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NGO Politics in Uganda: A Practitioner's Perspective

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Abstract:

Over the past decade the relationship between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the government of Uganda has become increasingly adversarial. In order to gauge perceptions of the causes and implications of the increasing tensions, interviews were conducted with NGO professionals and government officials in the Masaka, Gulu and Kampala districts. Based on the responses from these interviews, this paper argues that the tension between the government of Uganda and NGOs is due in part to the increased focus on lobbying and advocacy. The resulting antagonism between NGOs and the government of Uganda has deleterious effects on the ability of both actors to implement effective development programmes. This paper also finds that the capability of both of these actors is limited by their narrow social base and lack of meaningful connection with the majority of Ugandan citizens.

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Scott Andrews recently completed the requirements for the Masters of Arts in International Studies at Simon Fraser University. He works for the Spectrum Society for Community Living and is the co-founder and president of Youth in Development, a Vancouver based social enterprise that provides learning opportunities for Canadian university students in Uganda. Andrews is the former head of Oxfam Canada's Advocacy and Outreach Committee and is on the board of directors of the International Community Empowerment Foundation (ICEF), an NGO that works with partners in Uganda to provide education, health care and economic opportunity in rural areas.

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NGO Politics in Uganda: A Practitioner's Perspective

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.¹

Uganda provides an appropriate case study for NGO politics for a number of reasons. First, there are an astonishingly 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.² Ultimately this large presence of NGOs in the country is a product of favourable conditions and a policy environment conducive to NGO activity. Many of the conversations I had in Uganda emphasized that Uganda has become an "NGO Playground".³ Indeed there is much evidence to suggest that the policy environment in Uganda is favourable for NGOs. Uganda was 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). In recent years however, the Ugandan government has been increasingly described as coercive and militaristic (Tangri & Mwenda, 2010).

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. Indeed this

¹ The research for this paper has been funded in part by the Graduate Student Society (GSS) at Simon Fraser University. The author would also like to thank the participants of this study for their helpful comments as well as Dr. Morten Jerven and to Dr. John Harriss for their guidance along the way. This paper would not have come together without the helpful edits and feedback from Jen Wilson, Mairi Lester and David White.

² 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).

³ Interview No. 11, Masaka District, 24 May 2012.

hypothesis became self-evident during the interview process; though perhaps more importantly 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. The interviews allude to the government of Uganda's skepticism of advocacy organizations' work resonating with the growing political opposition, a claim that is difficult to refute.

The first section of this paper reviews the literature on NGOs and civil society, and how these actors engage in both politics and development. The second section on NGO spaces and the politics of Uganda provides a snapshot of contemporary politics in Uganda. The aim of this section is to elucidate some of the political logic behind the government of Uganda's policies toward NGOs. The section on NGO practice in Masaka, Gulu and Kampala breaks down the results of the interview process along both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. This section categorizes and analyzes the NGOs in this sample by their mandate, size, funding sources, strategic vision, relationship with the government and their perceptions of the 2006 NGO Act⁴. The final section concludes and provides some potential policy recommendations.

NGOs, Donors and Civil Society

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 NGOs and civil society. This increase marks a policy shift as official agencies seldom referenced the role of the NGOs and civil society in reports prior to the 1990s. 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 & Riddell, 1997, Pinkney, 2009; Desai, 2008; Gourevitch & Lake, 2012).

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). To effectively observe the political dimensions of NGOs, civil society, and development in Uganda, it is important to first map these concepts as they appear in the literature, and also how they

⁴ The 2006 NGO Registration Amendment Act is often referred to as the "NGO Act" or the "2006 NGO Act" (Uganda NGO Forum, 2009).

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 for the purpose of this paper, the term NGO will apply to externally funded organizations that aim to pursue public welfare goals (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 often assert their independence 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).

Donors are another crucial actor in shaping the political dimension of NGOs. Boulding (2009) highlights that “NGOs can be both donors and recipients of foreign aid”; therefore a typology is useful (4). In practice donors take a variety of forms – the main types identified in this study are: government agencies, private foundations and large multinational NGOs. Government agencies typically act as line ministries; some examples cited in this study are the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA); the Swedish International Cooperation Agency (SIDA); the Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation (NORAD) and the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID). Private foundations like the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation were also commonly listed as donors. 9 out of the 33 interviews with NGOs were with large multinational organizations that also qualify as donors. The remainder of the interviews were with local NGOs that seek funding from a variety of donors or raise funds independently.

Aid Effectiveness and NGO Accountability

Along with the rapid expansion of NGOs have 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) points out that participatory theory has strongly influenced NGOs, although in the majority of cases participatory techniques are difficult to implement. 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) also warns that simply participating is meaningless unless there is some form of institutionalized accountability.

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 stating 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 toward 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 (Ibid, p. 33-34). Questions then arise: to what degree the

increasingly large focus on advocacy is strategic or simply functional, and which publics these advocacy efforts are aiming to please.

NGO Spaces and the Politics of Uganda

In order to examine the political impact of NGOs in Uganda, it is necessary to trace the contours of the 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. Uganda has embraced a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), a document produced in joint with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as the country’s National Development Plan (NDP). Since 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 on these commitments. Recently, Museveni has been criticized by a number of sources for harassing NGOs and violating civil liberties (HRW, 2012; Tangri & Mwenda, 2010).

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 however 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 among well organized groups (Gray & Khan, 2010). A number of scholars use the term neo-patrimonialism to describe reciprocal and clientelistic elements of Uganda’s governance systems (Ibid; Pitcher et al, 2009; Mkandawire, 2001; Booth, 2011).

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 new ideas – most notably that neo-patrimonialism and fractionalization 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 to a degree by a strong commitment to decentralization by the NRM government. 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 level was once appointed by the Local Council IV representative.⁵ The CAO is now appointed by the Office of the Prime Minister, a representative of the central government.

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 mandates are congruent with these aims. A notable example is BRAC, which has become the largest NGO in Uganda with over 2,000 employees and 150 offices.⁶ BRAC’s central mandate is micro-finance and service provision. In the interviews I conducted it was reported that BRAC enjoys a strong relationship with the government of Uganda and does not engage in lobbying and advocacy efforts.

⁵ Documentation of this change can be found in ACODE (2010) and Green (2008). This change was also discussed during interview No. 23 on 13 August 2012.

⁶ Interview No. 13, Gulu District, 14 June 2012.

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). In recent years, one of the primary mechanisms for monitoring and regulating NGO activity is through the legal mechanisms enabled by the 2006 NGO Act.

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 described 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 the adversarial nature between civil society and the government of Uganda. For instance, NGOs are experiencing delayed registration and renewals and even being threatened with deregistration for administrative infractions (HRW, 2012, p. 7). In addition, the legislation contains extremely restrictive statutes. Stipulations are also sufficiently vague so that NGOs could find themselves under attack for carrying out seemingly benign operations.⁷

The most substantive reform brought about by the 2006 NGO Act is the establishment of the NGO Board. To the dismay of many NGOs in Uganda, the NGO Board acts as government regulatory body that operates in lockstep with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (HURINET, 2006). The structure of the NGO board demonstrates the Ugandan government's control of the board. The thirteen member NGO board is comprised of ten government officials and three non-government officials who are appointed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ibid). In other words, the NGO 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 palpable manifestations of the political impacts of NGOs in Uganda.

⁷ 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 the first section and recognizing the political currents in modern day Uganda outlined above, the exercise is now to analyze the empirical evidence gathered by this study within these frameworks. The next section will present the results of the field research and analyze the evidence in order to identify some of the causes of the rising tension between civil society and the government of Uganda.

Practitioner Perspectives in Masaka, Gulu and Kampala

This 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 conducted, 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 principal function of NGOs, staffing and volunteer input, funding sources, 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 at the end of this section.

Interviews lasted between half an hour and two hours. Due to the political nature of the interviews, the respondents' identity and name of their organization have been withheld. The organizations were selected subject to availability, and this varied between the three districts.

I actively tried to balance the sample in terms of size and mandate/focus of the organizations. However, the sample was also weighted toward 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 proportion of advocacy organizations than samples that employed randomized selection like the one conducted by 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 contacts (Davies, 2001). These limitations in the time frame and selection process inevitably infringe on the representativeness of this sample, but nevertheless the perspectives gained from the interviews 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). 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 among the respondents. Section one will analyze the mandate and strategic focus of the organizations profiled in this study beginning, section two will look at trends in personnel and human resources, and section three will analyze the intersection of donors and M&E mechanisms to the first two sections. Finally, section four will evaluate the responses given to how NGO professionals work with different stakeholders and section five will discuss some of the issues that could not be addressed in this paper, and some potential avenues for further research.

Mandate and Strategic Focus

Barr, Fafchamps and Owens (2005) have conducted 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' (2005) study included a random sample of 100 NGOs in Kampala and 200 NGOs from the 14 rural districts – only 56 districts existed at the time of this study. 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 principal function of the NGOs in each of the samples. The percentages are based on organizations that list the activities in the first column as one of their principal functions or core mandate. Organizations often had more than one principal function, thus appearing in more than one column. The same holds true for both Pinkney's (2009) and Barr, Fafchamps and Owens' (2005) sample.

Table 1. Principal Functions of Organizations Interviewed, 3 Studies of NGOs in Uganda

Principal 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 shown above, my sample was consistent with Pinkney (2009) and Barr, Fafchamps and Owens (2005) in being biased toward advocacy and 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 with NGOs that aim to extend the government programmes. Treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDs is a notable example.⁸ Interviewees at NGOs engaged in the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS said cooperation and partnership with the government at all levels is crucial to their work. In fact, the government often provides the antiretroviral drugs that these organizations administer. From the responses gathered in this study it appeared that HIV/AIDs outreach, treatment and prevention was understood in principle to be a healthcare extension service.

One large service provider with a head office in the Kampala district emphasized that the role of civil society was to complement the work of the government.⁹ 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, therefore services that fall outside of the perceived remit of the government were common for NGOs in the sample.¹⁰ For instance many NGOs listed counselling services, agroforestry, agriculture and vocational training in their mandate and indeed there is no parallel government ministry at the central or local level that provide these services.

Another observation from evaluating the mandates of the organizations in the sample is that no organizations focused on the adoption of new technologies or engaged in any value added activity outside of the agriculture sector. From my sample it appears that NGOs are not as committed as the government to the goal of “transforming Uganda into a modern society” as

⁸ 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.

⁹ Interview No. 31, Kampala district, 30 July 2012.

¹⁰ 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.

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 organizations¹¹ in Kampala had technology or technical capacity building in their remit. Income generating projects were common, though generally limited to agriculture programs and small handmade crafts.

The focus on lobbying and advocacy in the sample does indeed reflect trends noted in the publications of many 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" (World Vision, 2012).

Lobbying and advocacy efforts took 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.¹² 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.¹³ These two different methods reached different audiences, though neither seemed to engage meaningfully with social movements or with large sections of Uganda's rural agrarian population.

Barr, Fafchamps and Owens' (2005) study highlights the risks of this trend and cautions against the phenomenon of 'briefcase NGOs'. This concern was echoed in some of my discussions during 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

¹¹ The organizations profiled in interview No. 25 and interview No. 28 highlighted the role of technology in their work.

¹² The organizations profiled in interviews No. 15, 16, 25, 27, 28, and 34 followed this pattern.

¹³ The organizations profiled in interview No. 23, 32 and 33 published these types of reports.

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 my efforts to balance the sample’s organizations across a range of principal functions, the three districts analyzed in this study vary considerably. 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 generally the principal 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 principal activities.

Table 2. Principal Function of Surveyed NGOS in Uganda, by District

Principal 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%

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 in 2009 as a result of a lack of funding from the central government.¹⁴ 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 connection between advocacy and lobbying efforts and government scrutiny.

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 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 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.

Personnel, Size 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

¹⁴ Interview No. 5, Masaka District, 22 May 2012.

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. This section will also analyze some of the implications of NGOs as an employer in a very limited job market. For instance, more NGOs in Kampala had small staffs whereas in Masaka organizations had larger staffs but relatively small budgets.¹⁵ The reliance on volunteers also had implications for organizations' mandates and strategic focus.

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 Gulu, 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 are typically drafted outside of Uganda and projects are often replicated in several countries.

There was one 'large' organization that I profiled in the Masaka district that exhibits many of the characteristics of a 'small' organization.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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. Size of the Surveyed NGOs in Uganda, by District

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
Total	10	9	13

¹⁵ Respondents in interview No. 2, 3, 8 and 11 in the Masaka district all highlighted their large remit and small budget.

¹⁶ Interview No. 9, Masaka District, 4 June 2012.

¹⁷ Interview No. 14, Gulu District, 19 June 2012.

Table 3 maps out the size of NGOs in terms of staff across the districts in my sample. There are clearly a 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 principal 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 of principal functions 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 organizations hire Ugandan citizens wherever possible in order to combat the country's high unemployment rate.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰

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% of the jobs in Uganda are in the NGO sector, which is part of the reason the government feels insecure.²¹ Mamdani has discussed

¹⁸ As per Uganda's National Development Plan, Uganda's Unemployment was 29.1% in 2005/06 (NDP, 2010, p. 69).

¹⁹ *Daily Monitor* (2012a).

²⁰ Interview No. 34, Kampala District, 11 July 2012.

²¹ Interview No. 30, Kampala District, 17 July 2012.

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 National Development Plan 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 on transforming into an NGO in order to secure employment for himself.²² 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 international 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.

Organizations with a large focus on volunteers often rely on volunteer dues for funding, as opposed to large donors and governmental aid agencies. In my sample, nine out of the 33 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.²³ For instance, one medium sized organization based in Masaka relies entirely on their volunteer dues and efforts to direct their work.²⁴ 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

²² Interview No. 8, Masaka District, 25 May 2012.

²³ Interview No. 10, Masaka District, 29 May 2012.

²⁴ Interview No. 5, Masaka District, 22 May 2012.

functional or strategic accountability as the impacts are not measured empirically and the time frame for each project is less than six months.

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 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 relied heavily on volunteers. A number of organizations do accept volunteers, though the placements were short term and overseen and directed by professional staff. Kampala seemed host to a number of barriers for entry for volunteer driven organizations. Operational costs were higher and government scrutiny was more palpable.

This section has 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 focussed on 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 confirm that there is less scrutiny and barriers for entry facing rural service providers than urban advocacy organizations.

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 the strategic priorities listed 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.

As it was highlighted earlier in the paper, the most commonly cited donors during the interviews are the DANIDA, SIDA, NORAD and 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 "as NGOs get closer to donors they become more like donors" remains prescient (1997, p. 8). Fifteen out of the 33 organizations referred to specific "areas of focus" that closely resemble those of DANIDA, NORAD, SIDA and DFID. Not surprisingly the organizations that received funding from these major donors listed at least one of the donor organizations strategic goals in their core mandate.

During an interview with the CEO of a highly reputable mid-sized NGO 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.²⁵ 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.

²⁵ Interview No. 7, Masaka District, 28 May 2012.

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 government aid agencies performed thorough baseline surveys and have comprehensive follow up protocols. Indeed, the rhetoric around ‘results based management’ was ubiquitous among NGOs who received funding from government agencies and major foundations.²⁶ 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.²⁷ Their view is 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.²⁸ 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 local government officials, coordination was often cited as lacking. This dynamic became particularly apparent during an interview with one organization 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 had 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 ceased

²⁶ Results Based Management was highlighted in interviews 1,7, 12, 13, 17, 20, 21, and 22.

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

²⁸ Interview No. 25, Kampala District, 19 July 2012.

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

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 This lack of coordination resonates with the findings of Booth (2011) and the Africa Politics and Power Programme who observed that 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). The organization in Gulu dedicated to improving coordination did mention that the major NGOs in the district have been open to stakeholder meeting and discussions, but nevertheless coordination problems persist.

The same representative of this organization in Gulu emphasized that the lack of coordination is a multifaceted problem, but a major obstacle is 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 in Gulu are phasing out their projects and transferring responsibilities to their community based partners which 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 NGOs’ strategic accountability. This section highlights the deleterious effects of policy incoherence. A number of sources in the literature point the importance of the central government in overcoming this issue (Tendler, 1997), however in Uganda, 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. The next section outlines some of the responses given during the interview process that elucidate some of the major points of contention.

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

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.

Relationship with Stakeholders

The final two questions of my interview aimed to elucidate some of the dynamics between NGOs operating in Uganda and 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 33 respondents (39%) 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 the NGO Board. Advocacy organizations on the other hand were gravely concerned about their renewal with the NGO Board as it affected their access to funding.³⁶

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.

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

The majority of the respondents who did sympathize with the principles behind the NGO Act did however recognize that enforcement is sporadic due to the lack of resources available to the government. One director of a fairly large NGO focused 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 its 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 posing a threat 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 from 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. Secondly, service providers were seldom affected by the NGO Act and were more likely to highlight its benefits. Indeed, one of the primary observations of this study is that in spite of 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 a large degree of freedom, particularly if they operate outside of Kampala and are not engaged in advocacy or lobbying efforts. With that said, the implications of the NGO Act are serious, particularly for proponents of human and civil rights.

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.

Despite the palpable tensions of the NGO Act there did appear to be some positive steps taken toward better cooperation between the government of Uganda and the NGO sector. In July 2012 there was a lot of media attention surrounding the launch of the new 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, however it is difficult to hold the government accountable if NGOs and civil society are not supported by 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 and identifying self-censorship 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 softened their messaging so that it would be tolerated by government officials?

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, as 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.

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

This organization is very highly regarded and enjoys funding from a wide assortment of international donors and seems to engage in productive dialogue with a number of government officials and agencies, 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 exacerbate the tensions 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 same 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).

The small advocacy organizations in Kampala were run by highly educated Ugandans; though by virtue of their size and urban base, however, arguments in the literature by Mutua (2009), Odinkalu (1999) and Hulme and Edwards (1997) suggest that the limitations of foreign donors and a narrow social base remain prescient. 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 toward 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 is Uganda has become technical support, agriculture, agroforestry and extension services. This trend helps explain the rapid growth of NGOs like BRAC, a microfinance based organization who engages in a number of forms service provision that are linked with the effective implementation of financial systems.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

This study has aimed to provide a first-hand perspective on the views and opinions of NGO professionals 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 officials at the NGO Board and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Requests for interviews were 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 salient is the increasing emphasis donors place on lobbying and advocacy efforts. This has had 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. Another important observation is the narrow social base of advocacy organizations operating in the country limit their effectiveness.

This partially accounts for the inertia on behalf of the government as NGOs do not pose a credible threat if they are not influencing voters.

It is also important to recognize 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 stakeholders.

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 Western 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 toward human and civil rights are relapsing while NGOs continue to grow and advocate for governance reform. NGO politics in Uganda are being played out by the government and an externally funding NGO sector. Unfortunately 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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