GOVERNANCE IN POST-CONFLICT SETTINGS

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Abstract

This paper explores the major streams of thought on governance and the way this concept has been implemented in state collapse and post-conflict reconstruction settings. Ever since the term emerged in development thinking, governance has been translated by dominant official and academic literature into sets of neutral sounding technical functions describing administrative effectiveness of state institutions. In contrast to these highly management-oriented policy discourses, state-society literature presents a more political or power-oriented approach. This alternative stream of writing focuses largely on developing a better understanding of the different state-society relations and the way in which power and authority are structured in various social contexts. In this perspective, a growing number of scholars portray war and situations of state collapse as systems of social transformation, which can result in alternative forms of legitimacy and authority. This paper argues, however, that it are exactly these forms of informal local governance that are often neglected, forgotten or not even noticed when state reconstruction and general development projects are put into practice.
1. Introduction

With the end of the Cold War, ‘governance’ emerged for the first time prominently on the international development and academic agenda. Development assistance was increasingly made conditional upon fundamental reforms in line with donor’s perceptions of ‘good governance’. In the aftermath of 9/11 and with the subsequent securitisation of development policies, governance appeared again on the international agenda, this time as an important component of global security. It was acknowledged that weak or collapsed states posed a serious threat, not only to the national security of individual countries, but also to the international order of states itself. At the same time, the international community has assumed that it is both necessary and possible to reconstruct good governance practices in weak and collapsed states in order to maintain global stability.

Despite the omnipresence of governance in official development discourse, it remains an elusive concept, both in theory and in practice. Not only does the term have many different meanings, its extensive use without proper specification risks making it a hollow concept. This study, based on an extensive literature review, sets out to provide some critical insights and clarifications into the meaning and utility of governance as a concept. On the one hand, this paper explores the various competing and sometimes even contradictory efforts to conceptualise governance. On the other hand, it analyses the implementation of this term in the official development projects. More specifically, the paper focuses on the implementation of governance in the context of state collapse and post-conflict reconstruction efforts, today seen as critical for global security.

2. Conceptualizing ‘governance’

During the 1990s, ‘governance’ became widespread in international development circles. Although a substantial body of literature on governance has since than been developed, conceptualizing the term has proven to be rather difficult. Governance is a somewhat elastic concept and it has been interpreted in many different ways. At its simplest, governance refers to: “the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)” (UN ESCAP, 2004). However, in general, governance has been used in more specific ways. It is often seen as a technical term for describing the administrative effectiveness and efficiency of state institutions (Beall, 2005). Broadly two types of definitions have emerged: one is rather technical and policy-oriented, the other, especially popular in academic writings, is more society-oriented.

2.1. Governance in policy discourse

Governance was a rarely used term in development circles until the World Bank introduced it in a 1989 report on Sub-Saharan Africa. In the following years, the idea of governance became central in official development thinking. Donors increasingly started to see certain types of governance in many third world countries as problematic and obstructive to their development policies. Consequently, they acknowledged the need for adjustments to create a more ‘enabling environment’ for the economy. Fundamental governance reforms were also necessary to promote multiparty democracy. With the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War, democracy has been elevated to apparently unchallenged supremacy and became the only legitimate political forum.

According to the World Bank (1992) the concept of governance refers to “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development”. Subsequently, the Bank (1992, 1994) identified three distinct aspects of governance: (i) the form of the political regime; (ii) the process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources; and (iii) the capacity of a government to design, formulate and implement policies and discharge functions. This definition has proven to be highly influential. A multitude of multilateral and bilateral agencies uses this characterisation, sometimes with their own supplements. The Inter-American Development Bank, for example, puts special emphasis on the modernization of public administrations (World Bank, 1994).

Other agencies have given different, less economically oriented definitions of governance. For example, UNDP (1995, 1997) identifies governance as: “the set of values, policies and institutions by which a society manages its economic, political and social affairs through interactions among the government, civil society and private sector”. Charlick offers another definition for USAID: “the effective management of public affairs through the generation of a regime (set of rules) accepted as legitimate, for the purpose of promoting and enhancing societal values sought by individuals and groups” (Hyden et al., 2005).

Confronted with the problematic nature of many governance systems, the notion of ‘good governance’ became a general guiding principle for major donor agencies in the distribution of development and relief assistance. The World Bank, who has been very influential in elevating this concept to international orthodoxy, describes good governance as “central to creating and sustaining an environment which fosters strong and equitable development, and it is an essential complement to sound economic policies” (World Bank, 1992). This rather normative concept identified a group of policy ideas, which were seen as a model for effective economic and political management (Beall,
Governance in post-conflict settings is structured in various societal contexts (Doornbos, 2001). Governance is not seen as a set of technical functions but as a way in which power and authority relations are understood of the different state-society relations. The society-oriented stream of writing on governance has indeed been largely concerned with developing a better analysis of state-market relations and the effectiveness of some government bodies (Sisk et al., 2001). Political science theorists have even differentiated four major types of decentralization (de-concentration, delegation, devolution and privatization), all referring to deferent levels of power and resource transfers. It is believed that this type of government can improve governance by fostering accountability, transparency, efficiency, improved service delivery and popular participation (ibid.; Martinussen, 1997).

Policy literature concerned with local governance is mainly focussed on the theme of decentralization. It is seen as an important component of the good governance model and its serves as the dominant overarching analytical and policy framework towards local governance. The concept of decentralization refers to the general process of "transferring political and administrative authority to subnational government bodies" (Sisk et al., 2001). Political science theorists have even differentiated four major types of decentralization (de-concentration, delegation, devolution and privatization), all referring to different levels of power and resource transfers. It is believed that this type of government can improve governance by fostering accountability, transparency, efficiency, improved service delivery and popular participation (ibid.; Martinussen, 1997).

2.2. Governance in society orientated literature

The society-oriented stream of writing on governance has largely been concerned with developing a better analysis and understanding of the different state-society relations. Governance is not seen as a set of technical functions but as a way in which power and authority relations are structured in various societal contexts (Doornbos, 2001). Of critical importance for understanding state-society relations in third world countries is the highly influential work of Joel S. Migdal. His 'state-in-society' model can in part be understood as a reaction upon the neo-statist school of thought that started to dominate social and political science in the late 1970s and 1980s. Returning to ideas of Samuel Huntington, the neo-statists re-established the special, autonomous status of the state in society (Migdal, 2001). Political scientists such as Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol criticised the inability of the Marxist and neo-Marxist theories to distinguish between the state and other sectors (the dominant social class) in society. In their 'Bringing the State Back In' they emphasised the state's autonomous position in society and its central and powerful role in shaping people's behaviour (Evans et al., 1985). According to Migdal (2001) these state-centric ideas have remained an influential part of social and political theories up to the present day.

Migdal openly challenges this state-centred view. He notes that states are in general successful in penetrating society but fail in effectively changing population's behaviour and regulating social relations. To understand this, it is important to acknowledge that states have an impact on societies, but societies also affect states. One of Migdal's principle conclusions is that within a society, the state is just one organization amongst many. This so-called 'mélange' of organizations (clans, ethnic groups, villages, unions, religious institutions, etc.) is often marked by an active struggle for social control over the population. To overcome competing power centres in society, state leaders use a range of techniques including cooperation, intimidation, accommodation, absorption, etc. Especially in situations where state capacities are weak, leaders are forced to accommodate and develop alliances with strongmen. Important is also that Migdal does not see the state as one monolithic unit. State leaders at the top are confronted with different problems and use different strategies in comparison to officials in regional or local government functions. Cases of very fragmented social control have led to what Migdal calls "the politics of survival". Especially in third world countries, many top state leaders have consistently undermined and destroyed their own state agencies to protect themselves against potential power centres they cannot control (Migdal, 1988; 2001).

These observations went hand in hand with a growing disillusionment in the political literature during the late 1980s and the early 1990s regarding the capacities of the state as such, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. A growing debt crisis, the end of Cold War patronage, the predatory nature of many African regimes and their decreasing ability to deliver basic public services, plunged numerous African states into deep economic and governmental crises. Research conducted amongst others in Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria and the former Zaire, revealed a growing disengagement or
exit of citizens from state structures to the advantage of alternative and parallel social, cultural, economic and political arrangements (Ake, 1985; Azary and Chazan, 1987; MacGaffey, 1991). As Naomi Chazan (1994) observed: “The most noticeable changes took place at the local level, where the multiplication of communal associations was everywhere in evidence. Entrepreneurial, credit, banking, and barter groups were established alongside new welfare associations, mutual aid societies, educational initiatives, and self defence groups”. The tremendous amount of informal structures of self-governance made it clear to many observers that society was able to survive without the facilitation of state structures. Azarya and Chazan (1987) even noted that these forces could contain “the seeds of a more massive realignment of power relations predicated on the dispersion of state functions to (...) collectivises that the state claims to represent”.

Similar ideas found their way into the research on ‘state collapse’ and the so-called ‘new wars’. In the margins of the wider research agenda on contemporary wars, a growing number of scholars are examining governance issues in situations of protracted conflict and state collapse. These wars have consistently been described as internal (Rotberg, 2002; Dorff, 1996); identity based (Gurr, 2000); criminal (Collier, 1995); economically driven (Keen, 1998); characterized by irrational and excessive violence (Kaplan, 1994); and leading to complete societal collapse (Gros, 1996). A growing number of scholars, however, reject this apocalyptic view of total social regression.

Influential are for example the writings of Mark Duffield, who portrays these war and post-war situations not so much in terms of regression or breakdown but more as systems of social transformation, which can result in alternative forms of legitimacy and authority: “Instead of complex political emergencies, global governance is encountering emerging political complexes on its borders. (...) In many cases such complexes are the only forms of existing or actual authority that have the powers to police stability (Duffield, 2001).”

Talking about the many non-state armed groups that are typically active in countries torn apart by civil war, William Reno (2003) makes a similar point. He argues that many armed groups provide some basic forms of public goods to their population (for example security and protection). Some have even proven to be better providers of public goods than many state governments. Consequently, Reno places some question marks around the contemporary global norms that treat all armed groups in a more or less uniformly negative and criminalized fashion.

Highly interesting in this regard is the research conducted by Ken Menkhaus on Somalia, one of the most severe cases of contemporary state collapse. Although the country lacks a functioning central government since 1991 and is plagued by high levels of criminality, high unemployment and endemic armed conflict, it is wrong to follow the popular perception of Somalia being a zone of “anarchy”. According to Menkhaus (2004) “a closer look reveals an impressive if fragile level of local governance”. Menkhaus observes that situations of protracted conflicts like in Somalia are dynamic, not static, crises. He argues against the deeply embedded metaphor of the “vicious circle” (Collier, 1995) in the analysis of state collapse and internal war. “In at least some instances conflicts that appear to be self-reinforcing in the short term are in the long run producing conditions out of which new political orders can emerge” (Menkhaus, 2004).

The most visible and promising manifestation of this new type of political order is the self-declared autonomous region of Somaliland in the north-western corner of the country. Since 1996, it has provided modest levels of administration, maintained a high level of peace and rule of law and most recently held local and national elections. In other parts of the Somali space, more humble and fragile types of local polities have emerged out of coalitions of clan elders, intellectuals, businessmen and Muslim clergy, which are all providing some sort of order. Service delivery has almost completely been privatised but businessmen and entrepreneurs have been able to provide piped water, electricity, telephone lines, roads, and air travel in some regions of Somalia (Menkhaus, 2004; Nenova and Harford, 2004).

Similarly, Koen Vlassenroot and Timothy Raeymaekers (2004) concluded that “despite everything”, the conflict in eastern DRC “has not led to the breakdown of society. It has resulted in major changes and transformations built on evolving social relations and changing coping mechanisms”. Building on Ballentine and Sherman, they introduced the concept of ‘complexes of power, profit and protection’ to describe the several informal governance structures that have emerged over time in eastern Congo and are setting the frame for local socio-economic interaction (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, 2004).

The different authors discussed above do not offer clear descriptions about what they perceive as governance. They are all searching for new ways to describe the processes they observe and that often do not fit in our standard models. A closer look, however, reveals that they all talk implicitly or explicitly about governance in terms of a regulating authority that sometimes, but not necessarily, earns legitimacy by providing some sort of basic public goods. These goods can include for example protection or a formal cadre for doing business, but also some sort of redistribution through the financing of schools, mosques, churches or medical clinics (Roitman, 2001). With Somaliland as a notable exception, these new centres of authority and regulation are usually not trying to shape state-like functions and institutions. They exist outside what is left of the state, and are often in open conflict.
with it, but they are usually not attempting to replace the state altogether. On the contrary, state and non-state authorities can be entangled in a complex relationship of competition and cooperation “as each attempts to use the resources and networks of the other for either direct or mutual advantage” (Ibid.; Duffield, 2001). Indeed, a substantial part of these new non-state power complexes is situated in their control over local-global linkages with the “global shadow economy”. Not only are they able to mobilize extensive amounts of resources from it, they also perform as a sort of gatekeepers by regulating access to these informal transboundary networks. In general, however, these new complexes are socially exclusive (ethnic, clan-based) and driven by private interests (protectionist) in their regulating function. As Reno observes, inhabitants do not enjoy security by right of membership of a state, but for example, because of the presence of an armed organisation seeking to protect mineral resources for its struggle. Security is in other words coincidental, reliant on the interests of the new non-state regulatory authorities (Reno, 1998). However, for those that are included, such authorities “represent new frameworks of social representation and regulation” (Duffield, 2001).

3. Implementing ‘governance’ in a context of state building

Having explored the many conceptualisations of the term governance in part one of this study, we now turn our attention to the donor’s implementation of this concept into the international development agenda. The donor community has roughly three basic approaches towards governance in post-war and state collapse situations: (i) state centric approach, (ii) supporting NGOs and (iii) community-driven reconstruction. Note that in the day-to-day reality of development practices these methods are never implemented separately. We have, however, chosen to describe them individually to offer more clarity.

3.1. State centric approach

The state-centric approach is by far the oldest model for development. In the 1950s and 1960s, aid programmes and academic advisers propagated the idea of the state bureaucracy as the leading agent in the transition to ‘modernisation’. The failures of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s have contributed to a renewed interest in the state and its institutional capacity to support conditions for market development and democracy (Batley, 2002). A strong and effective government is now recognized as a prerequisite for successful policy implementation. However, in post-war situations, especially after a civil war such as in DR Congo, government structures are very weak or completely destroyed. Many states of this kind lost the ability to perform even their most basic functions. As already mentioned, this does not mean that a country is completely ruled by ‘anarchy’. The international community, however, strongly favours the reconstruction of formal political and economic structures, especially since 9/11. In some cases, such as Burundi, there is no real international unity and each donor has developed its own strategic framework for engagement, often through bilateral discussions with the government (ICG, 2003). In general however, multilateral agencies and bilateral donors, though partly in competition amongst each other, share an overall vision and basically move towards some sort of co-ordinated action (Doornbos, 2002).

Although, no universally accepted blueprint exists, there is a great deal of agreement about what a reconstructed legitimate state needs to look like. This prevalent model of state reconstruction has three key ingredients. The first is democracy, by which is meant that political authorities are established through competition for votes between rival political parties, under a constitutional formula (Clapham, 2001). The second is a minimal state that is run according to the principles of ‘good governance’. There is a strong preference amongst multilateral agencies and bilateral donors for the establishment of a small but effective state capable of ensuring peace, stability, the rule of law and the protection of basic human rights. Also, certain state structures need to be decentralized to lower levels of local government to improve service delivery, accountability and democratic participation (Sisk et al., 2001). The third and final ingredient is a liberal economy, meaning that the economy is managed according to the free market principles and that the state withdraws from the productive sector. Vision of a minimal, democratic state that supports the principles of the free market, is derived from ideas of statehood that have become deeply entrenched in the Western political tradition (Clapham, 2001). We find this conception back in the various political agreements, laws, constitutions and strategy papers outlining the post-war future of countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Afghanistan and East Timor.1

After the realization of a peace agreement and the establishment of a new (transitional) authority, efforts are being made to get some key government institutions back in business. Electoral institutions, financial agencies, the parliament, the judiciary, the military and the police are usually the key targets of international reconstruction efforts in collapsed states (Ottaway, 2002). Weak or non-existing state capacity is a very serious problem in many post-war government institutions. Consequently, filling this gap lies at the heart of every successful effort to reconstruct a state. In general, UNDP and the World Bank...
take the lead in rebuilding government capacity. This includes directly funding salaries of key staff, providing office equipment, organising skills development courses and offering technical assistance for planning, implementing and monitoring programmes in government institutions. Efforts to create rapid state capacity usually include using foreign consultants and subcontractors. Especially in situations of very serious state degradation a wide range of state functions are administered by foreign experts (WB, 2003; Suhrke et al., 2004).

In general, priority is given to rebuilding government competence at the central level. Issues of local governance are usually left fairly unaddressed in the first couple of years of the reconstruction process. Apart from implicit assumptions of the international community about the value and appropriateness of decentralisation, the most important reason for this low level of involvement is the central administrations’ lack of power. Governments of war-ravaged countries such as Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, DR Congo or East Timor have only limited power outside the capital and its immediate surroundings (WB, 2003; Suhrke et al., 2004). State institutions located in the interior are generally very weak or completely collapsed and links with the central government are eroded or do not exist anymore. Often local power structures such as armed commanders, rich businessmen or more traditional forms of leadership remain largely unaffected by the government in the capital. In order to survive and widen its influence, the central state is forced to negotiate alliances with these local elites.

The physical infrastructure reconstruction and the provision of some basic public services such as healthcare and education are largely mandated to the NGO and private sector. In most cases, the state simply lacks the resources and capacities to implement such projects, but this approach also fits well in the donors’ vision of a minimal, regulating state. In Sierra Leone, for example, almost the entire health sector was run by international NGOs and in Afghanistan, in line with the free market approach, there are plans to completely privatize health care through competitive bidding by firms and organisations (WB, 2003; WB, 2004; Suhrke et al., 2004). For a more in-depth analysis of this trend see the following parts of this paper.

The funding arrangements can differ from country to country, depending on a range of internal factors and the external cooperation between the diverse donor agencies. Donor money can be provided directly to the government of a post-war country as is the case in Burundi (ICG, 2003), but in general this type of budget support is not a favoured option. The capacity of governments to manage resources and implement effective programs has in general been greatly decreased as a result of war. Weak and often notoriously corrupt state institutions have contributed to the popularity of so called Multi Donor Trust Funds (MDTF), often administered by the World Bank. They not only help to reduce the burden on limited government capacities, but make a more coordinated use of reconstruction assistance possible and insure that donors stay in full control. At this point, the World Bank administers MDTFs for countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, East Timor, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan (Schiavo-Campo, 2003).

This reconstruction model favoured by the international community has been criticised on numerous grounds. Martin Doornbos, Marina Ottaway, William Reno, Jennifer Milliken and Keith Krause all have produced some very insightful work on this subject. First of all, enhancing capacity and improving government functions through foreign sub-contractors such as agencies, NGOs or private firms, might well produce quick results, but in the long run this is not sustainable and it can even be counterproductive. International management and auditing firms, experts and international NGOs are often very expensive. For a war-ravaged country, costs like this are only bearable with substantial donor support, creating all sorts of external dependencies. As Suhrke (2004) states, “by focusing on short-term gains, the enhancement strategy is not an approach to capacity building but rather a pricey substitute for it”. Sustained use of international contractors, combined with little capacity building in local governance structures also risks to undercut the legitimacy of the state.

Second, although there may be a lot of rhetorical support for ‘local ownership’ and ‘joint action’, in practice this is generally not the case. Iraq is a clear and recent example (see for instance ICG, 2004), but also in Afghanistan or East Timor there was not much room for consulting with domestic actors (Schiavo-Campo, 2003; Suhrke et al., 2004). Although it is a main lesson from post-conflict efforts worldwide that it is necessary to involve the local population along with their, often informal, institutions in the rebuilding process, it is still not taken for granted. As was mentioned previously, countries or regions without a functioning government are not without governance. Even in extreme cases of total state collapse, such as Somalia, numerous forms of regulating authorities have sprung up and now provide the local population with varying levels of local governance. In general, however, there is still not much readiness among donors to see themselves not so much ‘in command’ but available ‘on demand’. Instead it seems to be a trend among leading multilateral agencies to see post-conflict contexts as a suitable ground, and moment, to install market-friendly frameworks (Doornbos, 2002). This ‘fresh start’ and ‘fresh designs’ line of thinking further reduces the potential of local input in the reconstruction process, and thus the likelihood of a balanced, case-specific response.

This leads us to a third and related problem. According to Ottaway, the international community is not able to create government institutions. When international consultants
and experts of various sorts are organizing government departments and training staff, they are only building organisations. Ottaway states that: “Institution building is a slow process. Donors can create organisational structures that bear a resemblance to the functioning, legitimate institutions of stable states, but converting these organisations into real institutions in states recovering from collapse is an entirely different matter”. Whether or not these organisations are to transform into legitimate institutions is dependent upon domestic political processes and their capacities to provide solutions to real problems of the population. Simply transplanting ‘best practice’ models rooted in the Western political tradition will not work (Ottaway, 2002).

3.2. Supporting NGOs

A second approach towards governance is to work with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Since the early 1980s, NGOs have become increasingly important in development thinking. Disillusionment with government delivery systems prompted aid agencies to look for other delivery channels. In a growing consensus, international donors began to view NGOs as an efficient channel for the delivery of aid programmes, particularly in social areas. In addition, an expanded role for NGOs was directly compatible with the focus of the New Policy Agenda on democracy and structural adjustment. Today, NGOs are the primary implementing agencies of, and at times the driving force behind, international humanitarian and developmental action. (Edwards and Hulme, 1995; Desai, 2002; Talal, 2004)

Consequently, the number of development NGOs in the North and South and their recourses have risen explosively. According to a calculation of Lindenberg and Bryant, between 1980 and 1990 the number of northern NGOs nearly doubled, from 1,600 to more than 2,500 (Stoddard, 2003). Nelson estimated in the mid 1990s the number of international NGOs based in northern industrialised states and their local implementing partners in developing nations at respectively 5,000 and 20,000 (Cross, 1997). NGOs are controlling a larger share of humanitarian resources than ever before. Although there are no hard figures on how much humanitarian aid goes through NGOs, it is estimated that they receive around a quarter of governmental humanitarian spending. Denmark channels 36% of its humanitarian funding through NGOs, France 40% and the US upwards of 60%. Also UN agencies such as UNICEF and UNHCR rely on NGOs as implementing partners. In 2000, 44% of UNHCR’s budget was programmed through NGOs (Stoddard, 2003).

Especially since the end of the 1980s, NGOs began to work more and more in conflict zones and post-war settings. In general, NGOs play two main roles: service delivery and/or advocacy. Service delivering NGOs (also known as operational NGOs) provide a range of basic public goods to populations in need. In situations of acute crisis they are responsible for the distribution of emergency food, shelters and medical supplies. In a reconstruction setting, NGOs can provide a wide range of services going from infrastructure reconstruction, capacity building and de-mining up to the implementation of education, reconciliation and healthcare programmes. In short, service delivery NGOs fill gaps left by weak or collapsed governments. The other common role of NGOs is advocacy. Efforts in advocacy can be directed at governments, to effect policy change, but also at the general public, to educate and spread certain values and ideas. Advocacy can be conducted through a variety of means including lobbying, publications, press articles, or trough public demonstrations. Western donors typically see this type of NGOs as central components of ‘civil society’ and as vehicles for ‘democratisation’ (Edwards and Hulme, 1995, Desai, 2002; Stoddard, 2003). By providing services that are normally the domain of the government and by influencing policy decisions, NGOs play a direct role in governance. In the following sections, some results of NGO involvement in post-war reconstruction will be analysed. The case of Afghanistan will be used as a starting point.

The NGO sector in Afghanistan has exploded since the fall of the Taliban regime. Large and influential international NGOs such as CARE, MSF, Oxfam, Save the Children, World Vision and their numerous subcontractors are running major programmes, but also the number of national NGOs is mushrooming. Currently, it is estimated that there are close to 3,000 registered national and international NGOs in Afghanistan, compared to about 250 in mid-2001 (Knudsen, 2005). NGOs are a relatively recent phenomenon in the Afghan context, with national organizations being established from the late 1980s onwards, mainly within the Pakistan-based aid environment. Some of them are, however, rated as highly professional and at least as efficient as their international counterparts. The overwhelming majority of NGOs are involved in emergency and reconstruction aid but there are also a growing number of smaller NGOs dealing with public advocacy on issues such as human rights or peace-building (Harpviken, 2002).

Confronted with extremely weak state capacities, the Afghanistan Transitional Authority (ATA) and the UN have mandated the reconstruction process in a large extent to the NGO sector. More specifically, the line ministries, assisted by western advisers, formulate policy directions and planning, while NGOs are responsible for the project-level implementation after a competitive bidding round (Strand, 2002; Knudsen, 2005). This approach has some clear and important benefits, such as the rapid start of reconstruction activities and the delivery of vital public goods such as healthcare and schooling to the population. There are, however, also some major downsides. The most important one is the risk of undermining the legitimacy of
the Afghan state. Links between ordinary Afghans and the different government structures are in general weak or non-existent. In the present context, NGOs are therefore the local communities’ only hope for help. As a consequence, credits go to the NGOs and not to the government. In addition, many NGOs assumed a quasi-representational role since they raise issues before donors, at NGO coordination meetings, and with the Afghan government (Carlin, 2004; Knudsen, 2005). Rather than filling gaps, the NGO sector has become a sort of parallel structure next to the government. It has been reported that NGOs tend to relate to the local authorities to the least extent possible and have bolstered their position by developing their own clientelistic network. In the short term, there is no simple solution to this problem because the state lacks the capacity to undertake rapid service delivery, and postponing service delivery could have catastrophic results for the population and would only further undermine the legitimacy of the state (Harpviken, 2002; Strand, 2002; Knudsen, 2005, ICG, 2005).

This situation is even reinforced because of the Afghan government’s limited control over the allocated resources itself. A recent World Bank report calculated that around three quarters of the foreign aid is channelled outside the state’s own budget, presenting serious constraints to the country’s long-term fiscal planning and the danger of undermining the government’s authority (WB, 2005). This contradictory state of affairs has led to a rather sceptical and tough stance of some sections within the Afghan government toward UN agencies and the NGO sector. Especially the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning have repeatedly been very critical toward the NGO community, accusing them of excessive expenses and attempts to bypass the authorities (Strand, 2002; IRIN, 26/04/2004; Knudsen, 2005).

The situation regarding NGOs outlined above is in no way specific to Afghanistan. The problems of ‘bypassing’, ‘legitimacy’ and ‘authority’ are well known for many years in the development community. There are, however, wide ranges of other typical troubles related to the activities of NGOs generic in zones of post-war recovery.

**Briefcase NGOs**

A large portion of the mushrooming indigenous NGO sector in post-war reconstruction situations is often of dubious origin. Carlin noted that about three quarters of the in 2004 registered 2300 NGOs in Afghanistan were in fact illegitimate or so called ‘briefcase’ NGOs who wanted to tap into the large streams of development funds for private gain (Carlin, 2004). Researchers in Sierra Leone found widespread local disillusionment with these kinds of NGOs at the village level. One Paramount Chief described NGOs as to be little more than “income generating schemes for unemployed graduates” (Richards et al., 2004). Donor agencies should therefore be very alert and careful when contracting local NGOs.

**Staff drains**

Government structures in post-war countries are in general weak and lack expertise. This is especially true for local government institutions. They are further drained of competent staff by the recruitment activities of international funded NGOs who pay salaries that are many times higher than those of ordinary civil servants. This applies at all levels: NGOs pay teachers and health workers more than the government does. The disparity will become a serious problem when the facilities funded and run by NGOs are eventually handed over to the government. (Strand, 2002; Harpviken, 2002; WB, 2003; ICG, 2003; Knudsen, 2005).

**Lack of coordination**

Another common problem with NGO operations is their lack of project coordination. Interventions are often scattered over a wide area, leaving gaps in the service delivery, or clustered together and producing overlaps. Also the type and quality of the services can differ widely. It is observed, for instance, that the rehabilitation packages in Sierra Leone varied from agency to agency. Unequal treatment of adjacent villages sometimes fuelled wartime suspicions and conflict among neighbours (Richards et al., 2004). In general, central and local government authorities show a strong will to monitor and coordinate NGO activity but they are often hindered by the political context and weak capacity. Also until recently many NGOs strongly resisted coordination by the state to protect their status as a non-governmental organisation. The willingness to engage with governments is however increasing the last couple of years and also the inter-NGO coordination has improved (Strand, 2002; Richards, 2004; ICG, 2003; Knudsen, 2005).

**Weak contextual analysis**

NGOs are generally weak in contextual analysis of the societies in which they work and often go in with standard pre-packed programs without much knowledge of their impact (Desai and Potter, 2002). Construction and engineering activities for example traditionally make up a large part of the NGOs’ portfolio in post-war recovery areas. These types of projects are however commonly accused of putting local construction and supplies sector out of business (Knudsen, 2005). The same holds true for food aid, another standard type of service delivery. The massive inflow of food can seriously destabilise local food production. It is reported for example that during 2002 and 2003, in some areas of Afghanistan, farmers did not even
bother to harvest their crops because of the huge amount of imported wheat that was available. Afghan officials expressed serious concerns that this might encourage poppy cultivation (Suhrke et al., 2004).

3.3. Community-driven Reconstruction

Community-Driven Development (CDD) has become a very popular option for many NGOs and development agencies. It is a fast-growing mechanism for channeling development assistance and it refers to projects in which communities have direct control over key project decisions, including management of investment funds (Mansuri and Rao, 2003). CDD represents a bottom-up approach to development based on participation and empowerment. It seeks to empower communities by handing over control over decisions and resources to accountable, inclusive community groups (Dongier, et al., 2001). In short this approach means working directly with the population. Uvin observed that this approach is often, explicitly or implicitly, based on a deep distrust of the state. Numerous people in the aid business share the opinion that too many resources were squandered on the state and that they should go round it as much as possible in order to help the population (Uvin, 2005).

The principle of participation gained ground as it was realised that the structural adjustment programmes and ‘market-led development’ of the 1980s had failed to reach the poorest segments of the population. Reacting to the severe criticism on the predominant top-down approaches, large donor agencies increasingly implemented this new model of development (Platteau and Gaspart, 2003). For example, the amount lent by the World Bank for CDD projects has increased massively from US$ 325 million in 1996 to a conservatively estimated figure of US$ 2 billion in 2003 (Mansuri and Rao, 2003).

In a more recent development the World Bank, and in a lesser extent also the UN, started to implement this CDD model in conflict-ridden countries and in post-war settings. Starting in the late 1990s, the Bank developed so-called Community-Driven Reconstruction (CDR) programmes in countries such as Rwanda, Angola, East Timor, Indonesia, Kosovo, Burundi, Sierra Leone and recently in Afghanistan. According to the Bank these programmes have two principal objectives: (i) speedy and cost-effective delivery of reconstruction assistance on the ground; and (ii) building a governance structure that stresses local choice and accountability. The basic premise for this demand-led approach is that local communities are in a better position to identify their needs and corresponding actions than higher administrative echelons, higher societal structures or outside partners. It also supposes that for a large number of short-term reconstruction needs, local communities possess the core skills, incentives, and unity to implement a large range of projects provided they are given the resources and a management support system (Cliffe et al., 2003).

Because it is not possible to work directly with the population of a community, the CDR approach consists in most cases of creating committees and other intermediary organizations. These so called Community-Based Organisations (CBO) may emerge from already existing social institutions but in general they are formed especially for the project through local secret elections. CBOs are the centrepiece of the CDR approach and they need to be as representative as possible. In most projects mechanisms are designed to ensure the participation of vulnerable groups such as women, disabled persons or in some cases ex-combatants and younger men in the decision-making process. The primary functions of the CBOs are to address collective needs, identify projects (example are: the construction of roads, building of a school, installation of water facilities, distribution of tools, etc.) and to prepare and submit proposals for projects. After a project has been approved the CBO is responsible for its implementation, monitoring and management (Strand et al., 2003; Uvin, 2005; Cliffe et al., 2003, Boesen, 2004).

Apart from this reconstruction role the World Bank sees these CBOs also as a tool in their state building strategy. On the one hand the World Bank seeks to build grassroots confidence in the new central administration who is responsible for the nationwide facilitation and implementation of the project. On the other hand it sees the CBOs as a new foundation for good democratic governance. In the strategy of the World Bank these CBOs are building blocks or bottom-up agents of democratization (Masefield, 2004). In many cases the CDR programmes are implicitly or explicitly used to influence local power structures and to eliminate certain political actors that are considered to hinder democratic development. In East Timor, for instance, the traditional local power holders and individuals linked to the former clandestine resistance network were deliberately bypassed when the village councils were elected. This was done to establish new, and more representative structures at the village level (Strand et al., 2003; Moxham, 2004). In Afghanistan the new central government hopes to neutralize the power of local strongmen and warlords by implementing a large-scale CDR programme (Zakhilwal, 2004).

Enthusiasm about CDD and CDR is however not universal. A growing number of sceptics have doubts about the basic precepts of the approaches and practical concerns with the implementation challenges of such projects (Platteau, 2004; Platteau and Gaspart, 2003; Mansuri and Rao, 2003). Despite the ever growing popularity of CDD and CDR programmes, it is striking that little material is available from NGOs and donor agencies that gives insight into the validity of these participatory approaches. Many critics
note that evidence on Community-Driven Development initiatives lags well behind the rate at which projects are being implemented and scaled up. Plateau (2004) condemns the “praise culture” that exists around these programmes and notes that “the evidence produced in favour of CDD tend to be anecdotal, based on unqualified generalisations or unsubstantiated claims”. A research paper commissioned by the World Bank to evaluate CDD programmes in contexts of conflict note that “While WB staffs are of the opinion that CDD projects in conflict contexts have improved the living conditions of a large number of poor people, it has proven rather difficult to confirm this commonly held view” (Strand, 2003). Some important problems with CDD and CDR programmes are:

**Duplicative**

There is often little coordination in planning and implementation. Each organisation pursues different mechanisms and requests different degrees of community participation. The result is that there are often too many of these CBOs. Also, due to lack of coordination their efforts can be duplicative (ICG, 2003; Uvin, 2005).

**Empowerment**

‘Community empowerment’ is a prominent objective of all CDD and CDR projects. But as Strand (2003) notes: “there is no empowerment without disempowerment”. Some actors in the aid industry are not aware enough of this evident fact. Other agencies such as the World Bank use this approach in an effort to design new local governance structures that are decentralized and participatory from the start. This gave rise to local tensions between new and old power structures as observed in East Timor and Afghanistan. In post-war contexts this situation can be potentially dangerous, especially when certain actors still have access to military power.

**Elite capture**

Although there is no detailed data available, it nevertheless appears that the new CBOs rarely pose a real threat to traditional elites. Partial evidence from Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Burundi and East Timor suggests that elites often manage to bring CBOs under their control. In Afghanistan, for instance, the forcible influence over Community-Development Committee elections by local landlords, commanders or Mullahs has been a significant problem in many provinces. Some communities were able to reject the claims made by local elites but many others were not (Boesen, 2004). An obvious reason for this, apart from the direct threat of violence or patron-client relations, is that only elites have the time and resources to invest in a CBO. CBOs are time-consuming, and there is little or no reward structure (Richards et al., 2004). In East Timor, for instance, many CBO members voiced discontentment because of the heavy workload. They had not expected that their involvement would demand so much of their time, and some even claimed that the project was impoverishing them, through the fact that the time tied up in meetings and training pulled them away from economic activities (Strand, 2003). It is also difficult to measure the results of the incorporation of women and other disadvantaged groups into a CBO. Some projects claimed modest positive results. The World Bank observed that in East Timor female members of CBOs initially lacked confidence in discussions but have gained a stronger presence over time (Rohland, 2002). In Afghanistan, however, participation of women has in practice been more “symbolic” than real in most communities. Although women are officially registered as members of CBOs, they were often not able to participate in meetings and discussions (Boesen, 2004). The same holds true for Burundi. Uvin noted that CBOs in Burundi are often “hardly representative of the weak or poorest, and even those who do belong to these groups (precisely because of their weakness and poverty) are under enormous pressure” (Uvin, 2005).

**Bypassing (informal) local and national government structures**

A typical component of CDR projects is that they bypass certain (informal) national and local government structures. Since these institutions don’t control the CBOs, who are in charge of major resources, these parallel structures may be perceived as threatening. According to Uvin, CBOs will therefore “in all likelihood be resented, sabotaged, undermined, co-opted, captured or marginalized” (Uvin, 2005). World Bank documents usually stress the importance of incorporating government structures in the planning, implementation and management phases of the CDR projects. Project overviews, however, show that there is a tendency to work with those structures that offer less bureaucratic resistance to the World Bank and not necessarily the one with the main formal responsibility. In a CDR project in Indonesia for instance, local government structures were bypassed in the transferring of block grants, which went directly to the village’s bank account. Such strategies might certainly ease the implementation of projects in the short term, but according to Strand, at the expense of building a more permanent capacity within key ministries, coordination of the wider development efforts and, in the end, the insurance that the government will take over the ownership of and responsibility for the CDD process (Strand, 2003).
Ownership and Sustainability

Many project reports express concern about the long-term sustainability of the projects. Donor willingness to fund development programmes over a longer period of time has always been limited, especially in a conflict context, and the governments who inherit the CDR projects are usually not able to continue funding the project. The urgency in which most of these projects are implemented runs against the build-up of local and national ownership (Platteau, 2004; Strand, 2003). The lack of ownership was very prominent in East Timor’s CDR project. From the village level to the national level, the CBOs were viewed as World Bank organisations. Most East Timorese believed that the CBOs would dissolve without the grants from the World Bank. At the national level, the project fell officially under the new East Timorese government. Several CBO staff, however, described limited communication between the CDR project and the government structures (Moxham, 2004, La’o Hamutuk, 2002).

4. Conclusion

This paper has explored the dominant streams of thinking about ‘governance’ and the way it has been implemented in state collapse and post-conflict reconstruction settings. Introduced for the first time in 1989 by the World Bank, governance became in no time a general guiding principle for official development policies. Governance became a facilitator of market-led development and, especially in the aftermath of 9/11, a vital component of global security. Models of ‘good governance’ were developed, describing the necessary rebuilding of state bureaucracies, the reforming of legal systems, democratic decentralization and the creation of accountable-enhancing civil societies. In nature a difficult and elastic concept, governance was consequently translated by dominant official and academic policy literature into a set of neutral sounding technical functions describing the administrative effectiveness and efficiency of state institutions. In contrast to this very technical and management oriented policy discourses, state-society literature presents a more ‘political’ approach. This alternative stream of writing focuses largely on developing a better understanding of the different state-society relations and the way in which power and authority are structured in various social contexts. In this perspective, a growing number of scholars portray war and situations of state collapse not so much in terms of regression or breakdown but more as systems of social transformation, which can result in alternative forms of legitimacy and authority. State collapse and societal breakdown are not necessarily two sides of the same coin. The weakening or destruction of state institutions can give rise to alternative and parallel social, cultural, economic and political arrangements. However, it are exactly these forms of informal local governance that are often forgotten, neglected or simply not noticed in the first place when state reconstruction and general development projects are put into practice. As we have described in some detail, projects targeting governance in post-conflict reconstruction environments also suffer from a range of other technical and conceptual flaws, ranging from simply transplanting ‘best practice’-type of institutions; over low coordination, lack of contextual analyse and vulnerability for elite capture; to bypassing (informal) local and national institutions. This is not to say that none of these three basic implementing approaches identified in this paper have good parts. Institutions have to be rebuilt, capacity must be restored, NGOs can offer services that the government cannot provide, and CBOs can be a good way to engage local communities. As Uvin (2005) notes: “none of these are a priori bad things to invest in; rather, the way they are supported and the lack of political and historical context within which this takes place, typically all but ensures that the impact of these programs will be disappointingly low and unsustainable.”
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Footnotes