A harmony not foreseen

A study of the prevalence of conflict in NGO – local government relations in Uganda

Cecilia Fåhraeus

Abstract

The ambition of the study is to explore the area of tension between the local government and non-governmental organizations engaged in service provision in Uganda. By applying the method of most different systems design, the study aims at determining if conflict is more frequent in a high-risk environment compared to a low-risk ditto, as specified by the theory of Michael Bratton's. Lira District has been chosen to represent the first setting on account of its high level of internal violence and militarization in combination with a significant NGO sector and weak administrative capacity. In contrast, Kabale District has been singled out on the basis of its stability and comparably smaller NGO community. Despite the favourable conditions provided, the outcome does not diverge sufficiently to render the theory explanatory power. This reality is connected to the fact that conventional theory disregards the impact of NGO behaviour on the quality of the relationship. The particular strategies selected in dealing with local government reflect the NGO's normative orientation, which needs to be taken into consideration in order to produce reliable results.

Key words: *NGO, service delivery, conflict, relationship, norms, local government, Uganda*
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1 Introduction

The position of NGOs in the global development arena is today widely acknowledged and mainly undisputed. The prevalent view on the NGO community is that is has a comparative advantage over other actors in promoting development, connected to its ability to mobilize resources as well as marginalized groups (Fowler, 1995:63; Krishnan 2007:246). However, critics claim NGOs to be undemocratic entities lacking accountability or being guilty of undermining sovereignty (Jarvik, 2007:200). NGO activity has been accused of being counterproductive as well as perpetuating underdevelopment (Gideon, 1998:312; Jarvik, 2007:230, 236). At the same time, there is widespread disagreement about the proper roles of NGOs in the development process. Some advocate a greater involvment in lobbying and the promotion of human rights and democracy (Lundell, 16-10-2007), while others regard service delivery as the task for which NGOs are best equipped (Ishumi, 1995:164; Mehrotra & Jarrett, 2002:1688). Service provision has for decades been the dominant activitiy among NGOs, although a gradual shift towards capacity building and support to state institutions is occurring (Edwards et al, 1999:121; Gideon, 1998:303). Whatever the type of activity however, there is a growing awareness of the need to integrate the state if poverty alleviation is to be achieved in a long-term perspective. Partnerships between governmental and non-govermental actors are considered crucial if development initiatives are to be successful (Biggs; 1995:33; Ishumi, 1995:161). This view has been adopted by most prominent development institutions and is widely incorporated in formal poverty eradication action plans (Bräutigam & Segarra, 2008:149-152; Sverrison, 2002:52-53, 135).

1.1 Aim and disposition

This study departs from the notion that interaction between state and non-state actors is desirable and that further research on this relationship ought to be undertaken. In particular, attention needs to be directed towards the factors inhibiting collaboration between the two parties. As a result, the aim of this study is to explore the area of tension between the government and the NGO sector in an attempt to unveil the causes of conflict. The study departs from an NGO perspective and is aimed at problemizing theories causally deriving NGO behaviour towards state agencies from a computed balance of gains and losses. It emphasizes the influence of norms and how these contribute to shaping the NGO's values and priorities, which in extension is believed to affect its rapport with the state. The underlying objective is to illustrate the risk for misleading conclusions when applying a rational choice-perspective in attempting to explain the character of the relationship between governmental and non-governmental actors. This implies a move from the simplicities of cost-benefit analysis, towards the influence of values and internationally constructed norms active in moulding NGO strategies of collaboration.

With service provision being the most popular operation for NGOs involved in development (Edwards et al, 1999:121; Gideon, 1998:303), the study will be centred around NGOs engaged in this particular activity. An additional ambition is to supplement the surprisingly meagre material on government-NGO interaction at the micro level

In the first part, the theories subjected to scrutinization will be presented. The next step consists of applying these theories on the Ugandan local context in order to identify our objects of study. Two politically diverse settings have been selected based on the most different design (MDD). The first setting, Kabale district, has been chosen on the grounds that it displays characteristics assumed to create an enabling environment for NGO-government collaboration. War-torn Lira district does on the other hand possess qualities believed to hamper this development. In the following section, a comparison between these settings will be carried out in order to find out whether the outcome of this assessment corresponds to theory. Consequently, we ask if a conflictual outcome of the interaction between the two parties is more common in Lira than in Kabale. The actual study is devoted to ascertaining if the theories subjected to testing are correct in assuming that conflict will be more frequent in Lira, or if alternative variables need to be added in order to generate reliable results. The reminder of the thesis will be devoted to analyzing the expected discrepancy between the theory and the actual outcome. It is also in this part that the author's own theoretical orientation will be revealed.

1.2 Method

According to Esaiasson et al, the most different system design is appropriate in situations where the aim is to test theories on a small number of cases. The cases are to be selected on the basis of the different turnouts on variables that are to be rejected, but with the same turnout on the variable that the researcher would like to emphasize. If the outcome on the dependent variable is identical in all cases, then the researcher has succeeded in demonstrating the inadequacy of the tested theory (Esaiasson et al, 2003:114).

In this case, the nature of the study requires a somewhat modified application of the MDD. It will be used to demonstrate a fact of which this author has received previous indication, namely that the turnout on the dependent variable will be more or less equal to both settings, despite the divergence on the variables thought to determine the risk for conflict between state and non-state actors. Any overlooked independent variable that might have an effect on this outcome is unknown to this author and the analysis will consequently be devoted to establishing if such a factor exists or if there is another potentially plausible explanation.

In practice, the MDD has involved the selection of settings and NGOs corresponding to a system of polarization, where one setting (Lira district) displays a very high tendency for conflictual relationships between the non-state and state actors, while in the other (Kabale district), the risk is expected to be considerably lower. Information will be obtained through qualitative interviews with key people of the selected NGOs[1].

A more profound exposition on the settings and selected NGOs will be found in section 3.

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[1] For a presention of the questions asked, please see Appendix II

1.3 Operationalization

The first step of the analysis consists of determining the type of relationship between the NGOs and the local authorities, in order to identify the potential inconsistency between the established theories and the Ugandan reality. Bratton studies the process of interaction with the help of the logic of polarization, where relationships are described as either complementary of conflictual (Bratton, 1989:570). The fact that no precise definition is being offered makes an application of the concepts difficult and a concise conceptualization needs to be sought elsewhere. That is perhaps the greatest weakness of this study. Since we are to test if there is indeed a difference between the relationships in the two settings, a full and comprehensive definition is crucial. In the absence of such a tool, we are forced to resort to other sources, despite the relative risk for misleading results.

The author has chosen to refer to the definition provided by Kamugisha et al, who define conflict as a situation where different parties possess mutually incompatible interests and as a result of this express hostilities or even take actions which damage the other party's ability to pursue said interests (2006:69). Having a complementary relationship should thus logically imply the opposite; namely that two parties work alongside to pursue mutually defined interests. It does not necessarily have to be in the shape of a formalized partnership[2], but could also suggest a reciprocal understanding and respect for the other party's domain of activity.

An application of this model logically entails measuring the relationships in degrees. A relationship is not necessarily either complementary or conflictual, but should normally contain elements of both. Hence, conducting a comparison between Lira and Kabale means establishing if there are more conflictual elements in one setting in relation to the other.

Consequently, we first have to determine if the NGO believes its objectives to be consistent with those of the local government's. If this is not the case, we need to inquire about the government's response to this reality and in particular if it has taken any measures to regulate the operations of the NGO. Rationally, we must also map the NGO's own strategies when facing a possible clash. An incompatibility of interest does not only have to allude to general operational and ideological principles, but could also be encountered on a smaller scale, like issues evolving from the day-to-day running of the organization. The authorities and the NGO might embark on a joint undertaking but could still disagree on minor issues like the distribution of roles or the degree of involvement of the target community, etc.

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[2] Defined by Muhangi as a joint undertaking between two or more parties, often implying a sharing of resources and responsibilities (Muhangi, 2004:11)

1.4 Setting

Uganda has been chosen mainly on the grounds that its decentralized nature makes it suitable for studies at the local level. The local government has political, administrative, financial, legal and institutional powers. It is authorized to collect certain forms of revenue and to adopt laws as long as they are consistent with the constitution and national legislation. The district is further granted autonomy in planning and in the formulation of the annual development plan. It is also in charge of the implementation of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP). And most importantly with regards to the topic of this study, it is exclusively responsible for service delivery within its area of jurisdiction (Mitchinson, 2003:242-243; Onyach-Olaa, 2003:105-106; Steiner, 2007:180).

The local government entities are organized according to a five-tier system consisting of LC 1-5, where LC stands for Local Council (previously RC, Resistance Council). LC 1 is the village, LC 2 the parish, LC 3 the sub-county, LC 4 the county and LC 5 the district and consequently the highest political authority within the area of jurisdiction (Dauda, 2006:294; Devas & Grant, 2003:311; Francis & James, 2003:327-328; Onyach-Olaa, 2003:106).

Consequently, NGOs engaged in service provision primarily interact with representatives for local government. The PEAP recommends an inclusion of NGOs in all stages of the poverty alleviation process. This is particularly applicable to the planning, implementation and maintenance of social services at the local level. Partnerships between state and non-state actors involved in the provision of services are greatly encouraged (Muhangi, 2004:12; Sverrison, 2005:52-53, 55, 83-83, 132, 323). However, there is a general attitude of scepticism among government officials towards NGOs running counter to the inclusive approach found in development documents, and this trend has resulted in a firmer exertion of control (Lundell 24-10-2007; Internet 1 – Freedom House; Sverrison, 2005:106; Trädgårdh 24-10-2007). There is a National Board of NGOs, with which all active NGOs in the country are required to register. The Board is empowered to approve or reject applications, provide guidance and monitoring (Muhangi, 2004:16; Nabuguzi, 1995:202-206); Sverrison, 2005:97). In 2006, a bill was adopted stating that NGOs are now obliged to re-register annually, which reflects the harsher climate for NGO activity in the country (Internet 1 - Freedom House; Trädgårdh, 24-10-2007).

2   Theoretical considerations

2.1 The struggle for legitimacy

When studying the patterns of interaction between state and non-state actors, one inevitably comes across the theories on state-NGO relationships developed by Michael Bratton (1989), which although further elaborated still function as the foundation for subsequent research. Bratton regards the relationship between the two agents as a fundamentally political matter, based on an inherent tension "between the government's urge for order and control and the NGO's quest for organizational autonomy" (Bratton, 1989:570). We learn that a typical feature among NGOs is to define themselves in juxtaposition to the state. Further, autonomy is considered the "cardinal organizing principle" (ibid, p 581), and it is thus in the nature of NGOs to resist coordination. At the same time, the state is expected to resist any threats to the curtailment of their leadership (ibid, pp 570, 574, 582).

At the root of this divide one encounters issues of legitimacy in terms of the rights of various institutions to exercise power. Questions regarding which actors who rightfully have the ability to organize, mobilize and assert leadership and the way the different actors relate to this, determines whether a relationship can be described as conflictual or complementary (ibid, p 570). The struggle for legitimacy is thus the underlying cause for conflict, a view shared by a significant number of fellow researchers (see Clark, 1997:47; de Waal, 1997:137, Edwards & Hulme, 1997:12-13; Kanyinga, 1995:83; Nabuguzi, 1995:206; Parkhurst, 2005:571-572; Sverrison, 2005:25-27).

According to Bratton, the basic function of any state is to impose and maintain political order and as a result, political considerations always take precedence over socio-economic ones. This explains why governments, despite the fact that the presence of NGOs might relieve them of their managerial and fiscal burdens, develop instruments restricting the activities of autonomous organizations. Following this logic, the government will opt for the value of governability rather than development in situations where the two run counter to one another (Bratton, 1989:572-573; Lorgen, 1998:325). Gideon observes however that welfare delivered by non-state actors might in some situations serve the interests of the state, since it placates class interests but also relieves the government of responsibility for potential failures (Gideon, 1998:310).

NGOs have the ability to undermine state legitimacy directly and indirectly, but it is primarily the former that carries any relevance in this study. The indirect effect is debatable, but scientists argue that the presence of NGOs involved in service provision reduces incentives among government authorities to reform and develop. The effect is thus a moral hazard phenomenon, which could lead to stagnation (Gideon, 1998:303, 312; Goldsmith, 2001:124). Irrespective of whether moral hazard is an issue or not, service provision by non-state actors could have a predominantly negative effect on the authorities' ability to deliver, unless accompanied by capacity-building, which is often not the case (de Waal, 1995:137; Semboja & Therkildsen, 1995:25). It should nevertheless be noted that not all social scientists profess to this view. Gideon points to evidence from Latin America, where state capacity was

strengthened as NGOs assumed responsibility for state functions, since the retreat of the state meant that it was able to concentrate its efforts (Gideon, 1998:311). The African experience is yet quite distinct from the Latin American one, most noticeably in Uganda where empirical studies points to evident capacity losses due to an over-eagerness in gapfilling by NGOs (Sverrison, 2005:27). In the African post-colonial state, satisfying popular demands has become a prerequisite for achieving and maintaining legitimacy. In limiting the state's capacity to do so, it comes under the threat of losing said legitimacy (Fowler, 1995:54, Kanyinga, 1995:54; Sverrison, 2005:25, 27).

In the context of this study, it is however the direct impact of NGO activities on state legitimacy that carries any significance. The direct challenge to state legitimacy is of a more visible nature and lies in the primarily transnational NGOs' tendencies to circumscribe governments, partially or entirely, when pursuing their individual development objectives. These strategies are strongly connected to negatively charged articulations of the Third World state as corrupt, clientelistic, and inefficient. They also demonstrate a blatant disregard for the principles of national sovereignty by serving to delegitimize state authorities both in the eyes of their own citizens as well as internationally (Edwards et al, 1999:121; Edwards, 1999:368; Gideon, 1998:310; Jarvik, 2007:232; Lorgen, 1998:324; Nabuguzi, 1995:206; Parkhurst, 1997:572). According to Sverrison, this development can be traced back to the New Policy Agenda contributing to the retrenchment of the state in the Third World, which further leads to capacity losses as described above (Sverrison, 2005:25).

As NGOs takes on services traditionally associated with government, there is a risk of emphasizing existing weaknesses within public authorities, further contributing to the erosion of state legitimacy. NGO presence invites unfavourable competition, since NGOs in many cases are better equipped, both in terms of skills and funds, and also more suitable to spearhead interventions on account of their ability to specialize (Bratton, 1989:572; de Waal, 1995:137; Parkhurst, 1997:573)..

Nonetheless, some do point out that the inclination of NGOs and the donor community to divert development activities from the ruling sphere is in the process of being reversed, together with the tendency to engage exclusively in service provision. Collaboration between the different parties is gradually starting to materialize on the agendas of both NGOs and governments and at the same time, service delivery is increasingly accompanied by capacity building (Edwards & Hulme, 1997:124; Muhangi, 2004:12).

States thus feel threatened by what they perceive as competition for leadership and this is particularly relevant when studying African states, since Bratton concludes that their relative immaturity together with their administrative weakness make them even more inclined to exert control over NGOs. The government will in many cases endeavor to eliminate competing sources of power, which severely inhibits the NGO sector's room for maneuvre (Bratton, 1989:573).

2.2 Political context

The political context in which NGOs are obliged to operate, is with reference to Bratton the prime determining factor of the character of the relationship between the government and NGOs. The term "political context" alludes to the environments in which the NGO operates. There are certain environments which are less conducive for NGOs where opportunities for collaboration are curtailed and the potential for conflict subsequently increases (Bratton, 1989:575-576). Bratton has adopted a macro perspective and centres his analysis around the inhibiting factors active on the national level. Local level application therefore requires a certain revision, which will be further elaborated in section 3.2.

According to Bratton, states with a civilian constitution tend to be more tolerant of NGOs than regimes under military or martial law. The same can generally be said about multiparty systems as opposed to single party systems. Further, the adoption of a liberal development strategy which by and large has an inclusive attitude towards NGOs, also benefits the latter. Somewhat surprisingly, states where personalistic and patronage politics is the norm are occasionally more forgiving towards non-state actors, as long as they are regarded as an additional source of income (ibid, p 575). Finally, states with weak administrative capacity has a predisposition of defensive behaviour since they lack effective mechanisms for control. The absence of such instruments raises the risk of uninformed conclusions and suspicion, which might result in the public authorities perceiving the NGO as a threat (ibid, p 575; Clark, 1997:50).

In countries where the NGO sector is small, the government is normally more permissive than in states where the sector is growing and influential (Bratton, 1989:576). NGOs involved in political activities, human rights and advocacy are at large more exposed to government counter strategies (ibid; Kanyinga, 1997:82) as well as NGOs choosing to locate their operations in areas of conflict and civil strife (Bratton, 1989:576; Clark, 1997:50). Additionally, the degree of donor dependency also has a major influence on the government's tendency to accept the activities of the NGO, since external funding might raise the suspicion of the NGO acting as a proxy for foreign interests (Bratton, 1989:576; Clark, 1997:49; Semboja & Therkildsen, 1995:27). To sum up: relations are most strained when the government is weak and defensive and a growing NGO sector is in the process of locating operations in a politically sensitive area; and most beneficial when the state is well-functioning democracy with a liberal agenda and the NGO sector is principally limiting their operations to service delivery.

2.3 Strategies of control and autonomy

In the light of the perceived threat to state legitimacy composed by NGOs, governments have developed a set of instruments deployed to curb and regulate the actitivites of the voluntary sector. The application of each strategy reflects the extent to which the government senses that issues of legitimacy are at stake and consequently assesses its need to exert control.

Bratton suggests monitoring to be the first indication that the government considers itself to be challenged by forces external to the state. During this stage, legislative means are designed to create an overview of the NGO sector in the country and regulate its activities through enforced registration and continuous reporting. In practice however, monitoring represents a rather blunt instrument for control due to the often fragmented and weak nature of African state institutions, and contact is "scattered over a wide institutional front" (Bratton, 1989:577).

The second step in the upgrading of the state's machinery of control is coordination, which alludes to the "synchronization of activities among independent organizations" (ibid, p 578). Coordination is not necessarily a negative feature of state intervention, but might benefit all actors in development if used to avoid duplication of services and suppress initiatives which might be incompatible with the national development plan. It is nevertheless easily misused by overzealous governments in the need for justification of excessive control (ibid).

Cooptation is a firmer form of control and describes the process of government capture of independent organizations, submitting them to superior guidance. The establishment of "quangos"[3] is an example of such a strategy. The final tool is a severe limitation on the organization's freedom of action, with forced closure as an extreme measure. Government imposed revisions of the organization's internal government is another expression of this strategy, which is labelled dissolution and has been applied in contexts where NGO operations have been judged oppositional to the national interest (ibid, p 579-580).

As governments takes measures to extend their spheres of influence, NGOs develop counterstrategies to fend off the threat of having to surrender autonomy. When the government is seen as destructive and incompetent, NGOs might adopt the tactic of maintaining a low profile, where public authorities are bypassed and the NGOs struggle to avoid their attention. This might entail an official depreciation of the organization's own role in development and allowing the authorities to take credit for positive outcomes. Further, the NGOs might choose to deploy the method of selective collaboration in situations when scaling up activities means that bypassing the state is no longer an option. It involves working selectively with the government in areas where collaboration is considered to facilitate goal achievement, or in other words, handing over a piece of the autonomy in exchange for the chance of achieving a greater good (ibid, 581-582). A third strategy is called policy advocacy and consists of adopting an advising role based on sophistication and well researched information, facilitating a constructive dialogue with the authorities (ibid, p 583).

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[3] Quasi non-governmental organizations are publically sponsored NGOs directly connected to government ministries (Bratton, 1989:579).

3   Selection

3.1 The North-South divide

The nature of the Ugandan state is Janus-faced. The reality in the war-struck North is remarkably divergent from the South and this has led a selection of scholars to handle, somewhat simplistically, Uganda as two separate countries (Mbabazi & Shaw, 2007:567, 574). The informal frontier is roughly constituted by Lake Kyoga, north of which incidents of insurgencies, banditry and cattle-raiding are rampant. Armed struggle has in many parts caused a breakdown of civil authority and destroyed economic networks, having resulted in a serious lag in economic development compared to the rest of the country (ibid; Lundell, 24-10-2007). In Uganda, 38% are believed to live below the poverty line. In the north, this figure extends to 64%, but only to 27% in the south (Dolan, 2007:19).

The conflict in northern Uganda is Africa's longest running conflict, and the infamous Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is only one of 22 armed groups active in the region since the installment of the NRM-government in 1986 (ibid, p 3). The south is in contrast characterized by development and peace (ibid), although this image does lack a bit of nuance. The economy of the south is integrated into the global economy, and remains insulated from the troubles in the north (Mbabazi & Shaw, 2007:567, 571, 574).

The description of the Ugandan state, albeit crude, portrays a sharp polarization of contexts, which according to theory should provide radically different opportunities for NGOs in associating with the local authorities. Two districts believed to represent each of the two contexts have been selected for study: Lira in the north and Kabale in the south.

3.2 Different locations, different realities

A divergence between the two districts can be noticed on at least some of the variables determining the potential for conflict. The factors that are only relevant on a national level, like multi-party systems in relation to single-party systems, will be ignored.

Lira District is located in the Lango region, which in recent times has become one of the most seriously LRA-affected areas in the country. The humanitarian situation in Lango deteriorated significantly during the worst stages of the war, resulting in an influx of INGOs and NGOs, as well as different UN-bodies (Dolan, 2007:4, 8, 12, 14, 18).The area is heavily militarized, which serves as a constraining factor in developing sound relationships between state and non-state actors. This unconducive environment for building relationships is of course further exacerbated by the actual reason for the militarization, namely the high level of internal violence. Kabale shares border with Rwanda , but the relative stability of this region has meant that military presence is low (Kamugisha et al, 2006:68). This indicates that conflict between government agencies and NGOs is expected to be less frequent than in Lira.

The material available on Lira and Kabale does not submit any information about the prevalence of patronage politics, which makes it difficult to detect the existence of any potential differences. During the interviews, the subjects revealed that personalistic ties are indeed a common occurrence in both districts (Gerber, 10-11-2007; Omara, 17-11-2007, Omodi, 17-11-2007), but due to the limitations of the material, a fruitful comparison appears impossible. This aspect will consequently be neglected, despite the methodological concerns that follow such a position.

The quality of the administrative capacity is according to Bratton an important determiner to the character of the relationship between NGOs and state authorities (Bratton, 1989:575; Clark, 1997:50). Nevertheless, the authors fail to provide a full definition, and this is unfortunate since administrative strength or weakness is considered by this author to be value based concepts. In spite of the risks of conceptual discrepancy, the author therefore turns to Rotberg who provides a more detailed framework for a qualitative definition of administrative capacity (2003).

According to Rotberg, the prime indicator of administrative weakness is the inability of the authorities to deliver basic political goods. These goods can be arranged according to a hierarchy where the provision of security is assumed to be the most fundamental, and at the same time a prerequisite for the realisation of the subsequent ones. Without a functioning judicial system and a rule of law, political freedoms cannot be ensured and neither can public goods like education, health and water be reliably delivered. High levels of internal violence is thus associated directly with administrative failure (Rotberg, 2003:3).

Relating to the characterization of administrative weakness presented by Rotberg, it is evident that Lira stands out as the weaker of the two districts. Lira has suffered from a serious deterioration in the security situation during the most intense stages of the LRA offensive and the previous order is far from reinstated (Lundell, 24-10-2007). Most institutions in Lira, including the police and the judicial system, now lack essential supplies and equipment, severely constraining their ability to exercise their functions (Internet 2 - US Department of State). This example of the district's inability to guarantee the safety of its population is absent in the Kabale context.

A fact that also speaks in favour of Kabale having a more capable administration is its participation in the local government capacity building project, which according to research has served to strengthen local capacity considerably (Internet 3 - UNCDF). Building only on this type of evidence is however risky, since it is difficult to determine the strength of the Kabale local government vis-à-vis other districts. It would be assumed that the programme has provided Kabale with an advantage compared to the Lira administration, but since the development in local capacity is measured chronologically within the district and not in relation to other districts, this fact cannot be fully established. Suffice to conclude therefore that the fact that the Lira local government is in the process of struggling to reinstate itself as the sole authority within the district borders when the position of the Kabale administration is undisputed, should be enough to classify Lira as the weaker party.

Closely related to the humanitarian situation in Lira is the significant size of its NGO-sector. Although reliable figures are hard to come by, particularly in the case of Kabale where no official statistics on NGO exists, it is evident that the density of NGOs is far greater in Lira than in Kabale. This is especially true for international NGOs. Not many of the major independent aid organizations are present in Kabale, save for Amref and CARE among the few (Povodnik, 16-10-2007), which presents a remarkable contrast to Lira where a

conspicuous share of the most important transnational actors in humanitarian aid have offices. This reality in Lira is yet another factor indicating an increased risk for conflict between state and non-state actors compared to Kabale, when related to Bratton's theory on the connection between size of NGO sector and the potential for contorversy (Bratton, 1989:576).

3.3 The NGOs

Only two factors directly connected to the priorities of the NGOs are presented as being relevant to the quality of the relationship. These are donor dependency and type of activity, where policy advocacy is regarded as the most controversial domain (Bratton, 1989:576; Kanyinga, 1997:82). This does not exclude engagement in other types of activities like eco-tourism and orphan care provided that they are not deemed by Bratton as having a specific impact on the relationship.

All the NGOs in Lira were selected on the grounds that they depended extensively on financial support from major donor organizations, such as the World Bank or intergovernmental or supranational regimes like the UN or the European Commission. In Kabale on the other hand, the NGOs rely on voluntary donations from members or additional income generating activities. Two of the NGOs in Lira were explicitly involved in advocacy work: Save the Children promoting the rights of the child (Komakech, 16-11-2007) and Caritas advocating the rights of the poor and the marginalized (Omara, 17-11-2007); compared to none in Kabale.

Bratton refrains from making a connection between the size and scale of an NGO and its rapport with the state. He concedes that INGOs because of "diplomatic protocol" normally appear eager to comply with government requirements (Bratton, 1989:581). This should be seen as a deviation from the principle of autonomy, which logically ought to affect the quality of the relationship positively. Nevertheless, as Bratton derives the risk for conflicts exclusively to factors external to the NGOs, this fact should be of minor importance. Followers of Bratton would regard a typological distinction between the different NGOs as superfluous, but for the sake of methodological correctness, the ideal has been to carry out a selection where the value on this variable was similar to both settings. In doing so, we minimize the risk for contamination of the results.

Sadly, this ideal was not fully achieved. In Lira, the NGOs selected for study were Save the Children (StC), Arbeiter Samaritan Bund (ASB), Caritas and North-West Medical Teams (NWMT); all international NGOs with multilateral ties with their different member organizations. The NGOs in the Kabale area are externally initiated and managed by foreigners, maintaining bilateral ties with their country of origin, from which a majority of the financial resources (mainly voluntary donations) available to the organization is channelled. Their operations are rather small-scale but expansive, and in some cases spilling over the borders to neighbouring countries. They cannot be labelled INGOs, unless they have formal membership from more than two countries (Willetts, 2001:376). The NGOs selected were Edirisa, Byoona Amagara (BA) and Child Africa International (CAI). Edirisa fulfills the criteria for INGOs as specified by Willetts above. [4]

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[4] For more detailed information on the NGOs in this study, please see Appendix I.

4 Reviewing patterns of interaction

4.1 Type of relationship

4.1.1 Kabale

In Kabale, most NGOs had a reasonably positive image of the quality of their relationship with the local government. The general impression was that the rapport with the authorities remained good and uncomplicated, even after the introduction of the Registration Statute of 2006, of which most NGOs remained unaware. The type of relationship varied greatly between the selected NGOs and typical features were hard to discern. There appeared to be very little or no incidents of controversy with the local authorities, but the perception of the risk for conflict diverged.

4.1.1.1 Edirisa
Edirisa proved to be the NGO with the least interest of interacting with the local authorities, treasuring the principle of independence and fearing unnecessary interference. The initiative of managing and constructing schools had been well received by the district and there were no apparent potential for conflicting interest. A view of the local government as carefully supportive but at the same time weak and incompetent, had resulted in a discreet dissociation which so far had been tolerated. Contact was limited and primarily informal and seemed to be organized according to the preferences of the NGO. Recently, the NGO had decided to open up a connection with the local government, based on the submittance of information in exchange for assistance in matters that lay beyond their reach (e.g. the replacement of underperforming teachers). Two representatives from the local government had been installed on the board for the same purpose. Apart from this however, it was evident that both parties were quite content on leaving the other to its own devices, staying clear of issues that might lead to animosities. There were no examples of monitoring or supervision from the government. The NGO had been granted a certificate for a three-year period. As one of the directors remarked:

> As long as you do not work openly against the government, you are pretty much left to yourself (Povodnik, 16-10-2007).

Consequently, there are no indications of conflictual elements in the NGOs dealings with the local authorities, but neither can the relationship be described as fully complementary. The rapport was based on mutual tolerance and acceptance, but that aside, disinterest prevailed.

4.1.1.2 Byoona Amagara

Byoona Amagara maintained a more complementary rapport with the local government compared to Edirisa. Just like the former, Byoona Amagara managed schools, which it thought to be well in line with the district's development plan. Hence, its overall objectives coincided with the district's, and the reciprocal view on this fact was summed up in the following quote:

> [The district] know[s] that they are here to help improve people's lives, and we know that
> they are here to assist us in doing that (Gerber, 10-11-2007).

The NGO took care to integrate the officials in its work through the exchange of information, and also ensured their continuous sympathy for its activities by supporting the government's own projects, although not financially. Interaction was mainly with the LC 4 and 3. In parity with Edirisa however, Gerber believed that BA could be left entirely alone if desired. Actual monitoring from the district was rare and tended to focus on practical details, like the position of the school's pit latrines in relation to water sources. In general, Gerber regarded the officials as supportive but underequipped to take a more active interest. The only issue increasing the potential for conflict where incidents of "political behaviour", alluding to the process of politicians attempting to hijack successful projects for political leverage. Nonetheless, these situations never led to any tensions but were easily fended off through an uncompromising stance in combination with humour and strong informal bonds (Gerber, 2007).

4.1.1.3 Child Africa International

Child Africa International was by far having the most complementary relationship of the selected NGOs, by maintaining a constant dialogue with the authorities. That dialogue was according to founder Julie Solberg essential when constructing and managing schools, due to the complicated bureaucratical procedure related to the securing of relevant permissions (Solberg, 2007). The NGO would as a rule voluntarily share all sorts of information with the local authorities, be it account reports, grades or meeting protocols. The officials often showed up to carry out monitoring missions, either invited or by their own initiative, and Solberg described these procedures as rigorous. She would regularly invite them to participate in events and had over the year come to develop a close informal bond with some of the district's highest representatives; something that she claimed to be instrumental to her success in scaling up operations. The NGO's certificate had been granted for the maximum period of five years, which should be seen as a token of the administration's high level of trust.

Solberg remarked that although the NGO had the local government's full support, its role was more to approve and recommend and not to interfere specifically with any of the organization's plans. The lack of mutuality in planning and implementation of the organization's projects means that the relationship cannot be classified as exclusively complementary. Just like Edirisa and BA, CAI reported no incidents of conflicts or tangible tensions, but stressed that there were always a potential if the relationship was not managed correctly (Solberg,08-11-2007).

4.1.2 Lira

The situation in Lira resembled the one i Kabale in the sense that the NGOs' relationships with the local government were more complementary than conflictual. Perhaps due to the nature of the selected NGOs, formal dealings and agreements were more common in Lira. A significant difference from Kabale was constituted by the active presence of the UN-agency UNOCHA, which had shouldered the task of coordinating the humanitarian activities of the organizations, in conjunction with the local government. There were certain inconsistencies in the NGOs' perceptions of the distribution of responsibility between UNOCHA and the district. Some believed that overall chairmanship rested within the district (Komakech, 16-11-2007) and some that the leading role had been assumed by UNOCHA (Omodi, 17-11-2007). It was nonetheless expected that the presence of UNOCHA would have some mediating effect and presumably lower the potential for conflict.

4.1.2.1 Save the Children
Save the Children (StC) seemed to have been most successful in reaching a trade-off with the local authorities, clearly having the upper hand in all negotiations. The organization dealt mainly with LC 5 and sporadically with LC 4. The collaboration had been formalized into a written agreement, stating the roles and expectations of the two actors within the framework of the partnership. The long-term goals were defined jointly, although there were examples of occasional disputes over the distribution of roles. StC participated in planning meetings with the local government on a regular basis, as well as coordination meetings with the district and UNOCHA. Further, the organization made an effort to provide all departments and line ministries with continuous information, both automatically and on request. StC reported that the district frequently monitored their activities and demanded access to records and files, a request which was normally granted. In turn, StC as a sponsor of the district's activities, emphasized accountability and monitored the districts' use of designated funds without notable interference. Komakech stated that StC had never been involved in any controversies with the local authorities, but that incidents of conflict enfolding between other NGOs and the local government were rather commonplace (Komakech, 16-11-2007).

4.1.2.2 Caritas
Caritas was involved in several programmes serving to strengthen local communities as people had begun to return from the IDP-camps. The organization claimed the authorities to be highly supportive of its projects and had never embarked on any operations that had not been cleared in advanced. Due to its strong connection with the Ugandan catholic church, no certificate from the authorities was required[5], and nor did the organization have to register with the national NGO-board. Nevertheless, it cherished a close bond with the administration. The NGO did not have a formal cooperation with the local government in terms of a written agreement, but just like StC it participated regularly in joint planning sessions with the district, as well as the coordination meetings co-chaired by UNOCHA. It also submitted reports habitually and yielded to the district's monitoring measures whenever necessary (Omara, 18-11-2007).

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[5] Caritas does however need a certificate from the diocese to operate, but this is regarded as a mere technicality and is granted for an indefinite period of time (Omara, 18-11-2007).

Robert Omara, director for Caritas Lira, described its association with the local government as frictionless, but confessed that tensions appeared on an intermittent basis. Caritas took care to engage all relevant state actors all the way down on the LC-ladder but experienced greater challenges in dealing with representatives for the lower tiers of the local government. Due to capacity gaps in the LC1-3 the NGO often maintained a partial responsibility after the well had officially been entrusted to the local leaders, which sometimes led to dissatisfaction. Politicians on this level often attempted to use the activities of Caritas for their own benefit, like directing the projects of the NGO to their own villages. Although this brought about a situation of conflicting interests, where Caritas wished to prioritize the areas in greatest need and the local politicians sought to appease their constituencies, this kind of tensions never escalated into conflict.

It is evident that Caritas affiliation with the local government had strong complementary features, which is somewhat remarkable considering the fact that Caritas also engaged in advocacy work.

4.1.2.3 Arbeiter Samariter Bund
The German Arbeiter Samariter Bund (ASB) retained a slightly more conspicuous distance to the local government compared to its counterparts presented above. It had gradually began to shift its activities from the field of humanitarian relief to development and focused predominantly on infrastructural reforms. This change of action had received a positive response from the local government but there was still no formal cooperation. Nevertheless, the level of interaction remained high, particulary during the initial phase of a project. ASB dealt to a certain degree with all LCs, but principally with the district and the county. Just like StC and Caritas it shared information regularly. The NGO also attended the coordination meetings with UNOCHA as well as planning session with the district, but had so far refrained from engaging in any joint operations. Neither did it provide any financial assistance to any of the administration's own projects. The regional director Paulo Petrini expressed a desire to avoid becoming involved in any kind of closer kind of cooperation with local authorities for as long as possible, referring to the low level of capacity rendering the administration unpredictable and inefficient. He did nonetheless concede that as ASB's transition from humanitarian relief work to service delivery neared is completion, a formal dialogue was becoming more essential (Petrini, 17-11-2007).

The activities of ASB were, in congruence with those of StC and Caritas, monitored by the district, who exercised its right to control by demanding special reports on certain aspects of the NGO's work. ASB generally complied with these obligations, despite the fact that the capacity gaps in local government often led to an inability to enforce penalty mechanisms. After the adoption of the NGO-bill in 2006, there had been a pronounced intensification of the district's attempts to exert control over NGOs, but this had normalized recently. At the same time, the NGO had experienced incidents of tensions at all levels of local government when unintentionally bypassing officials who considered themselves being entitled to becoming involved in the project. The complicated bureaucratic structure of the LC-system led to that this occurred rather frequently, for which the simple solution was to involve anybody who felt him- or herself to be left out (ibid).

The element of collaboration can in the case of ASB be said to be weaker than for StC and Caritas although the NGO frequently interacted with the local government. Petrini did however associated this mainly with a desire to control rather than to cooperate since most

meetings consisted of sharing information and plans rather than receiving constructive feedback.

4.1.2.4 North West Medical Teams

North-West Medical Teams (NWMT) operated in the IDP-camps and the return areas by providing healthcare to the local population. In addition, it was responsible for the construction of healthcentres and dispensaries, all of which had received a full clearance from the local authorities. The relationship with the district had been formalized into a partnership through a signed memorandum of understanding of the same character as the one of StC's. The NGO was also present during coordination meetings and planning sessions, although they did not run any joint projects with the local government. In addition, NWMT also took care to include all other levels on the LC-scale already at the earliest stages of an operation. Like the others, the NGO frequently handed over reports to the local government and submitted to district monitoring and supervision whenever required. It did however refuse to share budget reports; a position that had so far passed unreprimanded. Its certificate had recently been granted for a period of three years, which would indicate a certain level of trust from the authorities (Omodi, 17-11-2007).

In parity with Caritas and ASB, country director Felix Omodi reported episodes of political hijacking of the NGO's projects, but claimed that such initiatives mostly were counteracted by UNOCHA and rarely demanded any active measures from NWMT. Omodi stated that the local government had several times been known to put a stop to operations when NGOs had been running programmes incompatible with local policy. NWMT had itself been a victim of such reprisals in late 2006 as Médecins sans Frontiers (MSF) were chased out of the district for unknown reasons. The problems with MSF had cast a shadow over the entire health sector in Lira district, causing the LC 5 to embark on a campaign of banishment of all NGOs involved in delivery of health care. NWMT eventually managed to negotiate itself out of the conflict and was allowed to continue its operations, but had since that incident constantly been on its guard. There was need to regularly demonstrate its level of activity, even informally, to fend off the risk of punishment. For example, NWMT felt that it was necessary to go to the IDP-camps several times a week and return with the vehicles covered in mud, as a sign of being operational. If the cars stood still for too long, there was always a risk of expropriation.

4.2 Determining the plausibility of theory

If referring to the theoretical considerations of Bratton's, we would have expected the relationships in Lira to be more conflictual and less complementary than the ones in Kabale. However, this is evidently not the case. All of the NGOs turned out to have a predominantly complementary relationship with the local authorities, although some conflictual tendencies were encountered in Lira. The only episode of open conflict appeared to be the one having taken place between North West Medical Teams and the local government, resulting in the NGO taking relevant measures to prevent further incidents. This example is not enough to confirm the explanatory power of Bratton's theory, since we have accounts of three other NGOs in the area claiming never to have been exposed to conflict. Neither is this incident sufficient in itself to earn the relationship the label of conflictual.

The quality of the relationships did however differ between the two settings. Interaction was more intense in Lira, where all NGOs had a constant exchange with the administration. In Kabale, only CAI reported the same level of mutuality. Formal partnerships were more common among the NGOs in Lira. In Kabale on the other hand, none of the selected NGOs recognized the need. Nevertheless, their rapport should also be defined as complementary, albeit in more loose terms. Except for CAI, there was not much in the way of reciprocity, and joint planning was for all an unknown phenomenon. Yet, they all pursued goals compatible with those of the government's and worked alongside – but not necessarily in conjunction with (save for CAI) – the former. Herein lies also the major difference between the two settings, namely the degree of involvement of the local authorities.

4.2.1 Interfere or not to interfere

The NGOs' room for maneuvre was clearly more limited in Lira, forcing the NGOs to adjust to a greater extent to the demands of the authorities. This corresponds to Bratton's predictions given the distinguishing features of the region. Tensions were also more notable in Lira than in Kabale. Further, the local authorities in Lira were more prone to exerting control and made greater use of the available instruments in relation to the officials in Kabale.

In Kabale, coordination efforts were completely absent. In Lira however, coordination was an established feature, which was also respected and supported by all the selected NGOs. It is nevertheless debatable if coordination would have had such a given status in Lira had it not been for the presence of UNOCHA. Omara informed on the behalf of Caritas that coordination had figured on the district's agenda even before the arrival of UNOCHA, but that it had been more sporadic and less efficient (Omara, 18-11-2007).

While cooptation was rejected as an unknown phenomenon by all organizations in both settings, all NGOs in Lira and some of the ones in Kabale were familiar with the threat of dissolution. All NGOs in Lira could give accounts of other NGOs having been subjected to such treatment, but claimed that it mostly happened to local NGOs with dubious accountability mechanisms (Omara, 18-11-2007, Omodi, 17-11-2007). Only North-West Medical Teams regarded dissolution as a tangible threat (Omodi, 17-11-2007). In Kabale, the strategy of dissolution seemed far more rare, but CAI's Solberg could recall at least one incident where it had been taken place. Just like in Lira, it had occurred to an NGO suspected of the misappropriation of funds (Solberg, 08-11-2007).

Thus, the local authorities in Lira appeared to be more inclined to apply the means to assert control described by Bratton, than its Kabale counterparts. One could also point to a correlation between the relatively lower level of capacity in Lira and clientelistic tendencies among the local leaders, which in turn led to situations where the NGOs found their objectives compromised. All this combined resulted in a higher degree of tensions in Lira, which in turn would presuppose a higher potential for conflict. Despite that, we have already concluded that the actual level of conflict was only marginally higher.

4.2.2 NGO-response: collaboration or autonomy?

The fundamental fact in this comparison was the tendency of the NGOs in Lira to go to far greater lengths in maintaining a complementary relationship with the authorities, in relation to their Kabale counterparts. The tendency of INGOs to yield to government requirements has been recognized by Bratton (1989:51), but its crucial effect on the quality of the relationship has nevertheless been overlooked.

The strategies applied in safeguarding ones interests when dealing with the local government, could be divided into two different categories: those that were aimed at preserving autonomy and those designed for improving the relationship. Roughly speaking, the NGOs in Kabale focused more on the former compared to Lira, although they also appeared to treasure a good rapport.

The strategy of maintaining a low profile was not typically applied by any of the NGOs. In contrast, the strategy of selective collaboration was widely exercised by all NGOs in Kabale, including Edirisa that had decided to open up a channel with the local authorities in exchange for their assistance (Povodnik, 16-10-2007). This strategy was the one where the divergence between the two settings was most pronounced. As previously noted, the form of cooperation varied in degrees of formality, with documented partnership being far more common in Lira than in Kabale. Open structures, transparency and complete access to information was the modus operandi of choice among the NGOs Lira, while in Kabale only CAI had chosen the same path. Byoona Amagara shared information on a regular basis, but only on its own initiative. Among the NGOs in Lira, the act of collaboration cannot be labelled selective, since the NGOs cooperated with the local government in all areas, even where there were no immediate rewards for doing so.

Among the strategies developed for maintaining a good relationship was networking, which appeared to be the strategy of choice in Kabale. In consisted of nurturing strong personal and informal bonds with the officials, in order to facilitate bureaucratic procedures and to ensure continuous support for the organization's activities (Gerber, 2007; Solberg, 08-11-2007).

A more direct strategy was to remove the risk of the NGO having to compromise its own principles in dealing with the local government, through eliminating the incentives for misbehaviour. Save the Children had for example decided to shift their financial support from being channelled directly to the local government, to being directed to projects where structures were more transparent (Komakech, 16-11-2007).

Most NGOs worked preventively to elminate the risk of tensions, but in situations where these occurred, a few measures where applied to keep them from escalating into conflict. These methods were only observed in Lira, as the context in Kabale rarely opened up for a conflictual outcome. The most frequent of the direct strategies was to demonstrate a high level of tolerance, which was equal to stoically accepting the demands of the local government even when the NGO perceived it to be principally wrong. This often meant including local key people and bureaucrats in different stages of a project, although they were not technically required to do so (Komakech, 16-11-2007; Omodi, 17-11-2007; Petrini, 17-11-2007).

> There are so many people and they all want to be taken into consideration. You talk to some
> and then some other show up and complain that they haven't been informed. And really, we

don't need to, but we take on as many as we can. But it's hard to know exactly who to
interact with; there are so many officials (Petrini, 17-11-2007).

When tolerance was compromised to an extent that the NGO found itself unable to aquiesce, provision of alternatives was another well tested strategy. This could entail rejecting proposals from the local government by advising them on how to find support elsewhere (Komakech, 2007).

5   Scrutinizing theory

Despite the total divergence on all independent variables given causal status by Bratton, the outcome on the dependent variable was not as diverse as theory had indicated. Keeping in mind the variation on these variables, the difference in terms of prevalence of conflict should be far significant. In order to seek an explanation taking into account the discrepancy in the theory of Bratton's and the actual outcome of this study, one must scrutinize the basic assumptions constituting the foundation of said theory.

5.1 Fundamental assumptions – fact or fiction?

The fact that conflict between the selected NGOs and the local government occurred no more frequently in Lira than in Kabale could have many possible explanations. Firstly, it could mean that there is no actual connection between a weak and defensive regime and increased levels of control, as stated by Bratton (Bratton, 1989:575; see also Clark, 1997:50). This possibility can however be rejected immediately, since it was established in the previous chapter that the local government in Lira indeed demonstrated a far stronger inclination to exert control than its Kabale counterparts.

Secondly, it might be suggested that the presumption that political considerations take precedence over economical ones (Bratton, 1989:572-573), is flawed. Indeed, as Rausitala reminds us, legitimacy does not have to rest exclusively on the distribution of power, but also on the securing of other goods like economic development (Rausitala, 1997:725). The statements from Save the Children and Caritas give some support to this orientation, since both directors appeared to believe that their position in the district was reasonably secure mainly due to the extent of the NGOs' contributions. Reasonably is nevertheless not synonomous to completely and there was an understanding that this condition would be relevant only up to a certain degree (Komakech, 16-11-2007; Omara 17-11-2007). StC claimed that they sometimes refused to accept tasks allocated by the local government on the grounds that they considered them to be the responsibility of the state. This fact would indicate that the local government was actually in the process of diminishing its borders, which is surprising keeping in mind the nature of the political context (Komakech, 16-11-2007). It also calls into question the belief that the political implications prevents weak governments from seeking opportunities to be relieved of their burdens (Bratton, 1989:572).

In addition, Bratton needs to take into consideration that a weak administration might very well be more disposed to perceiving NGOs as a threat, but might precisely because of its weakness lack the necessary means to adress it. In Lira for example, local government reprisals followed a staccato-like pattern, which indicates an only sporadic ability to respond to threats (Petrini, 17-11-2007). The unpredictability of the administration is probably equally challenging to the operations of the NGOs had the risk been constant, but the lack of

enforcement mechanisms makes it easier for the NGOs to maintain their own agenda without risking controversy.

Further, there is a need to problemize the hypothesis that locating operations in an area of conflict would entail a greater challenge in developing complementary relationships with the state agencies. The findings of this study confirm that the authorities are indeed more defensive and more inclined to exert control under such circumstances, but at the same time we have also established that humanitarian relief work is recognized as less controversial than other types of NGO activity (Omara, 18-11-2007; Petrini, 17-11-2007). Bratton makes a distinction between policy advocacy, and less politically sensitive activities like service delivery; claiming the former to be more provocative in the eyes of the authorities (Bratton, 1989:576). However, as all NGOs in Lira considered humanitarian relief to be comparably more neutral than service delivery, a further division is justified. Consequently, a trisection of the different activities should be made, and if arranged according to its potential to ignite conflict, the appropriate order should be relief work, followed by service provision and finally advocacy work. In conflict-ridden areas, the construction of mutually beneficial relationships is, based on the experiences from Lira, presumably more demanding; but since humanitarian relief work is also more common in these regions, the link between war-torn settings and controversies with the local government is not as automatic as Bratton leads us to believe.

Further, we need to be reminded about Bratton's core argument, namely that tensions between the state and non-state actors are expressions of a struggle for legitimacy. However, he also concedes that administrations with strong elements of clientelism are more forgiving towards NGO activity (Bratton, 1989:575). In such a context, NGOs do not necessarily constitute a threat but rather an opportunity for support for the legitimacy of said institution, unless of course at the local arena when favouring one party could mean discriminating another. Nevertheless, Bratton does not include the potential difficulties faced by the NGOs in maintaining a frictionless relationship under such circumstances. What we have seen, particularly in Lira, is that local politicians have tried to associate themselves with the NGOs or even attempted to hijack their projects. Such an act – if successful – would serve to reinforce the status of the person in question, and thus the legitimacy of the authority that he or she represents. This phenomenon is regarded by the NGOs as challenging, since it appears to be the actual limit beyond which the principles of the NGO are compromised to the extent that the NGO fails to cope. As a result, the NGOs in Lira have been forced to apply a significant part of their arsenal of diplomacy to save the situation without having to surrender their guiding principles. This could of course lead to tensions from the NGO vis-á-vis the authorities and affect their relationship negatively, but apparently this fact carries no relevance to Bratton.

In Bratton's accounts of the causal mechanisms determining the quality of the relationship, the key lies in the state's perception of the NGO. This perception hinges in turn on the political context, as expressed in the following quote:

> Relations are likely to blow erratically hot or cold depending on the government's perception of the national security situation of the day (Bratton, 1989:585).

There is thus no room for NGO influence on the relationship. The NGOs have to play by the rules of the game as defined by the state and from this perspective it is perhaps naïve to believe that an NGO exposed to the challenge of dealing with clientelism would engage in

conflict. Nevertheless, the study shows that the behaviour of NGOs can affect the way they are perceived by the state and in extension have an effect on the quality of the relationship. The level of flexibility of the NGOs in adapting to a different environment is a critical but neglected factor responsible for shaping the relationship with the state actor.

5.2 The construction of false extremes

The central critique of Bratton's theory, is that the the value on the NGO-variable in this context appears to be incorrect. Put differently, there is a discrepancy between the *presumed* and the *actual* risk for conflict consituted by the NGO-sector. On a superficial level, the defining qualities of the NGOs in Lira compared to the ones in Kabale, might very well be more provocative in the eyes of the administration. However, conventional theory fails to recognize the impact of NGO-behaviour on the relationship between the two camps. The study has demonstrated that there is a difference between the strategies applied in both of the settings, which naturally reflects the specific conditions under which the NGOs are obliged to operate. The NGOs in Lira were all going to lengths in appeasing local government, and were also displaying a surprisingly great tendency to surrender organizational autonomy. This over-compliance with the demands of the local government lowers the risk for controversy considerably and has not been properly accounted for. This means that we are facing a situation where the selection of objects of analysis is skewed and does not represent the typical qualities that our method prescribes. The polarization is thus false and that explains why the outcome of the comparison did not comply with theory. The NGOs selected in Lira are not high-risk NGOs although this is what Bratton has led us to believe. The defining features of the NGOs thought to carry a higher potential for conflict are mediated by other, overlooked features.

Bratton's major weakness consists of the fact that he assumes that the strategies of NGOs' in dealing with state authorities are entirely focused on preserving organizational autonomy. He refrains from exploring the motives of NGOs and the societal forces involved in shaping their priorities. His exposition on NGO strategy departs from the hypothesis that NGOs are exclusively driven by the ideal of self-preservation, in combination with goal achievement. This implies a rather simplistic view on NGOs as rational agents whose actions are a result of calculated choice and informed assessment, and at the same time overlooks the influence of norms on their decision to engage in partnership with government actors. Bratton's reasoning on selective collaboration is echoed in Taylor's research, where it is stated that interorganizational collaboration ultimately depends on transaction costs. This means that NGOs are less inclined to cooperate if they invest more in cooperation than they are likely to gain (Taylor, 2002:334). The same line of thought can be traced in Clark's writing, where he states that NGOs are increasingly seeking collaboration with government as a strategic gesture despite the risks involved, if it is believed to facilitate the achievement of their objectives (Clark, 1997:47). Organizational autonomy is therefore treated as the prime value, which the NGO to a limited extent is willing to barter in order to achieve a greater good. This entails a quid pro quo-mentality, where the NGO is seeking to maximize utility to a given and accepted price. The main motivational force is goal achievement, and autonomy is the currency for which this good is being purchased.

Kamat, however, criticizes this view and claims that it is a methodological mistake to look upon NGOs as fully cognizant actors capable of placing themselvs beyond the influence of "sectarian interests". According to Kamat, NGOs cannot be treated as independent agents disengaged from the context in which they operate (Kamat, 2004:158).

Ebrahim claims that the priorities guiding the different actors in the development sphere are ultimately contingent upon the prevalent discourse. The discourse has been formalized in most prominent development institutions like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the UN-system (Ebrahim, 2001:81; Kamat, 2004:72). It is however premature to assume that discourse alludes to a single set of norms and values encapsulating the entire industry. According to Ebrahim, contemporary development discourse is far from monolithic; rather it is criss-crossed by a wide array of conflicting value systems fighting for supremacy. Nevertheless, certain trends can be discerned; one being the previously mentioned view on NGOs as vehicles for development, that has dominated the industry for the last decades (Ebrahim, 2001:94-95).

Bräutigam & Segarra are of the opinion that the general view on the appropriate relationship between the state and the NGO-sector, is based on the idea of partnership. This position originated in the World Bank in the 1980s and has since then gradually taken root in most of the world's formal development institutions (Bräutigam & Segarra, 2008:149-150). Approaches to development have been transmitted to NGOs in a top-down manner, through funding conditions, consultants and reports (Ebrahim, 2001:98). Norms become adopted through constant interaction, where new practices are promoted and eventually internalized. This process of socialization contributes to the reshaping of the NGO's identity and values, upon which its priorities rest (Bräutigam & Segarra, 2008:155).

5.3 High risk or low risk?

In order to determine the actual risk constituted by the NGO, we have to take into account its view on cooperation in relation to its willingness to surrender autonomy. Empirical data from this study imply that norms have a significant impact on the NGO's behaviour. It is correct to presuppose that organizational autonomy is an important factor for the NGO; as the study has demonstrated, there is still a need to separate itself from the state. Goal achievement is also a crucial factor since it renders the NGO legitimacy. Nevertheless, it soon became evident that cooperation did not function exclusively as a mean to achieve a specific end. In accordance with the theory of Bräutigam & Segarra, to the NGOs in Lira, cooperation was not only viewed as the necessary arena where interests were negotiated and bartered before the particular objective could be reached, but also as an end in itself. This could serve as a complementary explanation to why NGOs in Lira went to such lengths to avoid conflict by giving up autonomy. To these NGOs, collaboration was treated as an independent value worth safeguarding. Cooperation thus turned out to be an alternative value, taking precedence – up to a given point – over the value of organizational autonomy.

In the two settings, there were two main motives for collaborating with the local government, based on whether the NGO felt itself being able to make a deliberate decision or not. The NGO could engage in a mutual exchange either by choice or obligation; choice meaning that there would be no element of force and necessity when making the decision, and

obligation implying the opposite. More importantly, cooperation could also be regarded as an independent value, or an end in itself, when no justification was sought for such a strategy. The other option would be to relate to cooperation as a strategic value, a means to an end, applied or concluded whenever appropriate.

In Kabale, all NGOs regarded cooperation as a strategic gesture, which means that the NGOs would not have agreed to such a relationship had there not been anything to gain, as demonstrated by the following quotes:

> We can start these official relationships and then in due time do some exchange, like expect
> som help from them and they can expect some help from us (Povodnik, 16-10-2007).

> I think involving the officials is very important. Because when they don't know what's
> going on, they just hear, and then they can misunderstand and cause problems. It's very
> important for them to see (Solberg, 08-11-2007).

Byoona Amagara considered itself to be the more legitimate actor and collaborated with the local governments only on the grounds that their objectives coincided and that there were synergy effects in coordinating their efforts (Gerber, 2007). In Edirisa's case, cooperation meant increased opportunities to replace underperforming teachers, while for CAI, it had resulted in the removal of bureaucratic barriers as well as a lower potential for controversies with the local authorities (Povodnik, 16-10-2007; Solberg, 08-11-2007). Consequently, to Edirisa and Byoona Amagara, cooperation was entirely by choice, while to CAI, it was somewhere between choice and obligation, since collaboration was also regarded as a means to ensure the NGOs continuous existence.

In Lira in contrast, all NGOs regarded cooperation as an independent value, which was strongly related to the opinion that service delivery was the actual responsibility of the state and that the state was the rightful owner of development. Komakech regarded StC as a supplementary force assisting the government in achieving its own goals and to Omara of Caritas, the state was the obvious manager of projects as they had been completed (Komakech, 16-11-2007; Omara, 18-11-2007).

> Normal service delivery should flow. It is the responsibility of the state. We should only
> focus where there are gaps. Otherwise you take over a responsibility of the state and that
> won't make it sustainable (Komakech, 16-11-2007).

Even Petrini of ASB, who was reluctant to develop a closer bond to the local authorities as a result of capacity problems, conceded that a reciprocal exchange was vital when moving away from humanitarian assistance to conventional development operations (Petrini, 17-11-2007). To North West Medical Teams, cooperation was treated as a prerequisite for survival and consequently looked upon as an obligation, but was at the same time also regarded as an end in itself. Gap-filling was to take place within the framework of the state and the general modus operandi was one of the NGO suggesting and the local government allocating (Omodi, 17-11-2007).

This demonstrates that Bratton is guilty of simplifying the conditions determining the potential for a conflictual relationship between the local government and the NGOs. By ignoring such a crucial factor as norms and their effect on NGO strategy, the objects of study

have been selected on the wrong basis. Consequently, the comparison was never between two extreme settings, as in high-risk climate with high-risk NGO contra low-risk climate with low-risk NGO. Instead, the NGOs in Lira have been low-risk all along. As a result, we did not achieve the proper variety on the different variables as specified by the most different systems design, and the outcome suffered accordingly.

One can of course argue that Bratton indeed acknowledges the effect of values on NGO strategy, since he states that all maneuvres in the interaction process are ultimately expressions of a profound desire to safeguard the value of organizational autonomy. Yet, this value is treated as thoroughly static, which prevents him from recognizing other potentially relevant norms. In this context, the value of autonomy has been challenged by the value of cooperation, to a degree that the NGOs have been made to compromise their independence in a manner exceeding the strategy of selective collaboration. The adoption of the value of cooperation has provided the NGO with an elasticity increasing its ability to accommodate elements like unjustified involvement by local leaders, which otherwise could have been perceived as an encroachment on its independence.

5.4 Final remarks

Coooperation was thus not treated as a norm for any of the NGOs in Kabale. In comparison, all NGOs professed to this dogm in Lira. Hence, the norm of cooperation increased the NGOs' level of tolerance, facilitating collaboration where the potential for conflict was higher. This testifies to that the existence of norms and its impact on NGO policy needs to be inserted as a independent variable into the theories of Bratton's, in order for us to better understand the mechanisms behind state and NGO interaction. There is consequently no reason to abandon the original theory altogether. The role of norms cannot be said to have superior explanatory power compared to other factors. If this would have been the case, conflict would have been more frequent in Kabale where the adoption of relevant norms remained weak. Instead, the relatively stoicism characterizing the local authorities' attitudes towards the NGOs, despite the isolationist tendencies of Edirisa or the unwillingness of Byoona Amagara to let local politicians take credit for the organization's work, gives support to the notion that service delivery by a small NGO sector in a peaceful environment with a comparatively capable administration, is perceived as a lesser threat to legitimacy than in regions where the opposite is true.

6   Closing the gap

When studying the pattern of interaction between state and non-state actors, it is vital to take into account that there are two parties, governed by their own individual agenda, responsible for shaping the relationship. Applying a theory failing to acknowledge this fact will inevitably produce misleading results. When determining if the relationship will be marked by conflict or complementarity, one has to look beyond pragmatism towards the impact of norms on the strategies employed by each actor in dealings with the other party.

The fundamental assumption of this thesis is that the idea of partnership between state and non-state actors has taken root in the world's prominent development institutions. This notion is supported by a wide array of researchers (see Ebrahim, 2001:81; Edwards & Hulme, 1997:124; Kamat, 2004:72; Muhangi, 2004:12; Sverrison, 2002:52-53, 135). Further, it builds on the theory of Bräutigam & Segarra, who advocate the process of social learning, describing how such ideas are being transmitted from the core to the periphery via specific channels like donor requirements and consultants (Bräutigam & Segarra, 2008:155). Following this argument, we can conclude that NGOs engaged in interaction with donor organizations, as well as other NGOs, are more likely to having been introduced to the norm of cooperation than those who prefer isolation. In short, interaction breeds further interaction.

In Lira district, there were several factors providing an enabling environment for socialization. To begin with, the active presence of UNOCHA should logically constitute a crucial channel for discourse transmission. In addition, and strongly related to this fact, there were solid coordination structures in place, ensuring a continuous exchange between the different actors. Further, all of the NGOs in Lira depended on external funds, which made them vulnerable to the demands of the donor community.

It is somewhat ironic that donor dependency in this case is believed to actually enhance the potential for successful collaboration. Furthermore, conflict-ridden areas with weak administrations normally have a greater humanitarian need, which attracts major INGOs as well as UN-agencies. This in turn promotes the establishment of the kind of structures thought to facilitate the transmittance of discourse. We can therefore conclude that some of the variables Bratton believed would serve as a constraint on government-NGO collaboration, have in this particular situation had the reverse effect.

In Kabale, the situation was more or less the opposite. There was no coordination whatsoever and little horizontal interaction between the different NGOs. This could be a possible explanation to why no other NGO perceived the value of cooperation to have independent status. This is probably also the reason why the approaches to collaboration were so fragmented. In the absence of input from external sources, there would be no channel for the introduction of a unified set of norms.

Naturally, a concise discourse analysis needs to be carried out before we can establish with full certainty that a process of socialization has actually taken place in Lira but not in Kabale, and that this would be the prime reason behind the difference in the adoption of the norm of cooperation between the two settings. And so, the exposition above should be regarded as hyptheses rather than facts, but should hopefully be able to inspire to future research.

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Petrini, Paulo. Senior Programme Manager for ASB, Uganda. 17-11-2007

Appendix I

The NGOs

Lira

Save the Children
Formed in 1932 in USA. Independent.
Aim: Improved living conditions for children and families
Scope: Worldwide
Activities in Service Delivery (Lira): Provision of education
Other activities (Lira): Child protection, livelihood support, HIV/AIDS prevention
Finance (Lira): UNICEF and national Save the Children organizations

Sources: Charles Komakech, Director for Save the Children, Lira Department

North-West Medical Teams
Formed in 1979 in USA. Based on christian principles.
Aim: Poverty alleviation and increased access to health care
Scope: World wide
Activities in Service Delivery (Lira): Provision of health care
Other activities: -
Finance(Lira): Donor funds from national governments and members' donations

Sources: Felix Omodi, Country Director for North West Medical Teams, Uganda.

ASB (Arbeiter-Samariter Bund)
Formed in 1888 in Germany. Independent.
Aim: The establishment of democratic principles globally and relief in humanitarian crises
Scope: World wide
Activities in Service Delivery (Lira): Rehabilitation of infrastructure
Other activities (Lira): Humanitarian assistance
Finance (Lira): German government, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, FAO

Sources: Paoulo Petrini, Senior Programme Manager for ASB, Uganda

Caritas
Formed in 1949, in Uganda since 1999. Based on catholic principles.
Aim: Peace, justice and improved living conditions globally
Scope: World wide
Activities in Service Delivery (Lira): Water provision and vocational training
Other activities (Lira): Rehabilitation of child soldiers, humanitarian relief, social services
Finance (Lira): UNICEF, ECHO, WHO and German government

Sources: Robert Omara, Director for Caritas, Lira Department

Kabale

Byoona Amagara
Formed in 2001 by Czech citizen Jason Gerber
Aim: Community development through education
Scope: Field offices in Kabale and the lake Bunyonyi area. Registered as an NGO in Uganda and as a charity organization in the Czech Republic
Activities in service delivery: Constructing and managing schools
Other activities: Promoting computer literacy. Eco-tourism
Finance: Private donations and income generating activities

Sources: Jason Gerber, Director for Byoona Amagara

Child Africa International
Formed in 1991 by Norwegian citizen Julie Solberg.
Aim: Providing education as an instrument to pull people out of poverty. Fostering new civic leaders with sound perspectives.
Scope: Field offices and operations in southern and central Uganda. Registered as an NGO in Uganda and Norway
Activities in service delivery: Education. Constructing and managing schools.
Other activities: Orphan care.
Finance: Donations from Norwegian NGO Better Globe, Norwegian companies and members

Sources: Julie Solberg, Director for Child Africa International

Edirisa
Formed in 2007 by Slovenian citizen Miha Logar.
Aim: Community development through the promotion of fair trade crafts and improvement of the quality of education. Balancing the unevenly negative information flow on Africa through projecting positive images of the continent in local and western media.
Scope: Field offices and operations in southern and central Uganda. Registered as an NGO in Uganda and Slovenia and as a charity organization in the UK
Activities in service delivery: Education. Constructing and managing nurseries, constructing schools, providing "alternative education" through regular workshops and teaching in government schools.

Other activities: Promoting and managing local craft production. Eco-tourism
Finance: Private donations, funds from national Edirisa organizations in several European countries, income generating activities

Sources: Natalja Povodnik, Manager for Edirisa Smiles, Lake Bunyonyi

Appendix II

Structure of the interview

1) General information
- Please describe your organization
- What are your long-term objectives?
- What are your main activities in Lira/Kabale?
  - o Do you engage in any advocacy work/HR-promotion?
- How are you being financed?
- Are you registered?
  - o If no,
    - § Why not?
  - o If yes,
    - § When did you register and how often do you have to renew your certificate?

2) Programme information
- How are your programmes initiated? Procedure?
- Who manages the programmes (NGO/beneficiaries/local government/other)?
- What are your working methods?
- Impact?
- Which are your main obstacles in reaching your objectives?

3) Relationships
- Do you interact with any other actors?
  - o If no,
    - § Why not?
  - o If yes,
    - § Why?
    - § With whom do you interact?
      - • If interacting with local government – which part/s do you interact with?
      - • Do you have any fixed strategy determining your commitment to the local government?
      - • Level of influence compared to other actors?
        - o Which ones are more successful and why?
    - § How do you interact? Quality of the interaction?
      - • Frequency of meetings?
    - § One whose initiative do you interact?
    - § What is the key to a good relationship?
    - § How do you exert influence?

- § Have you ever been in a situation where you have been forced to compromise your principles?
  - • If yes, please describe the situation.
    - o How did relate to this?
    - o What were the effects?
- § Have you ever experienced any problems/hostilities in your relationship to the other actor/s?
  - • If yes, what was the cause?
    - o How was it solved?
- Have you ever experienced any conflicts or tensions between you and the other actor/s?
  - o If yes,
    - § What was the cause?
    - § How was it solved?
  - o If no,
    - § What do you think is the reason?
- Have you ever decided to stop collaborating/interacting with another actor?
  - o If yes.
    - § Why?
- Which degree of autonomy is desirable?

4) Practical details
- Is it possible to avoid contact with the local authorities?
  - o If yes,
    - § Why?
  - o If no,
    - § What are the consequences?
  - o What is your opinion on NGOs circumscribing local government?
- Do you have to submit any documents to the local government?
  - o If yes, which?
  - o What would be the consequences if you refuse?
- Does the local government monitor your activities?
  - o If yes,
    - § How?
    - § To what extent/frequency?
    - § What is your response?
    - § What is your opinion of this?
- Have you ever been exposed to the threat of having to terminate operations?
  - o If yes,
    - § Why?
    - § How did you solve the situation?
    - § Have you changed strategy since that incident?
- Have you ever heard of any other NGO in Lira/Kabale being exposed to the threat of having to terminate operations?
  - o If yes,
    - § Do you know the cause?
    - § What were the effects?
- Is there any level of coordination of activities in Lira/Kabale?
  - o If yes,
    - § By whom?

- If not by the local government – what is the role of local government in the coordination process?
  - § What does it entail in practice?
  - § What is your opinion of having your activities coordinated?
  - § What is your response?
- o If no,
  - § Do you perceive the absence of coordination as positive or negative?