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Bachelor of Science in Development Studies

# **The paradox of accountability**

Three case studies concerning non-governmental activities in Mutomo, Kenya

A Minor Field Study

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Bachelor Thesis: UTKV03, 15hp

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## **Abstract**

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Non-governmental activities have, during recent decades, played an increasing role within international development assistance and have, to a certain extent, replaced more traditional channels of state-led aid. This study aims to investigate various issues and difficulties that surround non-governmental activities concerning the aim of promoting social and economic change in the context of Mutomo, in eastern Kenya. It will focus on the issue of accountability and how the relationship between organisations, as well as the institutional environment, affects non-governmental activities in a developing context. The study has used qualitative methods with an ethnographic approach, and it has been formed from three different case studies. It has furthermore focused on two NGOs active in Mutomo: World Vision and Plan International. The study has drawn on open ended interviews as the main tool to increase the understanding of the process and its context. The study argues that efforts made by the two organisations examined in this paper are invaluable for the local population in the area of Mutomo, in the sense of alleviating poverty and saving lives. But it is also arguing that the notion of civil society as the main provider of public goods is complex and full of contradictions. It is therefore of importance to take a variety of factors into considerations, in order to better understand and identify the structural asymmetries of power and resources which surrounds non-governmental activities in contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Non-governmental organisations, civil society, accountability, institutional environment, domain consensus

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# 1. Introduction

Non-governmental activities have during recent decades turned out to be a leading element within the field of development. Civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been promoted as major actors in the fight against poverty and social injustices, where NGOs have been seen as a global consciousness, acting for the civil society according to *the alternative development paradigm* (Tvedt, 2002: 363, Holmén, Jirström, 2009: 429). This paradigm refers to a way of working with promoting development, where the fundamental aim is to increase the participation of local populations as a mean to spur development from below (Holmén, 2010: 9-10). This new way of working with development assistance emerged during the 1980's, and surfaced as a result of widespread scepticism among donors towards state-lead development, where recipient governments systematically failed to effectively draw upon the given aid (Fredholm, 2008: 62). In combination with the failure of the Washington Consensus<sup>1</sup> and the limited results of market-oriented development during the early 1980's, the alternative development paradigm and civil society-led development were seen as a mean to balance the influence between the market and the state (Frödin, 2008: 42).

The notion of a civil-society led development is that the intended beneficiaries are meant to be involved and participate in developing projects and that social transformation must occur on a grass-root level without external intervention. Earlier development projects, imposed on a large scale and often from a state level, did not recognise the diverse conditions which people on the ground experienced and were therefore often misguided and ineffective. However, due to the incapacity of redistributing political and economic resources, which is often considered a prerequisite for involving the local population, it has proven to be problematic to involve the grass-roots. There are also indications pointing to the fact that participation has hardly lead to a situation where the local population is in control of the decision making process, but rather functions as a tool for implementing top-down approaches from a grass-root level (Fredholm, 2008: 62-63, 66-67, 70).

This study focuses on two NGOs: World Vision and Plan International, and their activities in the context of Mutomo in Kenya. It will be formed as three case studies and based on empirical observations done during two months, between January and March 2012, on three projects launched by the organisations: a child sponsorship program, a water project and a food relief

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<sup>1</sup> The Washington Consensus concept was the idea of attracting investors into certain markets and countries through liberalisation and privatisation, creating macro-stability and economic growth for wrecked economies in developing countries (Stiglitz, 2003: 67).

program. The study aims to present major impacts and various issues or obstacles that the organisations are facing when executing the projects and it furthermore seeks to explain these challenges, relating them to a wider political economic context.

Mutomo is one of Kenya's poorest districts and poverty, famine, malnutrition, drought and unemployment are common throughout the district. Out of the approximately 70 000 inhabitants in the district of Mutomo, 74% are living below the poverty line of 1.25 USD a day and the number of people involved in the informal sector is high. Mutomo has for a long time been neglected in Kenyan politics and is therefore in a situation where the infrastructure is underdeveloped, the health care is deficient and the education leaves a lot to wish for. The area is moreover extremely dry during most of the year and people have to walk up to 40 km to meet their family's daily need of water (World Vision).

Plan International has, due to the drought during the autumn 2011, been running a food relief program in primary schools in Ikanga, in the south of Mutomo. The aim has been to increase the attendance as well as the performance among the children through the provision of food and water on a daily basis (Plan International). World Vision on the other hand has been in the area since 2007, and runs several projects. Instead of relief projects, World Vision is running projects with a so-called capabilities approach, with the aim of help to self-help to empower the people in Mutomo. The three main areas which they are working with are: food security, water/sanitation/health, and HIV/Aids (World Vision).

## **1.1. Specific aims and research questions**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the intricacy surrounding non-governmental activities, striving to promote social and economic transformation in the context of Mutomo in Kenya. It focuses on three non-governmental projects in Mutomo and the study aims to illuminate difficulties and issues with the projects through the use of concepts such as civil society, development from below, and accountability. The study will also elucidate the importance of considering and acknowledging institutional frameworks when initiating development projects. Thus, it seeks to shed light on what role non-governmental organisations may play in promoting social and economic change within international development assistance.

More specifically, how do NGOs relate their stated goal of accountability towards their targeted group of people in Mutomo? And what impact does the institutional environment have for Plan International's and World Vision's possibilities of promoting social and economic change in the context of Mutomo?

## **1.2. Outline of the study**

The outline of the study is as follows; it will firstly present a methodology chapter, where approaches and sampling methods applied in the study is discussed. It will thereafter present the theoretical framework and discuss advantages as well as disadvantages with institutional organisation theory. Special attention will be put on the importance of acknowledging the institutional environment, and additionally, the chapter draws on relevant concepts within the field of development research. The fourth chapter provides the reader with a background of the area where the study was carried out and basic information about the organisations targeted in the study. It continues with a presentation of the empirical findings and a discussion where the theoretical framework is used to deepen the analysis and to make analytical generalisations. Finally, the study is summarised and proposals for further research on the topic are made.

## **2. Methodology**

This study has been designed as three different case studies, in order to profoundly analyse the complex mechanisms surrounding non-governmental activities in Mutomo. A case study design contributes to obtain and grasp the feelings and thoughts of the participants in the study and allows for closer contact with people in their environment. This is, as argued by Yin (2009), one of the central parts of the case study method: to maintain the characteristics of the findings in its original settings and reduce the risk of other factors having too much of an impact when analysing it. Moreover, a case study as the method facilitates for me, as a student writing my bachelor thesis, to be present and to a further extent investigate aspects which I found to be of particular interest (Merriam, 1994: 43-49, Punch, 2005: 144).

However, a case study is a study of a particular case, and it is sometimes argued that it because of this is not representative in a statistical sense. But even though these cases are acknowledged as unique, the intention has not been to find a representative sample, but rather to use the cases to draw on existing research and make analytical and theoretical generalisations of the contemporary politics being pursued within the international community on development assistance (Bryman, 2008: 55-57).

### **2.1. Ethnography and participatory observation**

The research has been carried out with an ethnographic approach, based upon open ended interviews where emphasis has been placed on participatory observation as well as informal

discussions. The reason for an ethnographic approach was the possibilities to study people's actions in their everyday context, rather than under conditions created by the researcher (Hammersley, Atkinson, 2007: 3-10). However, as indicated by Bryman (2008), the role of ethnographers is not always self-evident and often highly dependent on both the researcher as well as the social setting being studied. It indicates that the researcher acts mainly as an interviewer and observes rather than participates in any activities (Bryman, 2008: 410). Considering the extent I participated in the daily activities which were the base for this study, I would regard my role as '*observer-as-participant*'. I did not participate actively during the meetings which I attended with World Vision, but rather observed the participants reactions and opinions regarding what was said.

There are however limitations, or problems, with an ethnographic approach. Especially regarding the extent to which the social context accepts the researcher and how well the researcher is able to adapt to the new environment. There will furthermore always be issues involved in ethnographic research when performed in a sub-Saharan country by a white man from Northern Europe, considering the tangible cultural differences and the fact that the researcher stands out distinctly in the rural sub-Saharan context. But the ethnographic approach is probably one of the most prominent approaches in contemporary research and it could be seen as a step to avoid and tackle the westernization of the environment, as described by Chambers (2008), where the researcher unconsciously puts western values into the collected information and thus has too much of an impact on the study. Complementing the ethnographic approach, the research used participatory observation, as described earlier, as the major technique to make empirical findings. It is these observations which make it possible to register behaviour in its natural environment and it is furthermore the best technique to use when observing an activity or situation from the outside, as a foreigner, when handling sensitive areas which participants rather do not answer or tends to avoid. However, as it is easy for observations to be interpreted in a highly subjective way, it has been of importance to attempt a clear understanding of the socio-economic and cultural context in which the research is performed, and as will be discussed later in this chapter, that the research approaches a wide range of sources in the sampling process (Merriam, 1994: 101-103).

As a part of the ethnographic approach, open ended interviews were used to provide the research with valuable informal discussions which to a further extent resulted in insights about the context and social structures in Mutomo. The advantage with open ended interviews was not only that it lead to informal discussions, but also that additional questions beyond the prepared ones were raised. It also encouraged the respondent to be more flexible and made it possible to answer the questions from his or her own perception and with his or her own vocabulary. An informal

discussion is often preferable since the participants and the interviewees feel more comfortable and relaxed, which hopefully results in more nuanced and honest answers. The research has more over used group interviews to take advantage of the relatively unstructured and relaxed atmosphere in which participants can discuss and modify their answers. The modifying of the answers is an important feature since it increases the possibility of the participants considering advantages and disadvantages with their standpoints (Bryman, 2008: 475-476). However, group interviews have a tendency to leave the researcher with less control over the interview and more importantly, there is an obvious risk that certain participants take more place than others, leading to a situation where some people's opinions are being neglected (ibid: 488-489). This was especially apparent considering the gender aspect and one of the group interviews were therefore held with only women.

## **2.2. Sampling**

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, most of the contact with participants in this study was made through the daily excursions with Plan International and World Vision. To be able to get in contact with men and women with various social statuses, efforts were made to participate at both formal and informal meetings between representatives from the local population and the organisations. The guesthouse where I was staying was an ideal place to make contact with people since aid workers, government officials and businessmen frequently stayed there and a wide range of representatives for the local community regularly came for a cup of tea or to dine. In a sense, the sampling could probably be seen as snowball sampling; where the researcher, through an initial contact, gets access to a further number of people interesting for the study (ibid: 184-185). As a male researcher from Sweden, the least problem is to find key informants who could further introduce participants to the research. This is so since the number of Europeans in Mutomo is quite limited and there are many people who greet you, want to shake your hand and, from their viewpoint, hopefully be your friend. The troublesome part of the purposive sampling is to choose among the interviewees so that they are relevant to the research and the social phenomenon being investigated (ibid: 414-415). Because purposive sampling is not just, according to Bryman (2008), a way of seeking to sample respondents randomly, but rather a non-probability form of sampling which tries to ensure that the sampled participants are relevant to the research.

The empirical findings are based on 13 interviews, including the three group interviews, which were made with community members. All interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed, and they were all tape-recorded with the consent of the respondents. The group interviews were

moreover made in three different sub-locations in Mutomo, in the centre of the villages close to the water-points where the local population came to fetch water on a daily basis. The first interview was made with four respondents, and the other two with approximately 15-20 participants, where one of these was held with only women. During the group interviews furthermore efforts were actively made to include and make all people's opinion heard, considering that the most vulnerable persons are often the least visible ones as well (Chambers, 2008: 41).

Four of the individual interviews were made with project coordinators or local staff at the organisations targeted in this study, and they were chosen on the basis of their position within the organisation, e.g. if he or she was in charge of one of the projects or if he or she was working with the specific project on an everyday basis. These interviews were done at the organisations local office. The rest of the individual interviews were made with people that could be regarded as representatives for the local community, more specifically teachers and pastors. These respondents were approached more selectively, to include as diverse spectrum of opinions as possible, considering that factors such as age, gender and social status (influence in the area) could probably be reflected in their answers. These interviews were either held at the primary school where the teachers were tutoring, or over a cup of tea in Mutomo town.

In addition, the research divided the interviews so that it initially focused on the organisations and the staff working with the various projects, in order to get a picture of what the organisations were doing in the area and how they view their own work. The daily excursions with the organisations out in the villages further facilitated gaining contact with representatives from the local community, which were in focus for the interviews during the second half of the research.

The ethnographic approach has been supplemented with a collection of written documents to give a more nuanced overview of relevant demographic figures such as the level of education, access to health and income. This is an important key feature in ethnographic studies which is easily forgotten when focus is turned to other parts of the methodology. And as argued by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), there are various kinds of material that are being produced by governments, NGOs and other civil society organisations which have generated large amounts of relevant documents.

### **2.3. Analysing empirical findings**

Two of the most appearing concepts when analysing empirical findings, using qualitative methods, are *analytic induction* and *grounded theory*. Analytic induction is used when the researcher has a rough idea and some sort of a hypothesis about a specific problem. The researcher often has pre-

knowledge about the topic and is acquainted with commonly used terms and vocabulary within the field of interest. It is moreover quite common, especially if the study is being done during a limited period of time, as this study, that the initial hypothesis has to be reformulated or redefined when the process of material collection is over. It could be argued that this is, in a sense, the most common scenario for researchers, but nevertheless, is grounded theory the most commonly used approach (Bryman, 2008: 537-539). The development of a hypothesis within grounded theory is in quite a contrast to the development of a hypothesis in analytic induction, since it is totally based on the gathered material (ibid: 541-543).

However, this study could be seen as trying to use, to a certain extent, both approaches. As discussed by George and Bennet (2005), the focus on analytical induction does not have to exclude a deductive approach, as I have understood that grounded theory would do. It could rather be seen as a theory-driven induction where feedback from the case studies are used in a complementary way to the theoretical framework and together with the empirical analysis tries to make analytical generalisations. Theory-driven induction as the approach furthermore encourages the researcher to analyse complex social phenomenon and investigate how, why and under which conditions certain situations tend to occur (George and Bennet, 2005: 240-241).

### **3. Theoretical framework**

#### **3.1. Organisation theory**

The research draws on organisation theory, more specifically institutional theory. New institutionalism will be used as the theoretical framework since it thoroughly analyses the connection between the institutions of society and its organisations. The process in which organisations tend to develop is complex and the theory of new institutionalism illuminates that it is not only the urge for efficiency and low transaction costs, but also other aspects, such as the recognition from the organisations institutional environment, which influence the process of how organisations change and behave. Through analysing the formal structure of organisations, new institutionalism is revealing not least the normative frameworks which influence organisational activities, and has impacts on the process which the organisations develop (Ahrne and Hedström, 1999: 88-89; Johansson, 1997: 71). The research will also discuss the significance of identifying all aspects of the institutional environment in society, formal as well as informal. This is of importance since a majority of the aid receiving countries are suffering from highly complex institutional environments (Wood and Gough, 2004: 83).

New institutionalism has been criticized for its alleged tendency to identify and define, but not explain, changes or developments within organisations (Ahrne and Hedström, 1999: 89). It is furthermore not always clear whether or not a change took place because of institutional reasons or if it is an urge from the organisation to decrease its transaction costs. It has also limits since it is hard to explain actions by individuals, which tends to be explained as actions that are being done unconsciously, on a routine or unreflectively. But as much with qualitative research; the strengths of new institutionalism is also its weakness (ibid: 89). The constant and thorough questioning of organisation's rationality, highlighting its routines and normative structure, is an asset of this theory when examining relations between different organisations.

### **3.2. The institutional environment**

As mentioned in the last section, to be able to understand the context in which these organisations are active, it is of interest to identify the institutional environment and the structures surrounding them. Wood and Gough (2004) argues that it is especially two main features, a legitimate state and a functional formal labour market, that distinguish the more developed economies from countries in the poorer regions of the world. The absence of solid institutions in society facilitate for individuals to take advantage of public means to improve their personal situation, trough clientelism, and it results in poor governance and a fragile situation for the majority of the population (Wood and Gough, 2004: 49). It is more over to a far extent norms, culture and repetitive behaviour within a society that constitutes institutions, not only written standards. That is what North (2005) calls the institutional environment, which according to him is produced by society's own history. He argues that powerful actors in society takes advantage and form certain institutions within society to further cement their power and influence. This will have unavoidable structural effects on society, shaping peoples belief of how things work, what the population can expect of society and how they should behave. But as acknowledged by Frödin (2012), to be able to define a state and in what sense its institutions are weak, it is necessary to include considerations regarding the whole institutional order of rights and obligations within a society. Frödin (2012) argues that members of society are intimately bound to the institutional context in which they are present, and that it is the institutions which determine the, as he calls them, agreed-upon situations, which are referred to as transaction domains. These transaction domains are in turn explained as “*a mutually agreed-upon definition of a situation according to which a particular logic of interaction, exchange or decision-making is considered socially accepted*” (Frödin, 2012: 277).

Transaction domains are evident both on a micro- as well as on a macro-level and create routines which members of society are faced with on a daily basis, as consumers, family members and voters. Actors confine with the role which they are expected to play in a certain setting, on the mere basis that it is what people usually do. And just as people are relying on transaction domains in their everyday life, are transaction domains visible on a macro-level, where socially accepted practices and principles are the foundation for government decisions (Frödin, 2012: 278-279). This can be complicated when major parts of the formal institutional environment, such as the political system, the public sector and main parts of the economy, are not acknowledged and most actors operate according to an informal institutional environment (ibid: 281).

A definition of a state could thus vary depending on the contextual domain consensus<sup>2</sup> regarding what rights to expect and what obligations to fulfil. In more advanced economies, where most people act within the formal institutions, the state compensates for market failures by providing its population with public goods. But this is not happening in Mutomo, where the formal institutions lack the capacity of supplying its population with their security needs. In other words, there is no domain consensus about the state as a public goods provider (cf Frödin, 2012: 278; Wood and Gough, 2004: 49-50). This vacuum has instead been filled up by NGOs, domestic as well as foreign, that are meant to take the lead and promote social and economic transformation. In the mean time, and to the extent where NGOs not are able to provide the population with public goods, clientelism has a major role to play. This is evident when considering election processes in countries where formal institutions have been put aside. Where there are personal winnings involved in an election process, such as permission authorised by the state to open a business, by voting or campaigning for the right candidate. This tends to result in a semi-formal institutional framework that is complemented with powerful individuals and politicians who are expected to deliver resources through their personal network (Frödin, 2012: 283).

### **3.3. The complexity of defining civil society**

The definition of civil society is complex and it is highly eligible to question to what extent NGOs at all can be seen to represent the civil society and grass-root levels. The fact that all kinds of organisations, not only not-for-profit and humanitarian, but also for-profit organisations and even companies want to be included in the “NGO-family” is one reason for this. Given that it comes down to a national standard and definition, what constitutes NGOs involved in development

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<sup>2</sup>Domain consensus is, in this paper, argued to be understood as a group of people sharing the same opinions regarding behavioural expectations, rights and obligations that apply to a set of transaction domains (Frödin, 2012: 278).

assistance continues to be heterogeneous across contexts. But at the same time as these actors have varying interests and objectives with their activities, the aid system is producing a standard template which local interest groups and grass-root organisations have to adapt to, to get access and be included into the international aid system (Tvedt, 2002: 368-369). The desire among the international community to promote civil society-led development could also be questioned since a strong civil society is only possible in an institutional environment where formal institutions are acknowledged by all partners in society; public, private or civic (Frödin, 2012: 279).

Civil society is, within organisational theory, interpreted as a counterpart to the state where individuals perform on a voluntary basis, in a layer of society where they are assumed to be equal, not only separated from the state but also from the market (Ahrne et al. 2003: 273-274). But even though NGOs might be seen as representatives for civil society, and the staff truly engages in their work, the agenda which the organisation works for is not always representative of the broader civil society. There are several reasons for this. One is that staff at the NGOs does not work voluntarily and that the NGOs most often are financed by national aid agencies, which inevitably are separated from neither the state nor the market. Additionally, it is important to take power-structures within the international aid system into consideration when trying to define the civil society in which the NGOs are active. Opposing value agendas between organisations as well as between states and NGOs could be essential to acknowledge when outlining how non-governmental activities can be involved within international development assistance (Ahrne and Hedström, 1999: 31; Tvedt, 2007: 34). It is these structures of economic power which are of relevance to understanding why NGOs have been criticised for being “strong on participatory rhetoric but weak on its practice” (Holmén: 2010: 10).

### **3.4. Legitimisation through isomorphism**

The creation of the gap between an organisation’s formal structure and its actual work activities is according to new institutional organisation theory, a result of the institutionalised contexts where the organisations formal structures have been created (Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 341). The institutional environment, in which organisations develop, encourages organisations to adjust their activities to fit in with the prevailing and accepted system. Doing so will increase their legitimacy among stakeholders and other organisations, boosting the organisations reputation. And as argued by Meyer and Rowan (1977), the urge among organisations to legitimise activities is often stronger than the urge for efficiency, since the legitimising is based on rationalised myths. These rationalised myths are explained as institutionalised ideas and opinions which are taken for granted

and unconsciously affect the actions of individuals and organisations within society (Ahrne and Hedström, 1999: 81-82; Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 340-342, 347-348). Or, as explained by Schelling, in Di Maggio and Powell (1983: 149):

*“Organisations in a structured field respond to an environment that consists of other organisations responding to their environment, which consists of organisations responding to an environment of organisations responses” - (Schelling, 1978; 14)*

Thus, new institutionalism explains changes and complex processes within an organisational field, through the concept of isomorphism. There are, according to Di Maggio and Powell (1983), three different isomorphic processes; normative, mimetic and coercive. Each of the processes occur dependent on different conditions, although they are all intertwined in the empirical setting and are therefore sometimes hard to distinguish.

*Normative isomorphism* is explained as organisational behaviour within a certain field of interest, which are characterised, mainly not in terms of efficiency, but rather by the incorporation of mechanisms that are legitimised through the surrounding environments expectations on the organisation (Ahrne and Hedström, 1999: 85-86; Di Maggio and Powell, 1983: 152). A process of normative isomorphism could lead to a situation where the staff, hence the organisations, merely are driven by status competition. This is most likely when a majority of the labour force within an organisational field is professionally trained. As acknowledged within the sector of health care, hospitals tend to operate according to a norm of social legitimation which quite often clashes with efficiency and rationality, and increase their range of services not because there is a demand for it but rather because they want to be able to offer the services which other hospitals provide (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983: 154).

*Mimetic isomorphism* is, on the other hand, the tendency among organisations to model themselves on other, more successful organisations, and occurs when an organisational field suffers from insecurity (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983: 151). The common denominator within the discourse of development has during the recent decades been uncertainty and the international community has been permeated with uncertainty of how to tackle poverty, inequality and underdeveloped economies. This uncertainty could, according to new institutionalism, be seen as a mechanism which has encouraged imitation among the actors within the international aid system and led to a situation where the organisations tend to model themselves on other organisations, which are perceived as successful and legitimate (ibid: 151-152). This is furthermore apparent the larger an

organisation gets, since it creates pressure on the organisation to be successful and provide the same services as other successful organisations provide. The mimetic isomorphism within the international aid system could be exemplified through the transformation of organisations which initially work on a small scale level with the so-called grass-roots, and due to the institutionalized environment are being pressured to structurally change their organisation to facilitate and legitimate their activities (Tvedt, 2002: 368-369).

The last of the identified concepts of isomorphism, *coercive isomorphism*, is explained as the process of organisational change or transformation which takes place based on political and cultural influence. It is argued that organisations, due to pressures from other organisations which they are dependent on and because of cultural expectations within society, change their activities and behaviour towards what is more accepted. But as pointed out by Di Maggio and Powell (1983), it is common that these changes are merely ceremonial and that it does not have to mean that the organisation change its activities in practices. The implementation of new guidelines, e.g. for gender equality, could sometimes be seen as a way to increase the conformity of the organisation's formal sentiment to the government's, rather than trying to include more women in the decision making process within the organisation (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983: 150).

### **3.5. Summary**

In short, the theoretical framework for this thesis emphasises the significance of understanding organisational life as a highly complex phenomenon, where it is essential to recognise relations between organisations. Concepts of isomorphism will be used to illustrate how organisations have an urge to be legitimised by other organisations and the institutional environment. The three forms of isomorphism are sometimes hard to distinguish from each other, which could be explained by the fact that they are all intertwined in the same empirical setting. However, as explained by Di Maggio and Powell, the conditions that they originate from are all different which has a direct impact on the outcome. The study is also applying the notion of transaction domains and domain consensus to further illuminate the issue of formal and informal institutions when defining civil society.

## **4. The field work context**

### **4.1. Plan International and World Vision in Mutomo**

Mutomo is, as major parts of the Kenyan society, permeated by corruption and a strong scepticism among the population towards politicians and officials (The Guardian, 2012-04-03). The widespread corruption is a distinctive detriment in the capacity to form reliable institutions, which many sub-Saharan African countries experienced after independence in the 1960's. Corruption and a history of incapacity to provide the people with security needs has furthermore been the main reason for why the international aid community has re-targeted development assistance through other channels than the state, such as the civil society and non-governmental activities (Fredholm, 2008; 62). Hence, the absence of trust in government officials together with the support which NGOs have generated, has resulted in the fact that there is no domain consensus among the local population in Mutomo, particularly in viewing the state as the main provider of public goods.

Instead, as mentioned, the non-governmental activity is high in Mutomo. Plan International is at the moment running several relief programs, which were initiated in September 2011 when the drought in the horn of Africa was at worst. They have since then prolonged their stay and are at the moment targeting primary schools in Ikanga, located in the south of the district of Mutomo, where they are delivering food and water supplies as a mean to make children stay in school. World Vision has been active in Mutomo since 2007, initially also involved with relief projects, with the special focus on children's rights. But they have recently changed their policies and are now implementing a so-called capabilities approach, with the aim of "help to self-help" to empower the local population (World Vision).

This approach is the most common among NGOs active in today's sub-Saharan Africa. It conforms quite well to the sentiment of diminishing the role of the state and the 'rights approach' that have been influencing civil society-led development, and the alternative development paradigm. The idea is that projects are to be initiated together with local communities, and that community members are meant to participate in the build-up or the construction of the project. The thought is further that the community members are supposed to be responsible for the project, so that it can become sustainable in the long run. It is also among the most central parts of World Visions work that the changes will lead to a level where the local population no longer is dependent on the organisation, but where they rather access the possibility of changing their own lives and empower themselves (World Vision). Chambers (1997) argues that this is a central part of the development process and that it is necessary for social and economic transformation to

occur. He moreover illuminates the main obstacles and errors which need to be identified and structurally changed for participatory development to take place. According to him, it is the complex institutional settings which make changes inevitably on all levels: institutional, personal and professional (Chambers, 1997: 210-211).

#### **4.2. The issue of accountability**

Both Plan International and World Vision are dependent on funds, either through grants or sponsorships, to finance their activities in Mutomo. World Vision's major financiers are private donors and companies in the US, but they are also financed by the US national aid agency (USAID). They raise additional money through independent sponsorships, where private persons can sponsor a child in the poor region of the world on a monthly basis, who then acts like an ambassador for his or her community and makes it possible for World Vision to increase their activities in that particular community. Plan International is also raising some money through sponsorship programs, but is, just as World Vision, highly dependent on national aid agencies, donations from companies or private persons and grants from the European Union to maintain their presence in Mutomo.

Thus, the organisations are accountable towards the community members on the grass-root level, who they strive to lift out of poverty. However, they are not only accountable towards the intended beneficiaries, but also to the stakeholders in Europe and North America, who expect that the organisations efficiently utilize the funds to alleviate poverty and social injustices, and increase the opportunities for people in marginalised areas. This is an important issue to highlight: NGOs, through the funding from stakeholders overseas, have a responsibility to try to be accountable towards two different actors. On one side, the intended beneficiaries on a grass-root level, and on the other side, the stakeholders who wants to see results in the sense of decreased poverty and socio-economic change.

### **5. Analysis**

This chapter will present the empirical findings, collected during February and March 2012 in Mutomo. The findings are based on the three projects studied in the research; the sponsor a child programme, the food relief programme and the water project. The findings will therefore be presented in three sections, each section representing each project. There is however an additional section, *weak institutional environment*, where findings are presented to illuminate the importance

of acknowledging formal institutions in a development context. There will thereafter be an analytical discussion which aims to connect the findings to the theoretical framework.

## **5.1. Sponsor a child**

The child sponsorship programme in Mutomo was initiated in 2007 and aims to improve the well-being of children through a sponsorship, where individuals are able to support a child and its community on a monthly basis. It is also possible, as with other sponsorship programs, for donors to extend their support through the sending of gifts to the children and the community. World Vision is a Christian organisation and focuses on children's rights and its policy of ensuring the rights of the children conforms more or less to the declaration of human rights for the children:

*“Programs supported by sponsorship focus on the well-being of children by enabling families and communities to improve their health, basic education, spiritual and emotional nurture, protection from abuse, violence and exploitation, and development of sustainable livelihoods.” (WV Child Sponsorship Policy 2003)*

The programme is supervised by World Vision's local offices who together with the local community decide which children should be included in the programme. The children are generally elected on the basis of who is the most vulnerable and exposed, and in most need of assistance. However, some community members were sceptical and questioned the election process:

*“...it is not the most needed that are being elected for the programs. A child with school uniform can be elected while the most vulnerable are still without help.” – (B.1. 2012-02-28)*

Thus, there are indications of a discrepancy between World Vision and the community of which children that are most vulnerable. Furthermore, in contrast to earlier projects which have been run in the area, World Vision is working, with a universal approach, which means that the children will not benefit directly from funding. The elected child will merely act as an ambassador for the community, and the funding will be used to improve the situation for the whole community. A universal approach is used by many of the organisations working with sponsorship of children in third world countries, but there are also organisations which use a so-called targeted approach, where the children benefits directly from the program. Thus, as shown by the quotes below, there

tends to be confusion among the local population of how universal approaches are functioning, especially when the two different approaches are used in the same area.

*“There is a problem of understanding how universal policies are working. The community prefers the targeting policies since they see instant results, even though it leads to further exclusion and that even more children eventually will need the same targeted policy” – (B1.1. 2012-02-28)*

*“In general, the opinion is that the targeted approach works better, because it goes straight to the children’s needs. And the information given stated that the support was going to run all the way to a university level. The targeted children within Kenya Compassion have it better than those within the programs of World Vision” – (B.1. 2012-02-28)*

It seems that targeted policies are often preferred by the local community since the elected children benefit straight from the funding. This is obviously a natural reaction from parents and other community members, who notice an instant improvement of the children’s situation. It also means that the local population have been more sceptical to World Visions child sponsorship program, and in some cases their projects overall. There has been confusion and reluctance against the program, due to the fact that they did not understand why they did not see any direct impacts or improvement of the elected children’s everyday life. Earlier projects driven by e.g. Action Aid and Kenya Compassion were using a targeted approach, where paid school fees and school uniforms had an instant and visible impact for the children and their families.

## **5.2. Water project**

World Vision is also running a water project in Mutomo, together with the Kenyan water ministry and representatives for the local population, to facilitate people’s access to water. The landscape and the location of the villages determine the easiest way of harvesting water, through either rock-catchment dams or dams connected to rivers. Rock-catchment dams are planned at the bottom of a mountainside where dams are constructed so that the water will run down the mountain and into the constructed dam. It is also common to link two dams, and sometimes more than that, to each other to increase the total amount of water that can be harvested. At the moment World Vision are working to improve existing rock-catchments, and adding extensions in the cases where it is possible. But many of the rock catchments are old and the maintenance has been more or less absent over the years, which results in tremendous amounts of water going to waste. This was recognized by the elderly in one of the sub-locations, during an interview:

*“At the moment, there is so much water going to waste during rainy season since there are no possibilities of harvesting the water. The dams are too small and all the water goes out into the rivers and all the way to the ocean” – (B.1. 2012-02-28)*

Hence, there is not just an issue with water during the drought, but also during rainy season. As in other dry places on earth, if it was possible for them to store and harvest the water, people could have had access to water all year around. This could be achieved not necessarily through irrigation systems, but with the help of tanks or at least some sort of a roof on top of the dams.

For the villages situated near a river the idea is to construct dams connected to the river so to trap the water for a longer period of time. This means that a certain place, e.g. a sandbank close to the river, is strategically chosen and dug out so that rainfall will fill the river and hence the dam. Even though it does not always work, the idea is that both rock-catchments and dams connected to rivers should trap water during the rainy season and conserve it throughout the year to provide people with water. But the water project is not only aiming at providing the area with the access to water, it is also aiming to inform about sanitation and clean water. Because even though rock catchments and water dams give the population access to water, it does not provide them with clean water. World Vision is therefore informing the communities about the dangers of drinking water without boiling it and also providing the local population with tablets which disperse in the water, and destroys dangerous bacteria (B. 2012-02-06).

World Vision has the goal of working actively with a community based approach to all their programmes, and their partners, as well as the children and their families are meant to be involved in the identification of problems, in the decision making progress and the prioritization of solutions that can impact and improve their lives (C. 2012-02-07). But the involvement of the local community is sometimes hard to rely on, and according to one of the employees at the organisation, as illustrated below, the issue of lacking basic needs is one of the main reasons for this:

*“The participation and involvement of the local community is at times hard to rely on. This is due to several reasons, amongst others, do people have troubles engaging in various development problems, as e.g. the construction of a water point or something, if they do not have food or water for the day. Their engagement will decrease and they will spend their days searching for food or fetching water instead” – (C. 2012-02-07)*

Hence, the absence of food and water become a main obstacle for people to engage in non-governmental activities. But, as with World Vision's universal approach within the child sponsorship program, it is also an issue of the population's understanding of the projects and what impacts it will have for the community. The lacking understanding among the community members is moreover dependent on the amount of information that is given by the organisation responsible for the projects. This was acknowledged by one of the interviewees during a meeting, when the issue of participation was raised:

*“One of the main problems with many projects is communication and making sure that the local population are aware of what the project means for them and the community. People will be sceptical to projects they do not know how they will work. But if people are properly informed and understand the projects, the projects will hopefully improve as well.” – (B.1.1. 2012-02-28)*

The quote indicates that the communication between the NGOs and the community members are lacking, and that the NGOs more or less seems to assume that the intended beneficiaries have some sort of pre-knowledge of how projects are run or what they might imply for the community. It is moreover an indication of a discrepancy between the organisation that is responsible for the project and the community members, and it seems like it could be one of the core issues regarding participatory development and development from below. NGOs eager to show instant results towards stakeholders has lead to a situation where the projects are not anchored within the community, which in turn has direct impacts on the local populations understanding of the projects. This is failing to generate a domain consensus of what to expect from non-governmental activities and hence insecurity against their presence. The deficiency in understanding the projects could furthermore be argued to have significance for the sustainability of the projects, which are supposed to be run by the community after the initial phase of starting up the project.

The sustainability of the projects is another issue that has received attention among scholars and is something which, according to one of the project coordinators, is apparent in Mutomo:

*“The beneficiaries do not have the capacity of how to operate and manage the water points, so after some time, the projects fail. E.g. if a pump breaks down, there is a high probability that the projects will fail. Then what to be done? The organisations must do some self-assessment so that partners at the community level have the capacity to run the projects when the organisations have left the area.” – (B. 2012-02-06)*

The issue of projects not being sustainable is not new, but the quote elucidates the problem that occurs when NGOs terminate their activities in an area. It also illuminates that the communication between NGOs and community members must improve, which was also a common opinion among the locals targeted in this study:

*“The NGOs will not be here forever. When they are gone, everything dies out. There needs to be coordination between the various actors to learn how to make the most out of the present resources” – (B.1. 2012-02-28)*

Several of the respondents participating in the study witnessed an absence of coordination between the non-governmental activities. Since the responsibility for development to a far extent has been put on NGOs and civil society, the Kenyan government has been prone to accept a number of organisations to enter and initiate projects in Mutomo. However, the lack of coordination seems to be an unavoidable effect of the semi-formal institutional environment which exists in Kenya. Where the state, as defined in the beginning of the paper, is incapable of providing the support needed to make non-governmental actions effective. This is a distinctive characteristic of a society permeated by clientelism and an insufficient domain consensus in the state as the main coordinator, both among community members and the organisations themselves.

Two employees at one of the organisations saw this as the main problem with their activities in Mutomo:

*“There is a lacking coordination. When one organisation leaves a project site, it is not unusual to meet another organisation on the way in there “...” and there has never been a meeting with any officials with coordination as the purpose.” – (D. 2012-02-09)*

*“There are overriding interests with a lack of coordination and communication. A pity, since we are serving the same community and needs” – (D.3. 2012-02-24)*

That NGOs active in the same area, with the same purpose of alleviating poverty and improving the situation for the community, are un-coordinated so that they end up at the very same school at the very same time, is quite shocking. But it also indicates how non-functioning the important Kenyan institutions are. The quote below further illustrates how clientelism tends to undermine the formal institutions and is a concrete example of the intricacy which surrounds projects imposed by non-governmental actors.

*“The communication between the NGO and the community needs to be improved. They come and go, and then leave the project for someone to take over, but that person misuses it for their own purposes and the projects collapse. It should be improved with awareness. If the local community knew what to expect, then it would not be as easy to take advantage of the situation. Furthermore, let the community feel like it is their organisation – then the communication will be improved and not met with hostility. – (D.2. 2012-02-22)*

The quote above is also an indication of the need to further engage the various development projects within the grass-roots, so that community members more easily can engage and feel that they are involved in the project. And as stated by one of the project coordinators below, were the employees at the organisation’s local offices well aware of the situation:

*“That is why World Vision is launching IPM (Integrated Programming Model) // The aim is that IPM can be the catalyst which brings the resources together, so that lacking coordination will be a part of history” – (A. 2012-02-01)*

The IPM (The Integrated Programming Model) is a recently initiated process by World Vision’s local office in Mutomo, which aims to synchronize all development activities in the district. The anticipation is that the model will be the catalyst which brings the resources together so that lacking coordination will be a part of history in Mutomo. The purpose is furthermore to synchronize its own and other non-governmental activities, as well as private and state-led projects (A. 2012-02-01).

### **5.3. Food relief program**

Plan International is active in several parts of Kenya, but Mutomo is one of the few places where they are running relief projects. The relief projects in Ikanga, south of Mutomo Town, aim at delivering food and water tanks to primary schools that have not received any assistance, or not sufficient assistance, from the state. Plan International prolonged their stay after the extensive drought during the autumn 2011, and even though their work has been successful in the sense that it has saved lives and increased the attendance in school, it has also faced problems. These problems has most of the time been solved, thanks to innovative teachers and other community member’s assistance:

*“There were problems with transportation, but it has been solved thanks to parents and people in the community who has helped out and carried it.” – (D.1. 2012-02-21)*

The problems were, as pointed out by the quote above, mostly of logistic character since the infrastructure in the district is underdeveloped. But in cases where teachers and other community members could not help out, it often led to a situation where the targeted primary schools had to wait for several weeks before the water and promised food, such as beans and maize, were delivered. And, there is a clear consensus, both among project coordinators and representatives for the local community in Mutomo, that relief programs are essential not only for keeping the children attendant in school, but also for the survival of hundreds of families in the area. As a teacher said during an interview:

*“World Visions presence is very important, because it is supplying the community with the needs to survive and live everyday life”- (B.2. 2012-02-27)*

One of the pastors supported the teacher’s opinion:

*“If it was not for these organisations, the community would be in a really bad status // Before the NGOs came there was a low attendance in school and many children were dying from hunger and starvation // It has had great impact on decreasing ignorance and also gender violence and abuses have decreased” – (C.3. 2012-03-01)*

As stressed by the quotes, there are indications of NGOs making a tangible difference in marginalised areas like Mutomo, where attempts to alleviate poverty and social injustices are successful. However, poverty levels are not decreasing, and there are concerns among the project coordinators that the relief programs tend to create a dependency. One of the coordinators argued that it threatened to pacify the community members:

*“One could talk about a pacification of the local populations and the creation of a new dependency. If Plan leaves the area, the schools are doomed to go under. Relief, relief, relief, but there does not seem to be any long-term plan. It should not end with relief. There must be rehabilitation and then the creation of resilience.” – (D. 2012-02-09)*

Thus, there are signs pointing to the fact that the relief projects are successful, in the sense of alleviating the worst effects of poverty. But there are also indications suggesting that it is not

enough, and that it is not a sustainable solution. However, the idea with relief projects is to alleviate starvation through emergency actions and to facilitate the implementation of sustainable long-term projects, which can lead to social and economic transformation and improved living standards. Unfortunately does it not work, and it seems like the targeted groups tend to be the same every time. This was even recognized by those responsible for the projects:

*“The target groups are always the same, and all resources are spent in a small area and on one targeted group. There is a misuse of resources” – (D. 2012-02-09)*

Hence, much of the problems consists of the targeted groups always being the same, and because of the created dependency, it is leading to a situation where most resources are spent on the same group of people, actually preventing further development to take place. This was a regularly brought up issue when interviewing the coordinators:

*“These organisations possess a lot of resources and there must be a way of pulling the resources together. They must be pulled together, since the organisations are not here only for relief, but to develop the community. SIDA and a lot of organisations have been here for many years, but the problems persist. So what have the NGOs been doing so far?” – (A. 2012-02-01)*

As mentioned, concerns are regularly raised among the project coordinators at the two organisations that relief projects not are enough, and that resources spent on relief projects could be used more effectively in other forms. Or rather, that the resources have to be used more effectively, to stop the misuse and facilitate for social and economic transformation to take place, instead of preventing it.

Moreover, what the three projects appear to have in common is that there seems to be a lacking understanding of the projects among the local population, as in the case of the child sponsorship program and the confusion of the different approaches. The lacking understanding of the projects is in turn dependent on the NGOs abilities of anchoring them within the communities, to more easily engage the local population. However, the NGOs are experiencing difficulties with anchoring their projects, which according to the empirical findings seems to be a result of a combination of lacking support from the Kenyan government and too much of short-term objectives. And as mentioned by one of the employees at World Vision, the absence of food and water is another factor which is of relevance to include. It is amongst others, these factors, which put together, lead to a situation where non-governmental activities are implemented without any proper coordination.

#### **5.4. A weak institutional environment**

The lacking coordination is something which all of the projects seem to have in common. It does not only lead to an ineffective donor climate, with loads of resources being wasted, it also pacifies the local community to an extent, in the sense that it perpetuates the structures with weak institutions and a weak society. The continuous flow of relief projects, as stated earlier, rather prevents, than promotes social and economic transformation to take place. This view of weak institutions and a society permeated by corruption was shared by many of the respondents:

*“Government could play a role, but they have misused it so much, that people are hostile against the government” – (D.2. 2012-02-22)*

This was a frequent response to what role the government could play in improving the quality of the various projects, and it shed light to the deeply rooted mistrust towards the government and state officials. The lacking trust towards the Kenyan government was common also among persons working for the NGOs, but there was still a hope of strengthening the relations, so that future projects could have a stronger impact and more effectively fight poverty:

*“The relationship between the government and the various organisations needs to be improved, because there is a lack of support from governments which has a direct impact on the coordination of the different programs. Major issue is the lack of support from governments.” – (A. 2012-02-09)*

As stated by the quote above, more governmental involvement could increase the support and the coordination of the non-governmental activities. But representatives for the local population were continuously sceptical and argued that as soon as the NGOs leave a project site the person in charge of the project uses his or her position and take advantage of it. A teacher put it like this:

*“MPs (member of parliaments) and politicians who represent the community forget about the community. They tend to prioritize their own family and their own areas of the community. One could say that there is a discrepancy between what the representatives say they will do and what they are doing”. - (D.1. 2012-02-21)*

But to strengthen formal institutions and be able to increase the involvement of governmental support, would probably reduce the advantages of clientelism and improve the opportunities of state officials actively advocating for the implementation of future projects and programs.

Moreover, almost all community members are positive towards the presence of NGOs, not only because they help to alleviate starvation and hunger, but also because they tend to be the voice of the community, providing the rest of the world with information about their situation as well as keeping an eye on the politicians. That politicians have respect for the organisations is one of the main advantages with the presence of NGOs, according to one of the pastors in Mutomo Town:

*“Politicians are very afraid and insecure against NGOs, because the NGOs know that the politicians have taken advantage of the ignorance among the people” – (C.3. 2012-03-01)*

This is an important aspect, that the mere presence of NGOs decreases tendencies of power abuse among state officials. Moreover, just as evident as the domain consensus among community members seems to be on the positive impacts of non-governmental activities, the role of the state demonstrates an absent of the domain consensus. There are clear indications pointing to the fact that there is no domain consensus for the state as a provider of public goods, nor a consensus regarding what to expect from the various non-governmental activities in the area. This is illustrated by the following quotes:

*“The ministry of water should be involved together with the community so that the water points are a central feature in the villages” – (B.1. 2012-02-28)*

*“World Vision has said that they are willing to chip in and lead water from the big rivers and build irrigations systems, and if the government could be involved and were willing to be involved it would mean a lot to Mutomo” – (C.3. 2012-03-01)*

All in all, it seems evident that there is a diversity of opinions among the community members of what to expect from the non-governmental activities in the area. And it is also quite clear that the opinions among the community members differ substantially from the project coordinators and the NGOs way of working. Hence, there seems to be a need to drastically improve the communication between the different actors, not only to increase the efficiency of the projects, but also to be able to fulfil the idea of participatory development and development from below.

## **5.5. Analytical discussion**

The findings presented in this research paper designate that non-governmental activities in Mutomo are invaluable for the community, alleviating poverty and starvation as well as increasing

the attendance among children in primary school. Nevertheless, the situation is far from ideal and poverty levels are continuously high. Concerns have been raised both among community members and NGO personnel, about the complexity of the situation and the many troublesome aspects which the non-governmental activities imply. However, the main issue seems to be the incapacity among present NGOs in Mutomo to effectively eradicate poverty, and provide the community and its population with the public goods essential for further social and economic transformation to take place.

There are, as presented in the last section, several reasons to this incapacity, both on a macro- and micro-level. The absence of a strong formal institutional environment is a central aspect to take into account, especially since analysing non-governmental activities, which have been promoted as the main provider of security needs during the last decades. Furthermore, the findings indicates that it is eligible to question to what extent the civil society and NGOs can promote social and economic transformation in the context of Mutomo, considering the weak institutional environment in the district.

#### **5.5.1. Insecurity and clientelism**

The lack of sustainability of the projects could be seen as a direct result of insufficient support from the state and local authorities, and indicates that it is a key mechanism to understand the inability of promoting social and economic transformation in the long run. A main reason to why insufficient support from authorities endangers the sustainability of projects is that it leaves organisations with an insecurity of how to approach, and implement, different projects. This insecurity, as suggested by Di Maggio and Powell (1983), often lead to a situation of mimetic isomorphism, where organisations tend to copy each other's approaches, something which is apparent in the district of Mutomo. As presented in the analysis chapter, there were a number of employees who raised concerns regarding the sustainability of the projects, concerning both World Vision's water project and Plan International's food relief program. And it seems evident, especially in relation to relief programs that the organisations tend to copy each other's approaches, independent of the effectiveness or sustainability of the programs.

It could also be argued that lacking support from the Kenyan state is an indirect reason to why project coordinators at the two NGOs in Mutomo, fear the creation of a new dependency. Through regular relief projects, which indisputably are necessary for the survival of thousands of people in Mutomo, are the NGOs undermining efforts made to strengthening Kenyan institutions. This is so,

due to the fact that the NGOs accept contemporary structures of power and resources, by competing for funds from stakeholders to be able to maintain and expand their activities.

The findings also demonstrate a discrepancy within and among the NGOs. Employees from both of the organisations targeted in this study, were well aware of the circumstances and repeatedly stated that their work has a great impact and alleviates the worst effects of poverty, but also implied that resources are misused, that there is a creation of a dependency and that there is a lacking coordination of the activities in the area. These issues have a tendency to not be acknowledged higher up in the organisation, where decision makers are more prone to be accountable towards the stakeholders than towards the so-called beneficiaries whose situation they initially strive to improve. The inefficiency and misuse of resources are strongly intertwined with the lacking coordination of activities in the area. Since the state was replaced by non-governmental actors as the main providers of public goods, there has been a vacuum created of how to coordinate the various actions and activities. This vacuum encourages transaction domains, which rest on an institutional framework highly dependent on clientelism, and further perpetuates the weak institutional environment. It could be argued that the transaction domains, which in a sense are a result of the semi-formal institutional environment, in turn legitimises the clientelism and the very same institutional framework. This is undermining the possibilities of reaching a domain consensus of how to strengthen and involve people within the formal institutions.

Weak institutions within the Kenyan society might also have a direct impact on the efforts by NGOs to implement projects with a so-called universal approach. As mentioned in the first part of chapter five, there is a tendency for confusion among the local population towards the organisations different approaches. World Vision's efforts of running the child sponsorship program with a universal approach, so that the whole community can benefit from the private donations and not only the specific child, are facing obstacles since the community members would rather engage in projects with other organisations that work with a targeted approach. But even though the targeted child's livelihood is improved, it does not improve the situation for the community, and not even the situation for his or her brothers and sisters. There will always be more children to target, which is why many organisations work with a universal approach. But weak institutions within society are undermining the possibilities of implementing such policies, since a weak institutional environment is encouraging clientelism, which in contrast to a universal approach builds on individualism. The weak institutions within the Kenyan society could therefore be considered an obstacle to the possibilities of providing the population with essential public goods.

### **5.5.2. Accountability and legitimacy**

Accountability is furthermore a central aspect which is often highlighted but rarely thoroughly investigated and analysed. The NGOs are highly connected to the market and therefore also dependent on the funds which stakeholders provides. This gives stakeholders, e.g. national aid agencies, companies and private donors, an advantage to decide, or at least influence, what the international development assistance should look like.

The empirical findings made in this study indicate that the advantage among stakeholders towards the NGOs, pressures the organisations to adapt their activities so that it conforms to what the stakeholders expect. This creates a culture and environment where development assistance tends to lose its original aim of promoting social and economic transformation, and instead concentrates on securing its survival and strengthening its support. This is done, using the concept of Meyer and Rowan (1977), through the legitimisation of the organisation's activities towards stakeholder's expectations.

Thus, the organisations involved in the international aid system can be seen as trying to legitimise their work, rather than efficiently eradicate poverty. It should however be noted, that it is most probably not an active choice or the objective of the organisations, but rather the result of a competitive environment, where non-governmental and private actors involuntarily are forced to compete for clients, to be able to fund their activities and grow as organisations. It is a distinctive characteristic of coercive isomorphism, where political influences force an organisation to adapt to a new political landscape, to be able to legitimise its work and secure its survival (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983: 150).

The same tendency can be observed when considering the widespread difficulty of involving the local population and the so-called beneficiaries within various development projects. As presented under paragraph 5.2, concerning the involvement of community members within the water project, the findings indicate that community members quite often experience that they do not understand the meaning of a project. Or that they consider themselves excluded from a project initially meant to improve their own situation. This could partly be explained by the fact that the organisations have too much of a short-term objective when implementing the projects. As already mentioned, the pressure from stakeholders to show results and the fear of other organisations receiving their funds, easily makes participatory development and the involvement of the grass-roots stronger in the rhetoric than in practice. Hence, short-term thinking could be said to be driven by status competition, which in a sense is a result of the surrounding environments expectations on the

organisation, which is the main attribute of normative isomorphism (cf Ahrne and Hedström, 1999: 85-86; Di Maggio and Powell, 1983: 152).

The urge among NGOs to be legitimised by its surroundings, could also be argued to be the result of a “marketisation” of the development discourse. The international development assistance has to a further extent been connected to, and made dependent of, the market, even though the advocacy for the radical market-driven development was stalled after limited results during the 1980s. But the notion of market led development has persisted, through non-governmental and humanitarian organisations. The organisations are fighting for the same cause, to alleviate and eradicate poverty and social injustices. Nevertheless, since they are connected to and dependent on the market, they are also competing not only for resources and “clients”, but also for political power and institutional legitimacy (cf Di Maggio, Powell, 1983: 150). This is another example of how the concept of isomorphism is a good mean to illuminate the politics that pervade much of the organisational life, and which become evident when considering relational issues and the institutional and financial interactions that emerge between NGOs and their stakeholders (Di Maggio, Powell, 1983: 150; Tvedt, 2007: 41-42).

## **6. Conclusion**

This study has discussed and analysed the problems and possibilities related to non-governmental activities in the context of Mutomo, Kenya. The study has been based on empirical observations made during a minor field study in the district between January and March 2012, and its focus has been on issues regarding accountability and development from below. It has used organisation theory, more specifically institutional theory, to illuminate the importance of acknowledging organisational relations and to reveal organisational behaviour in various settings. This has facilitated an increased understanding of the intricacy surrounding non-governmental activity in a development context and elucidates the various issues concerning civil society lead development. The study has furthermore recognised the significant role of the institutional framework, and has argued that it is crucial to identify the institutional environment in an explicit context, to be able to analytically discuss and understand the impact which non-governmental activities might have for a specific area.

The study concludes that the non-governmental activities in Mutomo are indispensable for the local community, in the sense of alleviating the worst effects of poverty and contributing to an increasing attendance among children in school. But, the study is also pointing to the fact that it is of importance to acknowledge the tremendous challenges and problems which the NGOs are

facing and that non-governmental activities, in its current condition, hardly can be seen as a long-term, or sustainable, solution. This is due to various reasons, but foremost because of the tendency among NGOs to fail with involving the local population within the projects. The core idea of participatory development and development from below is, as already pointed out, to involve the so-called beneficiaries. However, instead of involving the local population, it can be argued that the NGOs are pacifying and making the local community dependent of the non-governmental activities.

Another of the main issues and problems concerns the accountability aspect, which during recent years has been a central feature within the development discourse. It is commonly used in research, but if it is not thoroughly investigated and analysed, significance and credibility diminishes. This can lead to a situation where the intricate, but yet so important, structural relations and asymmetries of power and resources within contemporary society are neglected. It is furthermore these socio-economic inequalities which are reinforced through non-governmental activities, and is the foundation of what this study claims to be the paradox of accountability. At the same time as NGOs alleviate the worst effects of poverty, they are also competing against other NGOs to receive more grants from stakeholders. This is inevitably leading to a situation where the NGOs have to be accountable towards both parties. On the one hand, the beneficiaries who they initially intends to assist. On the other hand, the stakeholders, in the sense of legitimising their activities and show commitment in the fight against poverty, to receive grants and funds to expand their activities.

This study argues that NGOs are intimately bound to a paradox of accountability, which they do not have the capacity to handle. The NGOs have in general too much of a self-interest as an organisation, and are too dependent on the market to have the responsibility as the major promoter of social and economic transformation. This study continue to argue that civil society could play a major role within development assistance, but that it is of importance to recognize institutional pre-conditions when initiating development projects. As concluding remarks, the study encourages prospective research on the topic to identify the multifaceted relationships which surrounds civil society lead development. The anticipation is that future research can contribute to an enhanced comprehension of the relationship between stakeholders, NGOs and grass-root levels, but also to reveal fundamental causes to structural socio-economic inequalities and generate a more positive attitude towards development assistance overall.

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