

NGO Politics in Uganda: A Practitioner's Perspective

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Abstract

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the government of Uganda provided an enabling environment for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to engage in development and advocacy work. Since the introduction of multiparty elections in 2006 however, President Museveni has begun to adhere to a new set of norms that mark a relapse in his government's commitment to human and civil rights. In response, heightened tensions have emerged between the government of Uganda and civil society and as a result legislation has been introduced to restrict NGO activity in the country. This paper argues that these tensions are a product of both Uganda's fractionalized political system and the strategic priorities of donors and NGOs operating in the country. Therefore in order to be more effective, NGOs must engage with larger sections of the population and be cognizant of the risks associated with their advocacy work.

Keywords: NGOs, Politics, Uganda, Development, Aid Effectiveness

*This paper is dedicated to Ryan McLeod,
whose life and death inspired the decision to
pursue this program and write this paper.*

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List of Acronyms

CAO	Chief Administrative Officer	Definition goes here, see examples below
CSO	Civil Society Organization	
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency	
DFID	Department for International Development	
HRO	Human Rights Organization	
HRW	Human Rights Watch	
HURINET	Human Rights Network	
IMF	International Monetary Fund	
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation	
MO	Membership Organization	
NDP	National Development Plan	
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for International Development Cooperation	
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency	
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs	
UNOCHA	United Nations Organization for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	

Introduction

Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) have played a large role in both the politics and the development of Uganda since President Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Movement (NRM) came to power in 1986. Over the past decade, however, the relationship between NGOs and the government of Uganda has become increasingly adversarial. The buildup of tension has been marked by the precipitous rise of NGOs and a relapse of the current regime's respect for human and civil rights. Understanding the causes and implications of this impasse is the focus of this paper.

Uganda provides an appropriate case study for NGO politics for a number of reasons. First, there are an incredibly large number of NGOs operating in the country. The Ministry of Internal Affairs with the government of Uganda estimates there are currently 10,000 NGOs operating within its borders.¹ Uganda has also provided an enabling environment for NGOs and foreigners to engage in development work. Many of the conversations I had in Uganda emphasized that Uganda has become an "NGO Playground"². Secondly, Uganda has been heralded as a 'showcase' of governance reform (Dijkstra & Van Dogne, 2001) and Uganda's current president was once heralded as part of Africa's coming renaissance (Porto, 1999, p. 19). The Ugandan government, however, has been increasingly described as coercive and militaristic (Tangri & Mwenda, 2010). In response, a large number of NGOs have made it their central mandate to advocate for governance reform. The result has been a clear demonstration of NGO politics, a trend that is playing out in Uganda with serious implications for domestic policy and development programmes.

¹ This estimate is based on the number of NGOs registered by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ministry of Internal Affairs – Uganda, n.d.). This number may be higher as a large number of NGOs do not register with the government (Uganda National NGO Forum, 2011).

² Interview No. 11, Masaka District, 24 May 2012.

The research for this paper was conducted during three months of field research in Uganda in order to test the hypothesis that mutual antagonism was a barrier to preventing the implementation of meaningful social and economic development programmes. The results highlight some of the structural reasons that the government and the NGO sector are steadily drifting apart. This paper finds that donor dependency, and the increasing focus on lobbying and advocacy, fuel the mutual antagonism between the NGO sector and the government of Uganda. Responses from the interviews also allude to the government of Uganda's skepticism of advocacy organizations' work resonating with the growing political opposition, a claim that is difficult to rebuke.

This study and others (Barr, Fafchamps & Owens, 2005; Pinkney, 2009) have found that the majority of NGOs operating in Uganda are donor dependant, reach only limited constituency and prioritize quantitative outputs of effectiveness in the form of "results based management" over more long term and qualitative objectives. As a result of their dependency on donor funding and the high value placed on reporting and measurement, NGOs in Uganda fail to meaningfully engage with the citizenry of Uganda, the only stakeholder capable of bringing about meaningful political reform. Thus, the central argument of this paper is that the narrow social base of NGOs in Uganda prevents them from being effective agents of governance reform, and that the resulting antagonism with the government will only serve to prevent effective coordination of much needed development programmes.

Chapter one outlines the literature on NGOs and civil society, and how these actors engage in both politics and development. This chapter will provide a theoretical frame of reference from which to evaluate the political dimension of Uganda's NGO sector. Chapter two provides a snapshot of contemporary politics in Uganda. The aim of this chapter is to elucidate some of the political logic behind the government of Uganda's policies towards NGOs. Chapter three then breaks down the results of the interview process along both its quantitative and qualitative dimensions. This section will categorize and analyze the NGOs in this sample by their mandate, size, funding sources, strategic vision, relationship with the government and their perceptions of the

2006 NGO Act³. These results provide the empirical evidence for the argument that NGOs are distancing themselves from the government of Uganda as opposed to finding ways to meaningfully collaborate to build institutions and better coordinate development programmes. This paper concludes by analyzing the trends in chapter three, and providing some policy recommendations for NGOs and development practitioners in Uganda.

The results of this study are relevant for NGOs and policy makers as Uganda's political situation parallels many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. NGOs are a quintessential part of civil society in Uganda, as they are in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Like many other developing nations, Uganda has recently experienced steady economic growth, though the structure of the economy is dependent on cash crop exports and the political system is fractured along patrimonial lines (Brett, 2008).

³ The 2006 NGO Registration Amendment Act is often referred to as the "NGO Act" or the "2006 NGO Act" (Uganda NGO Forum, 2009).

Chapter 1.

NGOs, Civil Society and the Politics of Development

NGOs have grown precipitously since the 1990s and even more rapidly since the United Nations Millennium Declaration in September 2000 resolved to give greater opportunities to non-governmental organizations and civil society (United Nations, 2000, para. 20). This marks a policy shift as official agencies seldom referenced the role of the NGOs and civil society in reports on African underdevelopment prior to the 1990s. Steven Radelet (2004) highlights the fact that the Monterrey Consensus which followed the Millennium Declaration contained commitments among heads of states across the developed world to increase Official Development Assistance (ODA) to 0.7 percent of donor GDP. The result has been an enormous increase in development assistance, much of which is channelled through NGOs. In this same time period, debates have emerged as to the degree to which NGOs displace other actors in developing countries, and their effectiveness at achieving their stated goals (Bebbington and Riddell, 1997, Pinkney, 2009; Desai, 2008; Gourevitch & Lake, 2012). This chapter outlines the mainstream definitions of NGOs, civil society, politics, and development in the literature. Following this, the key arguments in the debate on aid effectiveness will be mapped out. Finally, this chapter concludes by emphasizing the role that NGOs play in not only the development of countries, but also in their politics.

1.1. NGOs and Civil Society

NGOs have established their legitimacy as both service providers and as members of civil society advocating for good governance in developing countries (Pinkney, 2009, p. 2). In order to effectively observe the political dimensions of NGOs, civil society, and development in a country like Uganda, it is important to first map these

concepts as they appear in the literature, and also how they intersect and reinforce each other. In the literature the definitions of both NGOs and civil society are not only “slippery” but also “deeply contested” (Bebbington & Hickey, 2006, p. 417). Concepts like “civil society” and “civil society organizations” (CSOs) overlap with the understandings of NGOs, though as argued in this chapter, NGOs are distinctive because of their apolitical nature and foreign funding.

The term NGO is an amorphous one, though for the purpose of this study it is the widely held definition that holds NGOs are private, non-profit organizations that work towards public welfare goals through advocacy and service provision (Pinkney, 2009, p. 11; Clarke, 1998, p. 36). Much of the literature also holds that NGOs typically have formal organizational structures and a distinctive legal character defined by varying forms of internal democracy (Sadoun, 2007, p. 29; Ghosh, 2009, p. 477). While NGOs are independent in the ways described above, they typically rely on financial support from donors, which some have argued subject them to various degrees of influence (Hulme & Edwards, 1997).

Defining the relationship between NGOs and civil society is also important as there are competing theoretical frameworks in the literature. Harry Blair (1997) defines civil society as the area between individuals and the state, and holds that “all civil society organizations are NGOs” (24). This conceptualization is limiting and not very illustrative as, it undermines the role of civil society actors that do not fit the definition of an NGO. Pinkney (2009) suggests that the “lines of distinction [between CSOs and NGOs] are invariably blurred and fluid” (19), and studies of NGOs and CSOs often refer to both simultaneously and synonymously. A more appropriate conceptualization is outlined by Bebbington and Hickey (2006) who hold that “NGOs are, then, neither synonymous nor entirely congruent with civil society” (420). In light of this debate, this paper will draw upon Bebbington and Hickey (2006) and Pinkney (2009) and employ the liberal definition of civil society as a third sector, which exists outside of the state and the private sector and is composed of NGOs and other associations.

By virtue of operating outside of the regulatory frameworks of both the state and the market, civil society can fill a myriad of functions. From crafting norms (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998), adding to a society’s stock of social capital (Pinkney, 2009) and providing

a platform for collective action (Van Rooy, 2008, p. 521; Bebbington & Hickey, 2006), civil society is multi-faceted, dynamic and capable of filling a wide number of roles. The debate in the literature revolves around whether civil society limits or supplements the state. In functioning liberal democracies, the consensus is that civil society plays an important role in enhancing democratic institutions and encouraging political participation (Hulme & Edwards, 1997, p. 10).

There is also an important normative element in descriptions of civil society (Van Rooy, 2008; Bebbington & Hickey, 2006) in the same way that NGOs presumably work toward public welfare goals (Clarke, 1998). This normative element has been problematized, however, by the work of Mahmood Mamdani (1996). Critical conceptualizations of civil society emphasize that this “third sector” can in fact act as a source of exclusion. Mamdani (1996) in particular highlights the deleterious effects of the bifurcated state left over from the legacy of late colonialism. This paper moves beyond Mamdani’s definition and holds that civil society has taken a different form in the last two decades than what the British had implanted in Uganda in the middle of the twentieth century.

It is also important to recognise that civil society in the western industrial countries predates the modern form of civil society that exists in both the developed and developing world. Van Rooy (2008) notes that “the term has a long history in political philosophy, and its definition has altered with Roman, Lockean, Hegelian, Marxist and Gramscian interpretations, long before it was resurrected in the 1990s” (520). Having emerged in western European context, the implication is that civil society exists alongside a functioning state and market, a condition that may only hold to a certain degree in developing countries. Along the same lines Pinkney (2009) associates modern civil society with a ‘post-material’ society; though few would argue that a post-material value system is likely to bear little relevance to societies like Uganda which can hardly be referred to as ‘post-material’. To understand the form of modern civil society it is crucial to unpack its theoretical underpinnings which underwent a dramatic shift in the mid-1980s and early 1990s.

A number of scholars point to a theoretical impasse in development studies to explain the rise of modern civil society (Schuurman, 2008). David Booth (1985)

highlighted the fact that neither modernization theory nor dependency theory were sufficient in explaining poor countries inability to develop. The result was an “associational revolution” that followed both the disenchantment with the state and the market as effective agents of development in low-income countries which led to an emphasis on a “third sector” (Clarke, 1998; Matanga, 2010). Civil society was thus in a good place to fill the resulting theoretical void.

Issa Shivji accosts civil society being born in the “womb of Neoliberalism”, an argument which is congruent with the associational revolution’s disenchantment with the state. On the contrary, the fact that contemporary NGOs rally against neoliberal policies like structural adjustment programs (Råberg & Jeene, 2002; World Vision, 2007) calls into question the degree to which Shivji’s accusation remain salient. Globalization is also a catalyst in the formation of civil society as a ‘third sector,’ as many scholars agree that globalization decreases or at least changes the economic and cultural importance of nation states (Schuurman, 2008, p. 14).

The rise of NGOs as in low income countries is the product of several interconnected theoretical and practical developments. Relevant to this study is recognizing that civil society in developing countries like Uganda is by-in-large dominated by externally funded NGOs. NGOs are thus seen as the primary vehicle of civil society strengthening programs and thus fulfill a fundamentally political role (Desai, 2008; Van Rooy, 2008). It is also important to map out the types of politics they engage in and their effectiveness at bringing about development.

1.2. Politics and Development

One of the distinguishing features of NGOs is that they are often conceived of as agents of “development”, a term that is subject to voracious debate (Cornwall, 2007; Rist, 2007). The concept of “underdevelopment”, most closely associated with the work of dependency theorists Andre Gunder-Frank, is relevant in understanding development as more than just a certain demarcation of wealth, but rather as a product of an exploitative world system (Bergeson, 2011; 25). The relevance of dependency theory to the present study is the idea that the absence of development is the result of an active

process of underdevelopment. Dependency theory has thus influenced a certain level of solidarity activism within a number of NGOs (Barry-Shaw & Oja Jay, 2012).

A more mainstream definition of development has been articulated by Frederick Cooper, who boils development down to its simplest meaning as “down-to-earth aspiration”, or in other words “to have clean water, decent schools and health facilities; to produce larger harvests and more manufactured goods” (2002; 91). Harriss (2012, forthcoming) refers to the process of unravelling potential which implies a process of change towards a more advanced state. Also relevant to this study is the work of Amartya Sen (1999), which holds that individual agency is central to addressing the deprivations associated with the lack of development. For Sen “freedoms are not only the principle ends of development, they are also among its principle means” (1999, p. 10). In practice, this had led to increasingly multidimensional measures of poverty which has taken a number of forms. Sen outlines that poverty cannot merely be captured by income levels alone and perhaps most importantly, poverty is now often understood as a human rights violation (Elliot, 2008, p. 43). This emphasis on the role of agency links directly to the argument that the people of Uganda are the only effective agents of governance reform. To chart the intersection of development, and its agents (NGOs) with politics first requires a conceptualization of ‘politics’ and its practice in countries like Uganda.

Max Weber (1947) held the term ‘politics’ to mean “striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within the state” (1). Unfortunately, as Gray and Khan (2010) highlight, the trend is that “political fragmentation in developing countries frequently takes the form of multiple well-organized factions each seeking to gain power and rents for itself but failing to achieve enough stability to take a long-term view” (4). Politics and political fragmentation thus intersect and interfere with the intended outcomes of NGOs and civil society in developing countries like Uganda. Indeed, the policy environment is a determining factor for both the effectiveness and survival of NGOs (Clarke, 1998).

1.3. Aid Effectiveness and NGO Accountability

Along with the rapid expansion of NGOs has come an increasing number of criticisms of their effectiveness (Desai, 2008, p. 526). Susan Dicklitch (2003) refers to a “revisionist” literature that analyzes the shortcomings of NGOs operating in developing countries (483). Hulme and Edwards (1997) emphasize that states, donors and NGOs are “too close for comfort,” and Mutua (2009) explicitly states that human rights organization (HROs), one of the most common forms of advocacy NGOs, are self-defeating and reinforce deleterious class barriers by limiting themselves to a narrow social base. NGOs have reacted to these criticisms in a number of ways, including an increased focus on participation (Brett, 2003) and internal democracy (Gourevitch & Lake, 2012). The effectiveness and practicality of these approaches are, however, subject to much debate and scrutiny.

For many scholars and development professionals, the transformatory power of NGOs is captured by the concept of participatory development (Mohan, 2008, p. 48). However as Hulme and Edwards (1997) point out: “the theoretical incompatibilities between donor rhetoric and donor practice point to the improbability of donors treating participation seriously” (10). Brett (2003) also points out that participatory theory has indeed strongly influenced NGOs, although in the majority of cases it is difficult to implement in practice. For Mohan (2008) “the emphasis on grass-roots society can leave important structures untouched and do nothing to strengthen states and make them more accountable to their citizens” (49). Brett (2003) warns that simply participating is meaningless unless there is some institutionalized accountability. He argues that we should focus on the “the nature of the institutional constraints that determine how much leverage users can exercise over agencies, whether these operate in the state, market or voluntary sector” (18). Therefore in order to be meaningful, participation must go further than simply consulting with beneficiaries.

A large body of literature has pointed to a crisis of transparency and accountability (Burger & Owens, 2010, p. 1263; Gourevitch & Lake, 2012, p. 5). Defining these terms is important as both transparency and accountability can take a number of different forms. Desai (2008) summarizes the two important forms of accountability by holding that “there is functional accountability in relation to accounting for resources and

their impacts, and strategic accountability, which relates the wider implications of an NGO's work" (528). Gourevitch and Lake (2012) highlight the importance of the multiple audiences and the various "publics" that NGOs are accountable to, which can explain, at least at a theoretical level, the tendency towards functional accountability over strategic accountability. Gourevitch and Lake's (2012) theoretical framework is that credibility is necessary for NGOs to survive, and transparency and accountability are requisite components of credibility. The results of this are an emphasis on procedure over substance, metrics over program evaluation, short term responses taking precedent over long-term programs, and ultimately the flexibility of organizations being crushed under the weighty bureaucracies necessary in order to placate donors (Ibid, p. 33-34).

We are reminded that "working with civil society organizations, after all, is both practically and politically complex" (Van Rooy, 2008, p. 523). Nevertheless, it is important to be cognizant of the competing paradigms associated with NGOs, civil society and development. A civil society predominantly composed by externally funded NGOs has long term implications for the politics and development of Uganda.

Chapter 2.

NGO Space and the Politics of Uganda

In order to examine NGO Politics in Uganda, it is necessary to trace the contours of Uganda's contemporary political system. Uganda has held two rounds of multiparty elections since 2006 and has held "no-party" elections since 1986 (Kasfir, 1998). President Museveni's commitment to economic liberalization has been steadfast since the early 1990s, and this commitment continues to guide his official policy as he has embraced a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), a paper produced in joint with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as the country's National Development Plan (NDP). Recently, Museveni has been criticized by a number of sources for harassing NGOs and violating civil liberties across the board (HRW, 2012; Tangri & Mwenda, 2010). From implementing a comprehensive system of political stabilization, to enshrining liberal values in the 1995 constitution and promoting decentralization through the 1997 Local Government Act (Green, 2008), the government of Uganda has relapsed in terms of these commitments.

Since independence, Uganda has successfully moved from democracy and corporatism, to state collapse until finally reaching its present state of economic liberalisation and relative political stability (Mamdani, 1976; Brett, 2008; Green, 2008). Uganda remains divided upon tribal lines, and the legacy of Uganda's civil war in the North lingers in its politics (Finnström, 2008; Branch, 2011). The result is political fractionalization and clientelism amongst well organized groups (Gray & Khan, 2010). Another way of describing this is form of competition and rent seeking is neo-patrimonialism, an important but contested term in the literature (Pitcher et al, 2009; Mkandawire, 2001) that highlights the reciprocal and clientelistic elements of Uganda's governance systems.

There is a large body of literature discussing patron-client relationships and the logic of neo-patrimonialism in developing countries like Uganda (Bratton & De Walle, 1994; Khan, 2005). The literature has evolved and in fact embraced some relatively new ideas that while neo-patrimonialism and fractionalization are persistent features, they do not preclude the possibility of a governance model that can work well for development (Mkandawire, 2001; Kelsall, 2011). Sadly in Uganda these conditions are not said to be found (Mwenda, 2007; Booth, 2011). Rather, fractionalization and electoral competition make civil servants and elected officials “reluctant to enforce by-laws which are unpopular with the population” (Booth, 2011, p. 16). Some of these limitations have indeed been linked to President Museveni’s increasing insecurity, but also his aggressive decentralization program (Green, 2008).

In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s Uganda’s political fractionalization was neutralized by a strong commitment to decentralization. In addition to ensuring political stability this policy is designed to empower communities across the country to participate in decision making and improve access to basic services (UNDESA, 2004). Decentralization was brought into law by the Local Government Act in 1997, which granted formal authority to local government councils and district councils (Green, 2008). In light of Uganda’s recent multiparty elections this commitment to decentralized rule has weakened (Mwenda, 2007; Brett, 2008). The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), the highest ranking administrative position at the district was once appointed by the Local Council IV representative.⁴ The CAO is now appointed by the Office of the Prime Minister, a representative of the central government.

To his credit, Museveni has demonstrated his commitment to implementing neoliberal macroeconomic reforms, which has granted him access to loans and concessional aid payments from both the IMF and the World Bank (Dijkstra & Van Dogne, 2001). These commitments to transforming Uganda from a rural agrarian economy to a modern industrial economy remain (NDP, 2010, p. 2) and indeed President Museveni continues to welcome NGOs whose mandate is congruent with these aims. A notable example is BRAC which has become the largest NGO in the

⁴ Documentation of this change can be found in ACODE (2011) and Green (2008). This change was also discussed during interview No. 23 on 13 August 2012.

country with over 2,000 employees and 150 offices in the country.⁵ As mentioned above, Museveni has become increasingly insecure as opposition parties have made substantial gains in the 2011 elections and recent by-elections (The Observer, 2012). This has had unfortunate implications for NGOs, particularly those engaging in lobbying and advocacy efforts. The government of Uganda has begun to associate the activities of advocacy NGOs with opposition parties and has begun to restrict and monitor their activities in increasingly coercive ways (HRW, 2012).

The 2006 NGO Act was enacted by Parliament on 7 April 2006 and assented by the President less than two months later (Uganda National NGO Forum, 2009). This Act has been heralded as a brazen attack on NGOs and CSOs. The Act has provided a legal framework for undermining civil society and limiting the space in which they operate, and is widely interpreted as a legislative manifestation of adversarial nature between civil society and the government of Uganda. For instance, NGOs are having their renewals delayed and even being threatened with deregistration for administrative infractions (HRW, 2012, p. 7). In addition to delayed registration and renewals, the legislation contains incredibly restrictive statutes. Stipulations are also sufficiently vague so that NGOs could find themselves under attack for carrying out seemingly benign operations.⁶

The most substantive revision of the 2006 NGO Act is the establishment of the NGO Board. In essence this “board” is a government regulatory body that operates in lockstep with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (HURINET, 2006). To highlight this, we can look to its structure. Of the thirteen members of the NGO Board, only three are not government officials, and these ‘individuals’ are appointed by the Minister of Internal Affairs (Ibid). In other words, this “board” is merely a government agency with no connection to either civil society or society at large. As a result, the 2006 NGO Act is one of the most contentious pieces of legislation pertaining to NGO politics in Uganda. It highlights the rising tensions between NGOs and the government and is illustrative of the shortcomings of both parties in attempts to build a productive relationship.

⁵ Interview No. 13, Gulu District, 14 June 2012.

⁶ Interview No. 26, Kampala District, 20 July 2012 also see HURINET (2006).

Building on the theoretical framework for the role of NGOs and civil society as identified in Chapter One, and recognizing the political currents in modern day Uganda outlined above, the exercise is now to match the empirical evidence gathered by this study within these frameworks. Chapter Three will present the results of the field research and analyze the evidence to determine whether the mutual antagonism between civil society and the government of Uganda is a barrier to preventing the implementation of meaningful social and economic development programmes. Chapter Three will also guide the reader through the empirics that demonstrate the deleterious impacts of donor dependence and the limitations of a narrow social base for NGOs operating in Uganda.

Chapter 3.

NGOs in Masaka, Gulu and Kampala

The present study builds on three months of field research in the Masaka, Gulu and Kampala districts that took place between 15 May 2012 and 13 August 2012. Structured interviews were administered, though the respondents were given the flexibility to elaborate on any of the questions or other topics of their choosing. A structured approach proved useful, as this analysis strives to compare organizations along a number of different dimensions. The interviews were composed of twelve questions aimed to gather information on the principle function of NGOs, staffing and volunteer input, sources of funding, strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) techniques and the organization's relationship with its major stakeholders. The final question in the interview inquired about the respondent's perspective on the 2006 NGO Act; both the Act and the respondents' answers will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

I aimed to balance the sample between both size and mandate in the three districts, though as will be discussed further, the availability of organizations varied between the three districts. Interviews lasted between half an hour and two hours. Due to the political nature of the interview, the respondents' identity and name of their organization are withheld. The selection process for organizations was subject to availability, though I actively tried to balance the sample in terms of size and focus of the organizations in the three districts.

The sample was also weighted towards organizations that would mostly likely be affected by the 2006 NGO Act in order to probe into the dynamics of government-NGO relations in Uganda. This resulted in the slightly higher focus on advocacy organizations than samples that employed randomized selection (Barr, Fafchamps & Owens, 2005). A comparison between my sample and a representative study of NGOs in Uganda will be

made in the next section. Also, due to the relatively short time frame of the field research component of this study I often employed the 'snowballing' technique where I asked each respondent to recommend other potential contacts (Davies, 2001). These limitations in the time frame and selection process inevitably infringe on the representative nature of this sample, but nevertheless the perspectives gained during this interview process provide a keyhole perspective into the views held by NGO professionals in Uganda.

Other studies have used one or a small number of case studies to illustrate the political dimensions and effectiveness of NGOs (Nicholls, 1999; Cannon, 2000; Smillie, 2009), though two studies in particular closely resemble the present study: Barr, Fafchamps and Owens (2005) and Pinkney (2009). While there is a certain degree of overlap, the present study places a larger emphasis on the perceptions of government-NGO relations amongst the respondents. Section 3.1 will analyze the mandate and strategic focus of the organizations profiled in this study beginning, Section 3.2 will look at trends in personnel and human resources, and Section 3.3 will analyze the intersection of donors and M&E mechanisms to the first two sections. Finally, Section 3.4 will evaluate the responses given to how NGO professionals work with different stakeholders and Section 3.5 will discuss some of the issues not addressed in this paper, and some potential avenues for further research.

3.1. Mandate and Strategic Focus

Barr, Fafchamps and Owens (2005) is the largest study to date on NGOs in Uganda. This study was done in collaboration with the World Bank and the Office of the Prime Minister in Uganda with funding provided by the World Bank and the Japanese Government (Ibid, 2005, p. 661). Barr, Fafchamps and Owens' sample included Kampala and 14 out of the remaining 56 districts that existed at the time, and took a random sample of 100 NGOs in Kampala and 200 NGOs from the 14 rural districts. Pinkney's (2009) sample contained 32 observations and the present study contains observations for 33 NGOS and two government agencies. For a comparison, Table 1 combines the findings of Barr, Fafchamps and Owens (2005), Pinkney (2009) and the present study with regards to the principle function of the NGOs in each of the samples.

The percentages in figure 1 are based on organizations that list the activities in the first column as one of their principle functions or core mandate. Organizations often have more than one principle function, so organizations often appear in more than category. The same holds true for both Pinkney's (2009) and Barr, Fafchamps and Owens' (2005) sample.

Table 1. Principle Functions of Organizations Interviewed

Principle Function	Pinkney 2009	Barr, Fafchamps & Owens 2005	Andrews 2012
1. Service delivery; development and poverty eradication	25%	32.3%	36%
2. Raising awareness (enabling, mobilising and empowering)	40.6%	96.6%	94%
3. Lobbying/Advocacy (Promotion of democracy, human rights, civil society, good governance)	42%	60%	45%
4. Capacity building/consulting	n/a	n/a	9%
5. Agroforestry	5	2.7%	6%
6. Agriculture	4	32.3%	9%
8. Microfinance	n/a	33%	15%

Note: Percentages based on open ended questions about NGO activities where multiple responses were allowed.

As displayed above, we find that my sample was consistent with Pinkney (2009) and Barr, Fafchamps and Owens (2005) in being weighted towards advocacy organizations and organizations focussed on 'raising awareness'. The major discrepancy across the three samples in Table 1 is that Pinkney (2009) reports a much lower percentage of organizations engaged in raising awareness which is likely due to the fact that he marked 'raising awareness' and 'lobbying/advocacy' as mutually exclusive categories, where the present study along with Barr, Fafchamps and Owens (2005) recorded these as overlapping categories. In addition, the present study included fewer microfinance organizations than Barr, Fafchamps and Owens (2005), and Pinkney (2009) did not include microfinance organizations in his sample. It is important to note that this does not reflect current trends. Microfinance organizations have in fact grown precipitously in Uganda over the past decade (Wagner, 2012).

The results of my interviews demonstrate some distinctive trends in both the types of services that are provided by NGOs and the form of advocacy and lobbying that

is undertaken by NGOs in the Masaka, Gulu and Kampala districts. The mid-sized and larger NGOs in the sample who received funding from major donors did not engage in the direct provision of basic health care and education. The term “extension service” is often used in the literature to describe projects that supplement the agriculture sector (Anderson & Crowler, 2000), though this idea of extending and supplementing existing services applies in principle to other sectors as well.

The government of Uganda does have a Universal Primary Education and Universal Secondary Education programme, and also provides a base level of health care. And while larger NGOs do not typically provide services that compete with these basic services, there are some substantial and seemingly productive partnerships in areas that aim to extend the government programmes. Treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDs is one of the major examples.⁷ As these interviews highlighted, cooperation and partnership with the government at all levels was crucial to their work. In fact, the government provides the antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) that these organizations administer. From the responses gathered in this study it appeared as though HIV/AIDs outreach, treatment and prevention was understood in principle to be a healthcare extension service.

One large service provider with their head office in the Kampala district emphasized that the role of civil society was to complement the work of the government.⁸ Larger organizations in the sample tended to partner with existing government schools in line with the concept of extension services, it was only the smaller privately funded NGOs that supported private schools outside of the government education system.⁹ Other services that fall outside of the perceived remit of the government were also common of NGOs in the sample. For instance, counselling services, agroforestry, agriculture and vocational training were common and indeed there is no parallel ministry at the central or local level that provide these services.

⁷ Interviews No. 7 and No. 21 were conducted with two major organizations who partner with the central government and district official on the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDs.

⁸ Interview No. 31, Kampala district, 30 July 2012.

⁹ The organizations profiled in interview No. 9, 11 and 19 operated private schools and did not partner directly or indirectly with the government in any of their service delivery programs.

Another observation from evaluating the mandates of the organizations in the sample is that no organizations focussed on the adoption of new technologies nor engaged in any value added activity outside of the agriculture sector. It thus seems as though NGOs are not as committed as the government to the goal of “transforming Uganda into a modern society” as outlined in Uganda’s NDP (2010, p. 1). Microfinance was typically directed as the business of farming and smallholder agriculture rather than manufacturing or the IT sector. With advances in the availability and accessibility of technology in sub-Saharan Africa, it was peculiar to find that very few organizations, other than two small advocacy organizations¹⁰ in Kampala that had included technology or technical capacity building in their remit. Income generating projects were common, though generally limited to agriculture programs and small handmade crafts.

This large focus on lobbying and advocacy in the sample does indeed reflect trends in publications produced by a large number of NGOs. Large multinational NGOs like Oxfam “overwhelmingly articulates its role as a catalyst, broker and convener of change, rather than a deliverer of services” (Oxfam, 2011, para. 1). Even World Vision, an organization widely known for its commitment to service provision and child sponsorships aims to “facilitate an engagement between the poor and the affluent that opens both to transformation. We respect the poor as active participants, not passive recipients, in this relationship” (World Vision, 2012).

Lobbying and advocacy efforts can take a number of different forms. Some organizations direct their efforts at building capacity for citizens to engage with the government. This is usually done through short term training and seminars and is typically quite formal and technocratic. It was also often the case that the employees of the NGOs were the targets of these workshops.¹¹ Other organizations directed their advocacy directly at government officials and agencies. This advocacy was often accompanied by high level reports and attempts to gain international attention for their work.¹² These two different methods reached different audiences, though neither

¹⁰ The organizations profiled in interview No. 25 and interview No. 28 highlighted the role of technology in their work.

¹¹ The organizations profiled in interviews No. 15, 16, 25, 27, 28, and 34 followed this pattern.

¹² The organizations profiled in interview No. 23, 32 and 33 published these types of reports.

seemed to meaningfully engage with social movements nor with large sections of Uganda's rural agrarian population.

Barr, Fafchamps and Owens' (2005) study highlights the risks of this trend as allowing for the phenomenon of 'briefcase NGOs'. This concern was echoed in some of my discussions in the interview process. One respondent in Masaka cited an example of one individual who effectively obtained funding for a project that did not exist. For Barr, Fafchamps and Owens (2005) "the strong emphasis on 'talking' as opposed to the delivery of physical goods or services probably makes it easier for ineffective or unscrupulous organizations to hide within the sector" (664). The risk is that it is easier to hide workshops and advocacy programs than infrastructure projects and service delivery where the results are more visible.

Despite concerted attempts to balance the study across organizations with different principle functions, a large degree of variation exists across the three districts analyzed in this study. For instance, at the time of this study there was not a single advocacy organization engaged in the promotion of democracy, human rights, civil society, good governance or women's issues in Masaka, nor any think tanks or research groups. A number of organizations included various forms of advocacy in their remit, but by-in-large the principle function of every NGO encountered in Masaka was service provision. Gulu and Kampala on the other hand had a large concentration of organizations focussing on rights of various forms. As Table 2 shows, one third of the sample in Gulu and three quarters of the sample in Kampala listed lobbying and advocacy in the defense of human rights and good governance as one of their principle activities.

Table 2 demonstrates that the differences in terms of activities between the three districts are quite substantial. The trend in the literature noted earlier is that service delivery and conventional development NGOs are falling out of vogue holds true for this sample in Gulu and Kampala, though Masaka seems beholden to the paradigms of 'first-generation' NGOs (Clarke, 1998). It is also worthwhile to point out that there was no representative from the NGO board in Masaka. In one of the interviews in Masaka, I learned that the NGO board closed its Masaka office back in 2009 as a result of a lack of

funding from the central government.¹³ The chairperson of the Masaka NGO Board is now based in an office in Kampala and rarely visits the district. This is likely due to the virtual absence of advocacy organizations active in the Masaka district. Gulu on the other hand was host to an active NGO board and a membership based NGO forum. During the interview process it quickly became apparent that the political situation for NGOs in Gulu and Kampala was much different than in Masaka and indeed there appears to be a very clear association between advocacy and lobbying efforts and government scrutiny.

Table 2. Principle Function by District

Principle Function	Masaka	Gulu	Kampala
1. Service Delivery; development	100%	56%	25%
2. Raising Awareness (Enabling, Mobilising, Empowering)	63%	89%	100%
3. Lobbying/Advocacy	0	33%	75%
4. Promotion of democracy, human rights, civil society, good governance	0	22%	50%
5. Capacity building/consulting	9%	11%	8%
6. Agroforestry	9%	0	0
7. Agriculture	18%	0	16%
8. Microfinance	9%	0	8%

The Gulu district is in fact an outlier in terms of its high concentration of NGOs. A number of respondents in the Gulu district highlighted the enormous influx of humanitarian organizations starting in 2003 shortly after the UN Undersecretary General declared that Northern Uganda was the most overlooked Humanitarian crisis in the world (Nibbe, 2012, p.41). The result was a major influx of revenue for NGOs of various types and the result has been the establishment of a large NGO driven civil society.

In summary, the organizations profiled in my sample are consistent with the trend that advocacy and lobbying are of increasing importance and the ethos that service provision should fall within the remit of the Ugandan government. Further, the strategic

¹³ Interview No. 5, Masaka District, 22 May 2012.

mandates of the organizations profiled varied enormously between the three districts as a result of the large sum of donor funding that followed the high profile conflict and humanitarian situation in Gulu, the urban bias in Kampala and the enabling environment for volunteer driven organizations in the Masaka district. The next section will chart out the variation between the three districts in terms of their personnel, size and structure.

3.2. Personnel and Structure

This study also aimed to analyze trends in personnel and human resource strategies. I documented the size of the organizations in terms of personnel and documented the role that volunteers play in each organization. As this section will discuss, the size of the organizations profiled varied by district, though due to the limited size of this sample I do not suggest these trends are representative, nevertheless a number of the structural trends deserve attention. For instance, there were a large number of NGOs with few personnel in Kampala whereas Masaka was host to organizations with a large number of staff, but often relatively small budgets.¹⁴ The reliance on volunteers also had implications for organizations' mandates and strategic focus. This section will also analyze some of the implications of NGOs as an employer in a very difficult job market.

The size of the organizations included in the sample is subject to a high degree of variation, though there is a degree of subjectivity in categorizing organizations by size. For instance one large multinational NGO only has eight employees at its office in Northern Uganda, though for the purposes of this study it is classified as a large organization with over 100 employees across its international offices. There are important structural characteristics that come along with being a 'large' NGO, mainly a centralized M&E framework, strategy documents drafted are typically drafted outside of Uganda and projects are often replicated in several different developing countries.

¹⁴ Respondents in interview No. 2, 3, 8 and 11 in the Masaka district all highlighted their large remit and small budget.

There was one ‘large’ organization that I profiled in the Masaka district that exhibits many of the characteristics of a ‘small’ organization.¹⁵ Its funds are entirely private, they have no formal M&E mechanism, nor do they engage in advocacy or lobbying, yet they have over 100 employees between their two projects and over 1 million USD in annual revenue.¹⁶ In spite of these exceptions, it is important to map out the organizations in the sample based on size in order to determine any trends or patterns. Table 3 below maps out the size of NGOs in terms of staff across the districts in my sample.

Table 3. Size of the NGOs in each of the districts

Classification	Masaka	Gulu	Kampala
Small, 1-25 employees	4	3	9
Mid-Sized, 25-100 employees	3	1	3
Large, Over 100 employees	3	5	1

Table 3 highlights the large number of small organizations operating in Kampala. While this may appear initially counter-intuitive, I postulate it is a product of the high number of advocacy organizations operating in Kampala as depicted in Table 2. Recall from the previous section that only a small percentage of organizations based in Kampala listed service delivery as one of their principle functions (25% of the total). Nearly all of the organizations profiled in Kampala were dedicated to raising awareness and/or lobbying/advocacy work and it is rare to find an organization with over 100 employees whose remit does not include service provision. Masaka and Gulu are more balanced which also reflects the wide range in principle functions of these organizations spelled out in Table 2.

With regards to staff, 32 out of the 33 organizations interviewed reported that over 95% of their paid staff members are citizens of Uganda. This is hardly surprising as wages for Ugandans are generally substantially lower than foreign development professionals and the government of Uganda has stipulations mandating that

¹⁵ Interview No. 9, Masaka District, 4 June 2012.

¹⁶ Interview No. 14, Gulu District, 19 June 2012.

organizations hire Ugandan citizens wherever possible in order to combat the country's high unemployment rate.¹⁷ With that said, the small proportion of foreign employees did occupy a disproportionate number of high ranking positions. There has also been some fierce dialogue between the government of Uganda and civil society on the topic of expatriate salaries.¹⁸ My conversations with Ugandan NGO professionals did maintain that the government's accusations were overblown, and in fact hypocritical as government officials often receive high salaries and hire high paid foreign consultants.¹⁹

The vast majority of organizations I profiled were primarily staffed by educated Ugandans. I was surprised to find so few foreigners in my study. In terms of capacity building and providing employment for Uganda's increasingly educated population, this was a pleasant surprise. On the contrary, the long term implications of this trend are subject to a number of criticisms. Indeed one of my respondents commented that 40 percent of the jobs in Uganda are in the NGO sector, which is part of the reason the government feels insecure.²⁰ Mamdani has discussed the impacts of NGOs as an employer of African academics as deleterious to the integrity of African Universities (2011) and indeed there were a large number of programs being offering in M&E techniques, baseline surveys and grant writing, all requisite skills for the NGO sector (Kampala University, n.d. ; Makerere University, 2012). So the question remains as to whether this detracts from other sectors in terms of human resources or builds the capacity of educated professionals in the country. Nevertheless the fact that NGOs are a major employer in Uganda remains an important observation.

Uganda's NDP does not include the NGO sector as a "Primary Growth Sector" (2010, p. 16), though drawing from other sources (NGO Forum 2012, Nyangabyaki et al, 1999) and the results of this study it is difficult to ignore the impact of NGOs on the job market in Uganda. One very small organization I profiled in Masaka stressed the lack of employment opportunities and thus justified starting up his own CBO which he planned

¹⁷ As per Uganda's National Development Plan, Uganda's Unemployment was 29.1 percent in 2005/06 (NDP, 2010, p. 69).

¹⁸ Daily Monitor (2012).

¹⁹ Interview No. 34, Kampala District, 11 July 2012.

²⁰ Interview No. 30, Kampala District, 17 July 2012.

on transforming into an NGO in order to secure employment for himself.²¹ Also, while attempting to employ the snowball interview technique I found myself speaking with organizations that approached me for funding and access to networks from which to recruit Western volunteers. Taking on foreign volunteers is often a means of securing revenue as volunteers bring grants and fundraise for projects which can be lucrative for small NGOs.

Indeed, one hypothesis I aimed to test at the outset of this study aimed to determine any relationship between effectiveness, political awareness and volunteer programs. Organizations with a large focus on volunteers often rely on volunteer dues for funding, as opposed to major funding agencies. In my sample, nine out of the thirty organizations I profiled relied heavily on volunteers as both a source of strategic direction and personnel. None of these organizations engaged in a formal M&E process, though this is not to say that community feedback was not important to their work.²² For instance, one medium sized organization based in Masaka relies entirely on their volunteer dues and efforts to direct their work.²³ Interns are placed at a small local partner for placements that last between three and six months in which time they identify a project, write a grant proposal and implement it during their stay. With this approach to development it is difficult to see how this fulfills the criteria for either functional or strategic accountability as the impacts are not measured empirically and the time frame for each project is very short (Desai, 2008).

It also became apparent from the interview process that volunteer driven organizations did not meaningfully engage in advocacy. The fundamental focus was on service provision, thus making it difficult to compare volunteer driven organizations with advocacy based organization that rely on funding from major multilateral donors. The majority (six out of the nine) volunteer driven organizations I interviewed were located in the Masaka district; the remaining three were in the Gulu district. None of the organizations I profiled in Kampala were directed by volunteers. A number of organizations do accept volunteers, though the placements were short term and

²¹ Interview No. 8, Masaka District, 25 May 2012.

²² Interview No. 10, Masaka District, 29 May 2012.

²³ Interview No. 5, Masaka District, 22 May 2012.

overseen and directed by professional staff. Kampala seemed host to a number of barriers for entry for volunteer driven organizations. Costs were higher and government scrutiny was more palpable.

This section has thus uncovered a number of trends in terms of staff selection, the role of NGOs in the job market and some distinguishing features of volunteer driven NGOs in Masaka, Gulu and Kampala. The majority of the NGO jobs in the more remote districts of Masaka and Gulu revolve around rural service provision, whereas the majority of the NGOs in Kampala are rooted in advocacy and lobbying efforts and are staffed by a small number of educated professionals. Volunteer driven organizations are more common in remote districts like Masaka. The responses collected in this study confirmed that there is less scrutiny and barriers for entry for rural service providers as more urban based advocacy organizations.

3.3. Donors, Coordination and the Politics of Metrics

Funding sources and donors are a quintessential component of the literature on NGO effectiveness (Hulme & Edwards, 1997; Desai, 2008; Pinkney, 2009). This study came across a number of strong connections between mandate, M&E mechanisms and donors. The interview process made it explicitly clear that donors impose an enormous degree of influence on the organizations they support. This section identifies and analyzes some of the literature from the major donors reported in this sample. Links are drawn from between the trends in the literature produced by the major donors to the mandates and M&E mechanisms of the organizations in the sample. The lack of coordination cited during this study is also alarming in light of the focus on aid effectiveness by a number of donors identified in this study.

The most commonly cited donors in this study were the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID). There were also a large number of private donors, though the donors listed above were the most commonly cited and are indeed major donors to Uganda. DANIDA in particular highlights its

projects in Uganda extensively on their website. DANIDA outlines four strategic goals: 1) human rights and democracy, 2) green growth, 3) social progress and 4) stability and protection (DANIDA, n.d.). SIDA's list is almost identical (SIDA, 2009). NORAD includes energy, macroeconomics, public administration and research, though the core thematic areas are virtually identical (NORAD, n.d.). DFID's shares many of the same thematic areas, though also includes basic public services in their remit (DFID, n.d.). Having identified these priorities it becomes apparent that donors directly influence the strategic focus of the organizations in the sample.

It became clear in this study that Hulme and Edwards' warning over a decade and a half ago that "not surprisingly, as NGOs get closer to donors they become more like donors" remains prescient (1997, p. 8). Fifteen out of the thirty three organizations referred to specific "areas of focus" that closely resembles those of DANIDA, NORAD, SIDA and DFID. Not surprisingly the organizations that received funding from these major donors listed at least one of the thematic areas above in their core mandate. As an interviewer it was easy to make an itemized list that matched up nicely to their strategic vision or list of values.

During an interview with the CEO of a highly reputable mid-sized service provider in the Masaka district, the respondent alluded to the fact that adjusting to donor trends was the 'name of the game' in terms of shaping her organization's strategic mandate.²⁴ The respondent highlighted the fact that when the 'general' approach to treating HIV/AIDs changes, the strategic vision of her organization shifts in lock-step. Indicating that she had been involved with this organization for over two decades, she had seen a large number of ebbs and flows of donor trends during her tenure and has witnessed her organization's strategic focus shift accordingly.

It also became clear from the data in the sample that funding sources are also closely related to the degree of investment in M&E mechanisms. Organizations with funding from large foundations or donor government agencies performed thorough baseline surveys and had a comprehensive follow up protocols. Indeed, the rhetoric around "results based management" was ubiquitous amongst NGOs who received

²⁴ Interview No. 7, Masaka District, 28 May 2012.

funding from government agencies and major foundations.²⁵ Two exceptions were however noteworthy. Two well respected human rights organizations whose mandate is advocacy and legal outreach admitted that they do not have a formal M&E mechanisms.²⁶ Their view was that advocacy work is generally unquantifiable, yet these organizations have still found ways to attract financial support from major aid agencies. Other human rights organizations referenced M&E mechanisms, though their metrics were relatively soft in comparison with those cited by service providers. One organization indicated that they measured their work in terms of the quantity and quality of engagements with individuals, metrics which are unavoidably subjective.²⁷ In lieu of quantifiable results advocacy organizations often produced high level reports, report on rights abuses and engage with supranational organizations like the African Union and the United Nations as a means of fostering legitimacy.

Despite comprehensive and technocratic measurement tools, discussions of stakeholder meetings and consultation with the local government, coordination was often cited as lacking. This dynamic became particularly apparent during an interview with one membership organization (MO)²⁸ that aimed to improve both coordination and capacity of organizations operating in the Gulu district.²⁹ This organization emphasized the role of 'two-way advocacy' in their work. In their experience, NGOs have often been disconnected from one other and have a difficult time coordinating since the end of the conflict in Northern Uganda.

During the conflict, the United Nations Organization for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) was in charge of coordinating humanitarian affairs, though they began phasing out once Northern Uganda was no longer a conflict area and in 2011 they ceased their operations completely. My interview with the government agency that replaced UNOCHA revealed that the transition has been difficult particularly as organizational mandates have switched from a humanitarian focus to development.³⁰

²⁵ Results Based Managements was highlighted in interviews 1,7, 12, 13, 17, 20, 21, and 22.

²⁶ Interview No. 26, Kampala District, 20 July 2012 and Interview No. 27, Kampala District, 18 July 2012.

²⁷ Interview No. 25, Kampala District, 19 July 2012.

²⁸ This membership organization had a variety of NGOs and CBOs as its members.

²⁹ Interview No. 16, Gulu District, 7 June 2012.

³⁰ Interview No. 18, Gulu District, 19 June 2012.

This lack of coordination resonates with the findings of Booth (2011) and the Africa Politics and Power Programme that hold policy incoherence in developing countries often results from “ill-defined mandates or overlapping jurisdictions among all or some of the organisations concerned; and perverse incentives confronting actors within particular organisations” (13). This MO in the Gulu district did mention that the major NGOs in the district have been open to stakeholder meeting and discussions, though coordination problems persisted.

The representative of this MO in Gulu emphasized that the lack of coordination is a multifaceted problem, but a major obstacle was the lack of capacity on behalf of the government. The respondent felt this was partially due to the fact that both district officials and the Office of the Prime Minister were sidestepped by UNOCHA and other large NGOs during the conflict.³¹ The other major problem was the relatively short time frame for the majority of the projects in Northern Uganda. A number of interviews highlighted the fact that many organizations are phasing out their projects and transferring responsibilities to their community based partners, though this has created a myriad of logistical problems.³²

Turning now from the internal mechanisms of NGOs, we now focus our attention to their position in Ugandan society and unpack some of the observations about NGO’s strategic accountability. This section highlighted the deleterious impacts of policy incoherence, and a number of sources in the literature point the importance of the central government in overcoming this issue (Tendler, 1997). In Uganda however, barriers to effective coordination remain. One of the primary objectives of this study is to determine why coordination and cooperation between Uganda’s large NGO sector and the central government remain weak and are in fact deteriorating. Section 3.4 outlines some of the responses given during the interview process that elucidate some of the major points of contention.

³¹ Interview No. 16, Gulu District, 7 June 2012.

³² Interview No. 14, 16, 18, 20 in the Gulu district all highlighted the rapid exodus of NGOs out of Northern Uganda.

3.4. Relationship with other Stakeholders

The final two questions of my interview aimed to elucidate some of the dynamics between NGOs operating in Uganda and their other relevant stakeholders. The open ended nature of this question often required me to clarify what I meant when referring to other “stakeholders”. I would generally prompt respondents to discuss their relationship with government agencies at various levels. I was surprised however to find that very few of the respondents responded by saying that their beneficiaries are their primary stakeholders, a trend that does not bode well for proponents of participatory development.

The next question asked respondents their opinion of the 2006 NGO Act. Thirteen out of the thirty respondents (forty percent) were explicit in stating that this act only serves to restrict NGOs and is a regressive piece of legislation. Only five respondents had a positive outlook on the implications and ethos of this legislation, four of which worked for two of the largest NGOs operating in the country. Five respondents had not heard of the act and the remaining ten were ambivalent, highlighting some of the merits of oversight while cautioning against its ability to restrict NGO activity.

One respondent indicated that “NGOs are made to suffer in order to do good”³³. Another respondent said that “while the act has not affected us, statements that implicate NGOs as a whole do affect us”³⁴. He also maintained that “if you don’t raise any major issues, the government won’t have a problem with you”³⁵. This observation aligns with the fact that a large number of small organizations are indeed allowed to operate in the country with a large degree of freedom and very little interaction with the government. Many organizations, particularly in Masaka, had not even heard of the NGO Act and it seemed as though there were very few consequences for not registering with

³³ Interview No. 5, Masaka District 22 May 2012.

³⁴ Interview No. 30, Kampala District 17 July 2012.

³⁵ Interview No. 30, Kampala District, 17 July 2012.

the NGO. Advocacy organizations on the other hand were gravely concerned about their renewal with the NGO board as it affected their access to funding³⁶.

The majority of the respondents who did sympathize with the principle of the NGO act did however recognize that enforcement is sporadic at best due to the lack of resources available to the government. One director of a fairly large NGO focussed on service provision highlighted the irony of the government scrutinizing NGOs for not doing their work when their experience has time and again illustrated unwillingness on the side of the government to fulfill their role as a service provider.³⁷ For this respondent, the inadequacy of government services was not merely a product of a lack of resources, but of a lack of interest.

Media sources and advocacy groups have also highlighted the fact that the government of Uganda has accosted NGOs for representing foreign interests and posting threats to national security (HRW, 2012). Three of the organizations I interviewed had been directly impacted by this legislation. One organization was still waiting for their renewal to be processed from the Ministry of Internal Affairs which had been submitted six months earlier.³⁸ Two other organizations had been listed by the government of Uganda as organizations that could be facing deregistration.³⁹ One respondent in particular shared a story of an employee of another prominent advocacy organization based in Kampala who was threatened and harassed to the point where he felt it necessary to resign from his post.⁴⁰

Regional trends can be discerned by evaluating the information gathered by the respondents. NGOs closer to the centre of power clearly exhibited a greater awareness of the NGO Act and were more likely to be affected by it. Secondly, service providers were seldom affected by the NGO Act and were more likely to highlight its benefits to the NGO community. Indeed, one of the primary observations of this study is therefore that

³⁶ Interview No. 28, Kampala District, 1 August 2012 and interview No. 23, Kampala District 13 August 2012.

³⁷ Interview No. 24, Kampala District, 23 July 2012.

³⁸ Interview No. 28, Kampala District, 1 August 2012.

³⁹ Interview No. 33, Kampala District 24 July 2012 and interview No. 23, Kampala District 13 August 2012. The Guardian (2012) also documents the threats levied by the Government of Uganda.

⁴⁰ Interview No. 28, Kampala district, 1 August 2012.

in spite of the increasing tensions between the government of Uganda and civil society, there is little government oversight over the majority of the NGOs operating in the country. The result is that NGOs in Uganda can operate with an enormous amount of freedom, particularly if they operate outside of Kampala and do not engage in direct advocacy or lobbying efforts directed at the central government. With that said, the implications of the NGO Act are serious, particularly for proponents of human and civil rights.

Despite the palpable tensions of the NGO Act there did appear to be some positive steps taken towards better cooperation between the government of Uganda and the NGO sector. In July there was a lot of media attention surrounding the July launch of the new 2012 NGO Policy (New Vision, 2012). According to a number of sources this legislation has been heralded as “a generally positive document that is an important step in addressing civil society concerns” (HRW, 2012). Sadly, the reality is that this revised policy is unlikely to change the dynamics between NGOs and the government of Uganda. In 2010 a similar NGO Policy was passed, though violations on behalf of the government continued (Ibid). Statements and policies are easy to produce though it is difficult to hold the government accountable if NGOs and civil society are not linked with broad based social movements (Mutua, 2009).

One of the potential outcomes for advocacy organizations in response to restrictive legislation like the NGO Act is self-censorship. There is a surprisingly large body of literature on this trend that is specific to Uganda. Ghosh (2009) holds that “human rights NGOs in Uganda generally develop ‘self-censorship’ to avoid confrontation with government on sensitive issues” (483). However, recognizing self-censorship outright is difficult. Very few advocacy organizations are likely to be forthcoming about self-censorship, though some responses seemed to hint that it may indeed be occurring. This possibility crossed my mind during one interview when the respondent indicated his positive working relationship the central government.⁴¹ Had this organization bridged the impasse or had this organization backed down and tailored their message so that it would be tolerated by government officials?

⁴¹ Interview No. 27, Kampala District, 18 July 2012.

This respondent from this human rights organization asserted that the only time an NGO would get in trouble with the government is they did not approach issues with professionalism and care. Perhaps my scepticism during the interview was palpable, though the respondent insisted that their positive relationship was not the result of self-censorship, as this organization had in fact sued the government of Uganda on a number of occasions. For this long time defender of human rights in Uganda, his success was a result of the way their organization approaches politics.

This organization is very highly regarded and enjoys funding from a wide assortment of international donors and does seem to engage in productive dialogue with a number of government officials and agency, though recently their office was looted and many of their computers were either stolen or destroyed (Daily Monitor, 2012b). Whether the government played any part in this robbery has not been determined, though several responses to the online article indicated such suspicion before comments were disabled. Regardless of who is at fault, events like this only fan the flames of distrust and suspicion between civil society and the government of Uganda.

In terms of effectiveness, the fundamental weakness of advocacy and lobbying organizations in the districts profiled in this study is their social base (Mutua, 2009). As Pinkney observes, very few organizations have active memberships (2009, p. 7). In analyzing this safe trend Chidi Odinkalu (2009) asks “why don’t more Africans use human rights language”? This question is an important one. Odinkalu holds that “the current human rights movement in Africa—with the possible exception of the women’s rights movement and faith-based social justice initiatives—appears almost by design to exclude the participation of the people whose welfare it purports to advance” (1999, para. 6). Overseas donors are not only the primary or sole financial base, but also the primary source of reference and accountability. Reporting requirements and laid out by grant contracts and the *raison d’être* of rights organizations in Africa is to fulfill this contractual obligations rather than any sort of social obligation or to serve any sort of local constituency.

The small advocacy organizations in Kampala were run by highly educated Ugandans, though by virtue of their size and urban base, arguments in the literature by Mutua (2009), Odinkalu (1999) and Hulme and Edwards (1997) though despite the

efforts of a great many number of these advocacy NGOs suffer as result of their narrow social base. The operations of these small Kampala based organizations are conducted entirely in English, their reports are highly technical and their advocacy was most often directed at government elites. Susan Dicklitch (2003) provides analysis and profiled some of the same organizations examined in this study. She holds that “in addition to an advocacy and watchdog role, HROs can fulfill an important role in the education and empowerment of society” (Dicklitch, 2003, p. 486). In other words, HROs are not limited to targeting elites but indeed can and should engage with larger sections of Uganda’s population.

The 2006 NGO Act is indeed a harbinger of tensions, but does not ultimately diminish the enabling environment for NGOs that has been established in Uganda. The number of NGOs operating in Uganda continues to rise and NGOs will continue to be an omnipresent in the country, particularly as a source of employment. Civil society space is shrinking for vocal advocacy organizations who work towards governance reform and human rights protections, but not for service providers and volunteer based organizations that do not concern themselves with the performance of the central government. The trend in Uganda has become technical support, agriculture, agroforestry and extension services. This trend helps explain the rapid growth of BRAC, a microfinance based organization who engages in a number of forms service provision that are linked with the effective implementation of financial systems.

3.5. Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

This study has aimed to provide a first-hand perspective on the views and opinions of development workers in Uganda though it was limited by the relatively short duration of the research and lack of access to government agencies, in particular the NGO registrar managed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It would also have been beneficial to speak directly with some officials at the NGO Board and the Ministry of Internal Affairs though unfortunately my request for an interview was denied on the premise that these agencies did not grant interviews to foreigners.

An avenue for further research that would supplement this analysis would be a study of “non-conventional” civil society organizations, or in other words, organizations that do not fall under the formal definition of NGOs as recipients of foreign assistance pursuing apolitical public welfare goals. Muhumuza (2010) discusses the need to examine the “full array of African associational life” (4). It would also be interesting to examine the impact of NGOs and donor funding on existing associational groups that do not fall into these categories.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This study has uncovered a number of interrelated trends that contribute to the mutual antagonism between the government of Uganda and the NGO sector. The most prescient is the narrow social base of advocacy organizations operating in the country. This accounts for the inertia on behalf of the government as NGOs do not pose a credible threat if they are not influencing voters. The increasing focus on lobbying and advocacy is another related trend with a catalytic effect on the tensions between the government and NGOs. While in principle this shift moves past the dependency associated with early models of NGOs as aid agencies (Clarke, 1998), this study highlights some of the risks of this paradigmatic shift.

A second important trend is that despite increasingly restrictive legislation like the 2006 NGO Act, government oversight is woefully limited outside of Kampala and scarcely extends to service providers in the Gulu and Masaka districts. This productive policy environment enjoyed by service providers in these districts does not mean that the political implications of their work should be overlooked. This study has found an enormous focus on quantitative results based management, though as argued in this paper, strategic and political accountability are often overlooked (Desai, 2008). Service providers must be aware of the institutional environment they are operating in and find ways to grant their beneficiaries leverage over their work (Brett, 2003), which can only be accomplished by engaging directly with local political structures.

The policy recommendation for the increasing number of advocacy organizations in Uganda is to reflect meaningfully on the underlying structures of Uganda's politics. It is difficult to find common ground when many donors fund advocacy efforts directed at promoting "governance" without recognizing the political logic of reciprocity and patron-client relations that characterize countries like Uganda (Khan, 2005). Donors should also exercise caution when trumpeting "good governance", particularly when those donors operate as line ministries of wealthy industrialized countries.

Ultimately the antagonisms between the government of Uganda and the NGO sector are mutually reinforcing and are not a useful starting point for implementing development programmes and building effective institutions. An unproductive situation has resulted where the government of Uganda's policies towards human and civil rights are relapsing while NGOs continue to grow and advocate for governance reform. In summary, NGO politics in Uganda are being played out by the government and an externally funding NGO sector. Sadly these two actors are disconnected with the majority of the population and thus cannot be relied upon to bring about productive and lasting changes in Uganda's political system. The only effective agents of change in Uganda are its citizens. Engaging more directly with larger segments of Uganda's population is therefore essential in bringing about meaningful social and political reform.

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