contextspecificiteit van NGOs in Ghana en Indonesië

In het debat over het ondersteunen van het maatschappelijk middenveld en democratie wordt het belang van contextspecificiteit vaak onderstreept. Om een zinvolle bijdrage te kunnen leveren aan het bevorderen van lokaal gewortelde democratie zouden NGOs zelf goed ingebed moeten zijn in hun nationale context. Dit idee is goed te volgen, maar tegelijkertijd erg moeilijk tastbaar te maken. Het is namelijk niet duidelijk wanneer er sprake is van een goede inbedding en wanneer niet. Het is ook niet helder welke elementen uit de context van belang zijn en hoe een organisatie zich hierop kan aanpassen. Om hier inzicht in te verschaffen, kijkt deze studie naar wat het idee van contextspecificiteit concreet inhoudt voor NGOs. Er wordt hier een vergelijking gemaakt tussen NGOs uit Ghana en Indonesië om de kans te vergroten op het vinden van contextspecifieke verschillen. Dit heeft geresulteerd in de volgende deelvraag:

Wat zijn de overeenkomsten en verschillen tussen democratie bevorderende NGOs in Ghana en Indonesië, en in hoeverre duidt dit op contextspecificiteit?

De studie heeft geresulteerd in een raamwerk waarmee de mate van contextspecificiteit van NGOs kan worden beoordeeld op basis van enkele organisatiekenmerken, namelijk hun missie, strategie, structuur, financiële middelen en personeel. Wanneer de NGOs uit Ghana en Indonesië worden afgezet tegen dit raamwerk dan scoren de NGOs uit Ghana iets hoger op contextspecificiteit dan de NGOs uit Indonesië. Een interessantere bevinding is echter dat de NGOs uit beide landen erg op elkaar lijken. Wat betreft hun missie hebben ze nog wel een andere focus, die goed aansluit bij de context in Ghana en Indonesië. Zo houden de NGOs in Ghana zich (onder meer) bezig met decentralisatie, het ondersteunen van het parlement en het ervoor zorgen dat achtergestelde groepen ook worden betrokken bij het democratische proces, terwijl in Indonesië de nadruk ligt op de thema's corruptie en mensenrechten.

Wanneer we echter verder kijken dan alleen de missie van de organisatie dan zien we veel overeenkomsten. In beide landen vinden we vooral NGOs met een hiërarchische organisatiestructuur die met hoogopgeleide professionals werken. Ze worden namelijk top-down geregeerd door een academische elite die vaak in het Westen is opgeleid. Ze hebben nauwelijks leden onder het gewone volk, en al helemaal niet onder de armen en gemarginaliseerden. Veel van de NGOs hebben dan ook moeite met het benoemen van hun achterban. Daarnaast hanteren ze vooral non-confronterende lobby strategieën richting de staat. De meer activistische strategieën waarbij het nodig is om grote delen van het volk te mobiliseren, zoals demonstreren, komen weinig voor. Ten slotte worden ze financieel gezien niet, of maar voor een klein deel lokaal ondersteund, waardoor ze afhankelijk zijn van internationale donoren.

In tegenstelling tot wat er van NGOs wordt verwacht, blijken ze dus geen lokaal gewortelde organisaties te zijn die dicht bij het volk staan. Dit is een opmerkelijke constatering omdat veel van deze organisaties juist pleiten voor een betere democratie, vaak in naam van het volk. Daarnaast is het opmerkelijk dat ondanks het feit dat donoren al vele declaraties hebben ondertekend om hulp meer af te stemmen op de lokale context, dit zich niet heeft vertaald in contextspecifieke partnerorganisaties.

#### Hoofdstuk 4: De homogenisering van NGOs in Ghana en Indonesië

Het vorige hoofdstuk heeft laten zien dat NGOs uit Ghana en Indonesië erg op elkaar lijken. Het is echter nog niet duidelijk hoe dit komt. Deze studie zoekt naar een mogelijke verklaring door te kijken naar de invloed van donorfinanciering op de missie, strategie, structuur en het personeel van NGOs. Hierbij staat de volgende deelvraag centraal:

Op welke manier beïnvloedt de financiële steun van donoren de manier waarop Ghanese en Indonesische democratiebevorderende NGOs zich organiseren?

Om grip te krijgen op het proces van homogenisering is gebruikt gemaakt van de theorie van het institutionele isomorfisme. Deze theorie stelt dat organisaties die zich in hetzelfde veld bevinden na verloop van tijd op elkaar gaan lijken. De hoofdreden voor dit proces van organisationele adaptatie is overleven. Door zich aan te passen aan de normen van de actoren van wie ze afhankelijk zijn, hopen organisaties legitimiteit te winnen en daarmee ook toegang te krijgen tot (financiële) middelen. Voor de NGOs in Ghana en Indonesië heeft er wat dat betreft een vergelijkbare ontwikkeling plaatsgevonden, waarbij nationale actoren zoals de staat en burgers steeds minder belangrijk zijn geworden voor hun voortbestaan en internationale donoren steeds belangrijker. Omdat ze van de staat geen geld krijgen en omdat ze geen leden hebben waar ze contributies aan kunnen vragen zijn de NGOs momenteel volledig afhankelijk van internationale donoren. Dit is een eerste verklaring waarom NGOs in Ghana en Indonesië zo op elkaar lijken, namelijk omdat ze afhankelijk zijn van hetzelfde type actor voor hun voortbestaan. Dit verklaart echter nog niet hoe het proces van homogenisering in zijn werk gaat.

De analyse levert vier belangrijke inzichten op. Ten eerste wordt duidelijk dat steun van donoren een directe invloed uitoefent op de organisatiekenmerken van NGOs. Door hulp aan bepaalde thema's te verbinden, beïnvloeden donoren de missies van NGOs. Door activistische methoden af te keuren, beïnvloeden ze de strategieën van NGOs. Door ze te stimuleren om professionals in dienst te nemen. beïnvloeden ze het personeel van NGOs. Alleen op het gebied van organisatiestructuur is er geen directe invloed waarneembaar.

Ten tweede laat de analyse zien dat het proces van homogenisering niet alleen een kwestie is van een ongelijke machtsverhouding tussen donor en ontvanger, maar ook het gevolg is van strategisch gedrag van de NGOs zelf. Zo framen ze hun missie in donortaal en gebruiken ze hun professionele staf om toegang te krijgen tot donorfinanciering. Door non-confronterende strategieën te hanteren stellen ze deze toegang veilig.

Ten derde laat de analyse zien dat het proces van homogenisering ook voortkomt uit de onderlinge samenhang tussen de organisatiekenmerken van de NGOs. Het feit dat ze worden gerund door een academische elite (personeel) beïnvloedt bijvoorbeeld het type problemen dat ze aanpakken (missie) en de manier waarop (strategie). Daar waar activisten er eerder voor zullen kiezen om de gemeenschap te mobiliseren, organiseren academici eerder seminars en overlegcommissies met de overheid. Hierbij speelt ook mee dat het voor organisaties zonder leden (structuur) sowieso moeilijker is om strategieën te hanteren waarbij het nodig is om de achterban te mobiliseren.

Ten slotte laat de analyse zien dat dit proces zichzelf versterkt omdat het twee kanten op werkt. Als de NGOs in hun missie streven naar zaken als democratie en goed bestuur, en ze dit willen bereiken door het doen van onderzoek en het rapporteren van de resultaten hiervan op conferenties en seminars met overheidsfunctionarissen, dan hebben ze een academische staf nodig. Op deze manier ontstaan er verscheidene feedback-loops die het proces van homogenisering versterken. Figuur 4.1 laat dit in detail zien.

Het is moeiliik voor NGOs om uit deze feedback-loops te ontsnappen omdat ze momenteel, qua financiering, geen alternatief hebben. Hoewel financiële steun van donoren het proces van homogenisering in gang zet, is de afhankelijkheid van deze steun de drijvende kracht achter het homogeniseringproces. Daar komt bij dat deze afhankelijkheid groter wordt naarmate het homogeniseringproces vordert. Om toegang te krijgen tot donorgelden conformeren NGOs zich aan het door donoren gepromote professionele organisatiemodel. Tegelijkertijd maakt het hebben van een professionele organisatie een NGO meer afhankelijk van financiële steun. Het werken vanuit een modern kantoor met een academische staf kost veel geld, en momenteel zijn alleen internationale donoren bereid om dit te betalen. Dit zichzelf versterkende proces bevordert zo internationale afhankelijkheid in plaats van lokaal eigenaarschap en geworteldheid.

#### Hoofdstuk 5: Democratische rollen van NGOs in Ghana

De vraag die nu nog rest is op welke wijze de NGOs een bijdrage leveren aan het democratiseringsproces. Zoals in de inleiding is aangegeven wordt er veel van NGOs verwacht. In de literatuur worden er vier democratische rollen genoemd, te weten: een educatieve, een communicatieve, een representatieve en een coöperatieve rol. Deze vier rollen worden als ideaaltypen omschreven en gebruikt om de praktijk tegen af te zetten. Er wordt hier gefocust op Ghana omdat dit vaak wordt genoemd als voorbeeldland op het gebied van maatschappelijk middenveld en democratiebevordering. Dit heeft geleid tot de volgende deelvraag:

Welke democratische rollen vervullen Ghanese NGOs en welke organisatiekenmerken stellen hen in staat om deze rollen te vervullen?

De educatieve rol omvat het idee van de democratiescholen waar burgers door te participeren democratische normen, waarden en praktijken leren. De communicatieve rol gaat in op het idee dat NGOs een communicatiekanaal vormen tussen staat en maatschappij. Bij de representatieve rol staan aspecten als burgers een stem geven, het opkomen voor hun belangen en het bieden van een tegenwicht aan de staat centraal. Bij de coöperatieve rol gaat het daarentegen juist om de toegevoegde waarde die NGOs kunnen hebben wanneer ze met de staat samenwerken om problemen in het land op te lossen.

De analyse laat zien dat Ghanese democratiebevorderende NGOs alleen de coöperatieve rol vervullen zoals die in de literatuur is omschreven. Als naar de overige rollen wordt gekeken, dan kan er worden geconcludeerd dat de NGOs niet leveren wat er van hun wordt verwacht. Omdat ze geen leden hebben kunnen burgers niet participeren en gaat het idee van de democratiescholen niet op. Hierdoor zijn NGOs ook niet in staat om de stem van het volk rechtstreeks te vertegenwoordigen. Daarnaast heeft geen van de NGOs zowel een goede toegang tot de staat als een sterke link met de maatschappij, waardoor de schakelfunctie tussen staat en maatschappij niet goed van de grond komt.

De analyse laat echter ook zien dat de NGOs deze ideaaltypische rollen op een andere manier invullen, alsmede welke organisatiekenmerken hen in staat stellen om dit te doen. Zo vervullen ze ook zonder leden een educatieve rol. In plaats van leren door participeren, heeft het leren meer de vorm van kennisoverdracht via het organiseren van conferenties, trainingen en seminars. Hierbij richten verschillende NGOs zich op verschillende groepen zoals overheidsfunctionarissen, vrouwen of gemarginaliseerde groepen. Verder richten NGOs zich met name op het onderhouden van goede communicatiekanalen met ofwel de staat, ofwel de maatschappij. De representatieve rol, ten slotte, wordt vervuld op een indirecte manier. NGOs doen dit door hun achterban te mobiliseren en door het opbouwen van netwerken met andere NGOs. Zo spreken ze toch in naam van hun achterban, zonder dat die daadwerkelijk lid is.

De analyse laat tevens zien dat het moeilijk is voor NGOs om alle rollen tegelijkertijd te vervullen vanwege conflicterende organisatievereisten. Zo is het voor NGOs moeilijk om een goed communicatiekanaal met de overheid te onderhouden en zich tegelijkertijd als een kritische waakhond op te stellen richting dezelfde overheid. Confronterende tactieken zoals demonstraties bemoeilijken de toegang terwijl lobbyen met een zachte hand deze toegang veilig stelt. Ook is het moeilijk om tegelijkertijd op te treden als coördinator van beleidsdebatten met de staat (coöperatieve rol), en als vertegenwoordiger van een achterban (representatieve rol). NGOs die een goede relatie hebben met de staat en die zelf geen duidelijke achterban vertegenwoordigen zijn goed in het samenbrengen van verschillende partijen voor overleg, terwijl NGOs die wel een achterban vertegenwoordigen juist eerder zullen deelnemen aan zo'n overleg als een van de belanghebbende partijen. Het is dus logisch dat iedere NGO zich specialiseert in zijn eigen niche.

Het gegeven dat NGOs niet alle rollen kunnen vervullen vanwege conflicterende organisatievereisten verklaart waarom ze zo vatbaar zijn voor kritiek. Ze worden namelijk vaak bekritiseerd vanwege de rol die ze niet vervullen. De kenmerken die ze sterk maken in de ene rol zijn vaak precies de kenmerken die ze zwak maken in de andere. Bijvoorbeeld, door zich kritisch op te stellen richting de overheid kunnen NGOs opkomen voor de belangen van hun achterban. Wanneer ze echter te kritisch

zijn, lopen ze het gevaar om aan legitimiteit te verliezen in de ogen van de overheid. Op de zelfde manier is het hebben van een hoog opgeleide staf en goede informele relaties met overheidsfunctionarissen van essentieel belang om een educatieve rol richting de staat te kunnen vervullen. Tegelijkertijd roept dit echter de kritiek op dat de NGOs te elitair zijn, te dicht op de overheid zitten en het volk niet vertegenwoordigen. Op deze manier verliezen ze legitimiteit in de ogen van de maatschappij. Dit laat zien hoe NGOs op een dun koord moeten balanceren om ervoor te zorgen dat een kracht niet verandert in een zwakte.

#### Hoofdstuk 6: Conclusie

Achter het optimistische idee dat het maatschappelijk middenveld, en daarbinnen NGOs, altijd een positieve bijdrage leveren aan het proces van democratisering in ontwikkelingslanden, gaat een zeer complexe werkelijkheid schuil. Dit proefschrift laat zien dat op elk van de onderzochte beleidsaannames veel is aan te merken. Nu de discrepanties tussen de aannames en de praktijk in kaart zijn gebracht rest nog het beantwoorden van de hoofdvraag, namelijk: wat verklaart deze discrepanties? De verklaring moet worden gezocht in een drietal vertaalslagen waarbij er telkens iets verloren gaat, waardoor er uiteindelijk nauwelijks meer iets van de idealen is terug te vinden in de praktijk.

Ten eerste is er de vertaalslag van theorie naar beleidsaanname, waarbij er selectief wordt geput uit de theorie. Hoewel er in de literatuur een grote diversiteit aan opvattingen bestaat, gaan beleidsaannames allemaal uit van een positieve relatie tussen maatschappelijk middenveld en democratie. Het lijkt erop dat de theorie wordt gebruikt als grabbelton waarbij met name de positieve ideeën er uitgepikt worden. Zo wordt het positieve idee van Tocqueville's democratiescholen vaak genoemd en niet Gramsci's idee over het maatschappelijk middenveld als een 'slagveld' waar maatschappelijke conflicten worden uitgevochten.

Dit selectieve gebruik wordt mede veroorzaakt door de hoge mate van normativiteit en het hoge abstractieniveau van het theoretische debat. Dat deze kenmerken van het debat verleidelijk kunnen zijn voor beleidsmakers is op zich begrijpelijk. Normativiteit is namelijk positief in de zin dat het mensen kan inspireren tot actie. Daarnaast zorgt abstractie ervoor dat de ideeën op bijna elke context van toepassing zijn. Tegelijkertijd zijn dit ook de twee grootste valkuilen. De focus op idealen kan het zicht op de werkelijkheid vertroebelen en er kunnen hooggespannen verwachtingen door ontstaan. Tegelijkertijd zijn de ideeën zo abstract dat ze weinig handvatten bieden voor daadwerkelijk handelen in de praktijk.

Dit brengt ons bij de tweede vertaalslag, namelijk het vertalen van beleidsassumpties in een concrete beleidsstrategie. Ook in deze stap worden de zaken versimpeld. Het opbouwen van een kritisch maatschappelijk middenveld wordt teruggebracht tot het ondersteunen van NGOs, terwijl dit maar een klein onderdeel van het hele scala aan organisatievormen binnen het maatschappelijk middenveld betreft. Dit betekent dat veel organisaties die in de theorie als belangrijk worden omschreven niet aan bod komen. Men kan hierbij denken aan meer activistische sociale bewegingen, en zelfs aan niet politiek georiënteerde organisaties zoals sportclubs of cultuurgerelateerde organisaties. De reden voor de focus op NGOs lijkt tweeledig. Enerzijds zijn professionele NGOs het type organisatie dat kan voldoen aan de strenge verantwoordingseisen die donoren verbinden aan hun financiële steun. Anderzijds is er de tendens dat organisaties langzaam transformeren in de richting van een professionele NGO vanaf het moment dat ze financieel afhankelijk worden van donoren.

Daar waar de eerste vertaalslag een normatieve keuze betreft (het positieve selecteren), verdwijnt deze normatieve lading in de tweede vertaalslag. Normativiteit wordt hier namelijk teruggebracht tot organisatievorm. Daar waar het vroeger een ideologische keuze was om NGOs te ondersteunen lijkt het vandaag de dag meer een praktische keuze vanwege de hiervoor genoemde verantwoordingseisen. NGOs die de juiste professionele organisatievorm aannemen worden bijna automatisch legitieme democratiebevorderaars in de ogen van donoren. Op deze manier verdwijnt de ideologische lading en blijft er een relatief lege huls over in de vorm van de voorkeur voor bepaalde organisatiekenmerken. Dit heeft ook zijn weerslag op de volgende vertaalslag.

De laatste vertaalslag is die van het daadwerkelijk implementeren van het beleid. Hier blijkt dat de focus op organisatievorm boven een focus op ideologische inhoud leidt tot een paradoxale uitkomst. Enerzijds worden NGOs door hun organisatievorm beperkt in de democratische rollen die ze kunnen vervullen. Anderzijds biedt de focus van donoren op organisatievorm de NGOs ook ruimte om zich ideologisch te onderscheiden. Er wordt vaak gezegd dat NGOs een van buitenaf opgelegd fenomeen zijn die de neo-liberale agenda promoten. Ondanks dat sommige van de NGOs uit dit onderzoek inderdaad het neo-liberale model aanhangen, promoten andere NGOs juist hele andere interpretaties van democratie, zoals de overlegdemocratie (deliberative democracy) en de sociaaldemocratie. Het lijkt er op dat deze ideologische differentiatie eerder een onbedoeld bijeffect is van de focus op vorm boven inhoud, dan een van tevoren uitgedachte strategie. Deze onbedoelde democratische diversiteit als bijproduct van een proces van homogenisering is misschien wel het beste voorbeeld van een complexe realiteit die zich moeilijk laat vatten in theorieën, laat staan zich laat beïnvloeden in de praktijk.

#### Beleidsaanbevelingen

Donoren zeggen veel waarde te hechten aan het afstemmen van hun hulp op de lokale context. Dit streven is terug te zien in de assumpties die aan hun beleid ten grondslag liggen. In de praktijk blijken deze assumpties echter nauwelijks uit te

komen, waardoor externe hulp nog steeds op gespannen voet staat met contextspecificiteit. Het is de vraag of contextspecifieke democratiebevordering een 'contradictio in terminis' zal blijven, of dat het voor donoren mogelijk is om uit dit spanningsveld te ontsnappen. De bevindingen van dit proefschrift suggereren twee oplossingsrichtingen, namelijk een verandering in hun manier van handelen, en een verandering in hun manier van denken.

#### Een andere manier van handelen

Een manier waarop donoren hun democratiehulp meer contextspecifiek kunnen maken is door andere organisatietypes te ondersteunen. Hoofdstuk 5 heeft een raamwerk opgeleverd dat laat zien welk type organisatie nodig is voor het vervullen van welk type rol. Hiermee kunnen donoren hun werk meer toespitsen op de rollen die nu minder aan bod komen. Hulp kan dan vooral worden gericht op minder professionele democratische lidmaatschapsorganisaties die dichter bij het volk staan. Tegelijkertijd heeft de studie over het homogeniseringproces van NGOs laten zien dat er ook een gevaar schuilt in deze strategie. Wanneer deze lokaal gewortelde organisaties deel uit gaan maken van de hulpwereld bestaat er namelijk de kans dat ze zich langzaam zullen transformeren richting een professionele NGO en zo een vergroot risico lopen om ontworteld te raken. Dit gevaar kan alleen doorbroken worden als het donoren lukt om flexibelere voorwaarden en minder strenge verantwoordingscriteria te hanteren. Aangezien donoren zichzelf vaak ook weer moeten verantwoorden aan (supra)nationale parlementen, is dit niet waarschiinlijk op de korte termiin.

Er blijven dan nog drie opties over. Ten eerste kunnen donoren zich richten op NGOs in een tussenpositie. Deze vormen dan zowel de schakel als de buffer tussen de donor en de lokaal gewortelde organisaties. Hierbij is het van belang dat de tussenliggende NGO zelf niet ook een donor wordt voor haar lokale partners. Dit kan worden voorkomen door deze tussenliggende NGOs geen geld over te laten maken naar lokale partners. In plaats hiervan kunnen zij hun lokale partners helpen op het gebied van capaciteitsopbouw en het zorgen voor een betere verbinding met het nationale politieke systeem. Deze strategie wordt momenteel in Ghana al toegepast.

Ten tweede is het een optie om werk te maken van het ondersteunen van een gunstige institutionele omgeving. Deze strategie wordt nog weinig toegepast. Uit de studie van hoofdstuk 2 blijkt echter dat economische ontwikkeling en het verbeteren van de rechtstaat een positieve bijdrage kunnen leveren aan de ontwikkeling van het maatschappelijk middenveld. Er moet hierbij wel rekening worden gehouden dat naarmate deze factoren verbeteren, er wellicht juist een afname kan optreden in het aantal lidmaatschappen van maatschappelijke organisaties. Dit kan echter als een positief signaal worden beschouwd, omdat dit zou betekenen dat mensen minder afhankelijk worden van lidmaatschap om in hun eerste levensbehoeften te voorzien.

De verwachting is dat wanneer de omgevingsfactoren nog verder verbeteren er weer meer mensen lid zullen worden, maar dan om redenen van zelfontplooiing. Dit behelst dus een transformatie naar een ander type maatschappelijk middenveld.

Ten slotte is het wellicht een beter idee om een ander type partnerorganisatie te koppelen aan een ander type donor. Niet elk type donor is namelijk gebonden aan dezelfde spelregels. Voor de grotere bi- en multilaterale donoren is het bijvoorbeeld moeilijk om af te wijken van protocollen. Dit komt onder andere omdat zij zich ook weer voor hun uitgaven moeten verantwoorden aan derden. Donoren die aan minder strikte verantwoordingseisen gebonden zijn kunnen wat dat betreft meer hun eigen koers varen. Het is dus het overwegen waard om het ondersteunen van minder professionele en meer lokaal gewortelde organisaties over te laten aan flexibelere donoren.

#### Een andere manier van denken

De bovenstaande aanbevelingen hebben allemaal te maken met het verkleinen van de discrepantie tussen beleidsassumptie en praktijk door de praktijk te verbeteren. Het is echter ook mogelijk om de discrepantie op een fundamenteler niveau te verkleinen door beleidsassumpties realistischer te maken. Dit klinkt makkelijker dan het is. Beleidsassumpties bestaan namelijk vaak uit een mix van theoretische argumenten over hoe dingen werken en normatieve argumenten over hoe dingen zouden moeten zijn. De normatieve elementen van beleidsassumpties belemmeren nogal eens het zicht op hoe het er daadwerkelijk aan toe gaat in ontwikkelingslanden, terwijl beleidsimplementatie vooral gebaat is bij hele concrete informatie over hoe dingen werken in de praktijk. Het opnemen van normatieve elementen in beleidsassumpties veroorzaakt zo een paradoxale situatie. Beleid sluit hierdoor namelijk minder goed aan op de situatie in een land en leidt daardoor juist tot verwijdering van de nagestreefde idealen.

De oplossing hiervoor ligt in het beter scheiden van hoe dingen werken en hoe dingen zouden moeten zijn. Idealiter zouden beleidsassumpties gebaseerd moeten zijn op theorieën over hoe zaken werken, vervolgens kan men op basis van normen en waarden een handelingsrichting kiezen en ten slotte kan de beleidsimplementatie steeds beter worden afgestemd op de lokale context door een constant proces van monitoren en evalueren. Op deze manier zullen beleidsdoelen automatisch realistischer worden. In plaats van het nastreven van het ambitieuze doel om prille democratieën om te vormen tot ideale democratische staten, is het veel productiever om de bestaande situatie te analyseren en enkele kernpunten te benoemen waar men als externe donor een bijdrage aan zou kunnen leveren. Dit betekent wel dat donoren bescheiden moeten zijn over wat ze kunnen bereiken. Het stellen van realistische doelen is daarom waarschijnlijk de beste manier om ontwikkelingshulp op het gebied van maatschappelijk middenveld en democratiebevordering meer contextspecifiek te maken.

#### Curriculum Vitae

Jelmer Kamstra (1979) holds two master degrees from the Radboud University of Nijmegen. During his first study of Public Administration and Organisational Science he focused on the topic of European integration. For his final thesis he did research in the Czech Republic on the institutional challenges faced by the Czech administrative system in the process of EU accession. At the same time he studied Development Studies with a specialization in Conflict Studies. For his final thesis he went to Macedonia to research the causes of the ethno-political conflict which struck the country in 2001. After completing his studies, Jelmer worked three years as a teacher of statistics and research methodology at the Niimegen School of Management of the Radboud University. In 2005 Jelmer cofounded research agency 101 research and online research facility peilsnel.nl. For this agency he has carried out a range of research and training assignments for NGOs, universities, (local) government institutes and businesses. While continuing to work for 101 research, Jelmer started his PhD in September 2006. For his research on promoting civil society and democracy in developing countries, he did extensive fieldwork in Ghana and Indonesia. Since 2013 Jelmer combines teaching at Radboud University with research and training assignments for 101 research.

## Promoting Civil Society B Democracy

Tracing Ideals in Reality

The optimistic view that civil society is always a positive force for democracy and must therefore be supported by international donors, has been the subject of intense debate. Not only do scholars disagree about civil society's contribution to democracy, the debate is also driven by a normative agenda which projects particular hopes and dreams onto civil society organizations. 'Promoting Civil Society and Democracy' unravels these issues by tracing what is left of ideals in reality. Based on extensive fieldwork involving democracy promoting NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia, this study uncovers why policy assumptions in the field of civil society and democracy promotion often do not yield the expected results.