

# Aiding at Change or Abetting Crimes

## High Time to Re-politicise NGOs

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# NGOs

## And their growing importance

- 50.000 – 100.000 NGOs claim to act selflessly
- Majority arise as a reaction to neoliberal globalization
- The two reasons:
  - a) neoliberal „Policy of De-Politicisation“ has fostered private initiative
  - b) no equivalent to economic globalisation at the international political level ; vacuum used by NGOs
- Success stories:  
HIV/AIDS Movement, ICBL, ICC...



# NGOs

## Double edged actors

- NGOs do not necessarily oppose state-based policy
- They undertake tasks that normally governments are obliged to do (identifying of problems, agenda–setting, knowledge development, planning of action, surveillance, charity and social services)
- Privatization of state institutions goes along with NGOs becoming „state entities“
- NGOs can challenge the political system but can also stabilize and justify it.
- NGOs are part of the solution and the problem at the same time

# NGOs

## Part of the “extended state”

- NGOs belong to civil society
- Civil society involves parties, trade unions, churches, media, corporate sector, NGOs, grass-root, etc.
- Civil society is always interlinked with state; together with the political sphere civil society forms the „extended state“ (Gramsci)
- Civil society actors aren't only good guys
- Civil society isn't about actors but describes the place of the struggle for „cultural hegemony”
- Gaining cultural hegemony is a precondition for change

# NGOs

## Public and private interests

In theory state institutions and NGOs should be committed to public interests only. In practice:

### States

- Are much more accountable to those who dominate civil society
- Ideal personification of national capital

### NGOs

- Are also influenced by private interests (visibility to survive competition, economic constraints, or directly controlled by donors and industry)

Distinction much more selective by drawing the line between actors striving for social property (commons) vs. private property (market).

# NGOs

## Open for instrumentalisation

NGOs can support social change but can also assist those who are responsible for the precarious state of the world

NGOs are threatened to be misused for

- Security policy
- Commercial interests
- The interest of states to overcome the lack of political legitimacy

# NGOs

## Force multiplier?

Instrumentalised for security strategies

- Aid and the reference to Human Rights are used by warring parties as economic and political resources
- Increasing demand of governments to include NGOs in a formally regulated “civil-military cooperation”
- Risk to become hostage to security policy that only aims at stabilizing privileges and misery

Idea of social justice  
reduced to a technical crisis management

# NGOs

## Promoting commercial interests

NGOs (unwillingly) co-opted by the corporate sector

- By accepting the exploitation of knowledge
- By Laying the ground for new profit opportunities  
e.g. if NGOs call for technical solutions only  
(drugs, money, etc.)
- By promoting a business oriented approach  
("philanthrocapitalists", corporate foundations)

*Can-do attitude*

# NGOs

## Agencies to create political legitimacy

- Promoting a pragmatic approach:  
Misery cannot be abolished but only alleviated
- Ignoring the political circumstances of injustices:  
the “de-politicised can-do attitude” is perfectly corresponding with the TINA principle
- Helping to overcome the lack of political legitimacy, e.g. by replacing action for political change by humanitarian assistance
- Mixing up effectiveness with efficiency
- Introducing managerial business thinking
- Calling for industry to have a seat at the table

# The perspectives of NGOs

## How to avoid instrumentalisation

### The five principles of re-politicising NGOs

1. To develop a critical understanding of their own nature
2. To re-assure a political stand. Human Rights will not be granted, but have to be taken in possession by the people themselves
3. To seek for a maximum of independence by establishing a countervailing power
4. To never forget the fact of being rooted in social movements
5. To aim a networking and joint strategies even at the costs of own visibility

Too long we have only affirmed  
civil society in various ways,  
the point is to change it!



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