



Non-Governmental Public Action Programme

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**Understanding the dynamics of relationships
between government agencies and non-state
providers of basic services: Key issues
emerging from the literature**

**Whose Public Action?
Analysing Inter-sectoral Collaboration for
Service Delivery**

**Kelly Teamey and
Claire McLoughlin**

General introduction to NGPA Working Papers

Editor: Professor Jude Howell

The **NGPA Working Paper (NGPAWP)** series provides a vehicle for disseminating recent and ongoing research of researchers based at, or linked to the Non-Governmental Public Action Programme (NGPA). It aims to reflect the range and diversity of non-governmental public action, and understand the impact of public action.

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Non-Governmental Public Action Programme
c/o The Centre for Civil Society
Department of Social Policy
London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE

Tel: +44 (0)20 7955 7205/6527 Fax: +44 (0)20 7955 6038 Email: ngpa@lse.ac.uk

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1. Introduction

To argue that understanding the dynamics of relationships between Non-State Providers (NSPs) and government agencies is *complex* is an understatement. Terms such as *convoluted*, *unpredictable* and *thorny* are perhaps equally apt, depending on the context and historical background of the relationship. This is perhaps unsurprising, for what relationships in reality are ever simple? Particularly relationships that involve groups of many individuals with various and often divergent professional, ideological, political, cultural and financial alliances coming together with a supposed common objective?

The literature discussing, analysing and theorising relationships between NSPs and Government is multitudinous and diverse. Piecing together a clear image of how these relationships work in practice is a painstaking process, particularly given the patchy and rather narrow empirical research that has been primarily undertaken and the vast array of variables that can impact on the nature of the relationships formed. Yet in spite of the dearth of empirical research on NSP-government relationships, there is still much to be learnt from the existing literature about how they can be better understood and applied in practice.

This is the first of two working papers for the Non-Governmental Public Action (NGPA) programme series based on a wide-ranging and rigorous literature review on NSP-government relationships.ⁱ The literature review explored an extensive range of empirical, theoretical, exploratory and/or polemical literature that has examined relationships between government agencies and NSPs of basic services (i.e. education, health, water and sanitation) for poor people.ⁱⁱ It was carried out to situate a research project, *Whose Public Action?* (WPA), part of the NGPA programme that is funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

This working paper identifies and briefly discusses a range of key issues that were classified as being of particular importance to understanding the dynamics of NSP-government relationships. These relationships are not confined to, or delineated by, any particular typology within this working paper, but do cover a range of formal and informal interactions through which the state and NSPs engage. A plethora of terms are used in the literature to describe these relationships (e.g. collaboration, cooperation, and partnership) and their outcomes (e.g. complementarity, competition, co-optation). The

second working paper focuses more specifically on theoretical and methodological issues (including typologies of relationships) pertaining to research that has been conducted already and suggested recommendations for future research.

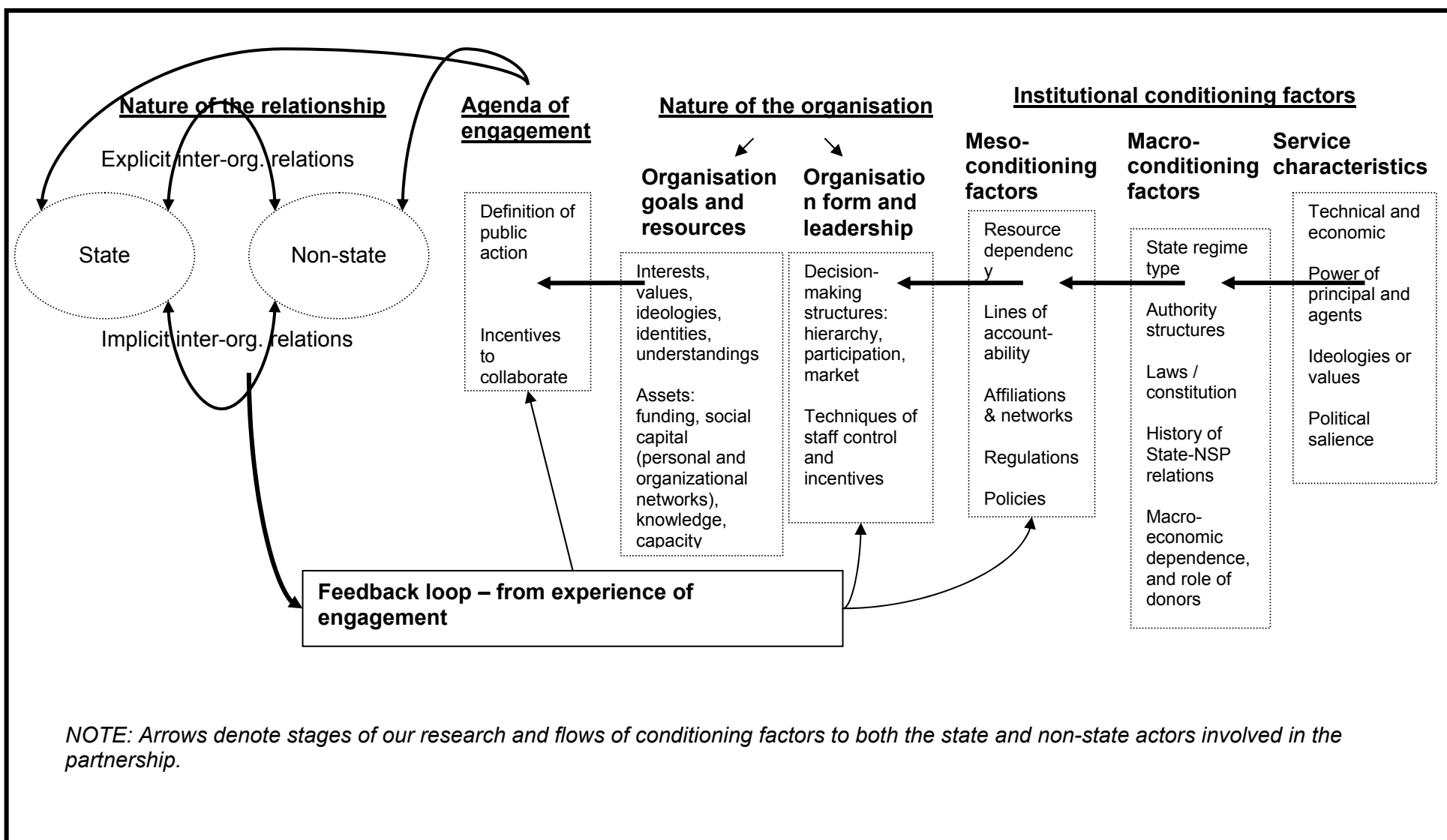
The sequencing of issues within this working paper coincides with the logic of the *Whose Public Action* (WPA) research ‘flow diagram’ set out on page 3. The flow diagram guided our research questions, methodological tools and fieldwork techniques, and subsequent analyses, assisting in the description of the various conditioning factors influencing the dynamics of NSP-government relationships: *macro and meso-level institutional factors, the nature of the organisation and agenda for engagement*. It then considers the ‘feedback loop’, the *effects of NSP-government relationships* on the nature of the organisations and its immediate meso-level environment. The sub-categories within each of the larger issues were found as being of particular importance by a multitude of sources. Many of these issues blend into each other and are inextricably linked, some more than others, depending upon the relationship under examination. In spite of any repetition, we found it important to identify each separately:

- Macro-level institutional conditioning factors:
 - o *Historical influences, legislative frameworks, policies and institutions, globalisation forces, donor influences and state-regime type.*
- The nature of the organisations in an NSP-government relationship:
 - o *Different levels of government, NSPs and their origins and values; the internal management of NSPs; boundaries; civil society and the state; networks, alliances, coalitions, and linkages of NSPs with government agencies; key individuals or leaders*
- The definition of boundaries:
 - o *Of the organisations themselves, between civil society and the government, within and between networks, coalitions and alliances of various organisations, and dimensions of the NSP-government relationship*
- The ‘agendas of engagement’:
 - o *Incentives for collaboration, pre-conditions for successful collaboration and the design of the relationship.*
- The ‘nature of the relationship’:
 - o *Dimensions of the relationship; roles of participants; formal and informal*

interactions; methods, modes and strategies of interaction; accountability; autonomy and room for manoeuvre.

- Effects of the relationship:
 - o *Isomorphism and autonomy*

It is to be noted that due to the length and diversity of information coming from such a large number of sources in the literature review and the limitation of space within this working paper, we have prioritised and selected some cases and examples to be retained in this working paper over others. In addition, the term 'non-state provider' is not widely used in the literature, therefore in both the literature review and this working paper we refer to the terms used by the different authors (i.e. Non-governmental Organisation and non-profit organisation).



2. Background

As widely referenced in the literature on Government-NSP relationships, Najam (2000) notes a 'striking trend' toward an increasing number of interactions between non-governmental and governmental entities all over the world. The literature predominantly identifies the rationale behind this 'striking trend' as based on a range of perceived 'comparative advantages' of NSPs in terms of their organisational form and practiceⁱⁱⁱ and in their relationships between government agencies and NSPs.^{iv} Much of the comparative advantage argument stems from the perception that governments are often unable to provide adequately for their citizens.^v This coincides with assumptions about the important role of NSPs fostering development at the local level.^{vi}

Specifically in relation to their organisational forms, agendas and practices, NSPs are widely perceived as being structured in a less hierarchical, more democratic and flexible form than government, cultivating more innovation, accountability and efficiency in terms of cost and delivery.^{vii} They are generally understood not to have profit-seeking motives and to have a greater commitment to serving and working with the poor.^{viii} In addition to 'filling the gap' left by government failure to provide basic services, NSPs are also valued for their capacity to challenge government approaches and practices through advocacy strategies and tactics.^{ix}

Considering the failures of government service provision, and the perceived 'comparative advantages' of NSPs briefly outlined above, relationships bringing NSPs and government agencies together appear to be an obvious step forward. This coming together is often captured in terms of 'complementarity' in the literature and in policy statements: meaning a positive and mutually supporting division of roles between government and NSPs in delivering services.^x As MacDonald and Chrisp (2005) explain, the simple logic of government-NSP relationships is that, although all organisations have strengths, no single organisation has the strength to do everything. The World Bank World Development Report 2004 confirmed that states are opting for alternative forms of service delivery including by contracting out service delivery to NSPs (both private and non-profit).

In spite of the arguments in favour of NSPs providing basic services, they have become increasingly criticised. Some claim there is a lack of evidence supporting the

comparative advantage argument, others question whether the organisational characteristics of NGOs are as benign, compared with government, as has been argued, and some have challenged their relative cost-effectiveness.^{xi} The perception of NGOs as the 'favoured child' of donor agencies may also be shifting^{xii}. This shift is arguably mirrored in what Mitlin et al. observe to be a 'fourth phase' of NGO history, characterised by a "persistent and public set of concerns about practice, direction and focus of NGOs."^{xiii}

The state and NSPs come together to deliver services with differing motives across different contexts, and the extent to which they mutually benefit is also variable.^{xiv} Much of the literature indicates different types of tensions that arise in the course of these relationships. NSPs are sometimes viewed as undermining the state - a perception sometimes held by the state itself.^{xv} Lack of trust (in many cases open mistrust) is often the starting point for NSP-government relationships. It is in spite of these tensions that NSPs and government agencies work together.

The increasing number of Government-NSP relationships is often created under the banner of 'partnership'.^{xvi} In parallel with this trend, 'partnership' has become 'in vogue' (Lewis), a 'new paradigm' (Rao and Smyth) and a frequently used buzzword in development debates (Haque). Fowler (p. 140) argued that the usage of the term 'partnership' in the development field ranks second after 'participation' and is closely followed by 'empowerment' (which is ranked third).

Although there is an abundance of material outlining suggestions for what makes a 'good partnership' (Brinkerhoff), there is also a corresponding profusion of critical and sceptical material questioning the value and meaning of the concept of 'partnership' in practice.^{xvii} Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff (p. 10) argue that 'partnership' is over-used, thus 'devaluing its essence ... clouding the analytic use of the term'. Many others argue there is a gap between partnership rhetoric and reality^{xviii}. Cornwall and Brock (p. 7) explain, "poverty reduction has come to be framed as a collective, consensual enterprise of partnership between different actors, seamlessly embracing diversity under a single, clear moral imperative". For example, Bhat et al. compare the attributes of partnership and contracting as a result of their research study on contractual relationships of the Mother NGO scheme in India, explaining, "although contracting is a form of partnership, true partnership is an involved affair with participation of all stakeholders in the process."^{xix}

Welle usefully argues that rather than abandoning the concept of 'partnership' in the development agenda, it should be examined whether the pre-conditions for different forms of collaboration exist.

Rao and Smyth describe the evolution of the centrality of 'partnership' in current development rhetoric. Although arguably apparent in each development context through the New Public Management agenda (i.e. governance) and Millennium Development Goals (Goal 8 in particular is focused on partnerships), 'partnerships' have particular contextual nuances.^{xx}

3. Institutional conditioning factors

Institutional conditioning factors constitute the context in which NSPs and government agencies operate. These conditioning factors include a range of political, legal, social and cultural institutions.^{xxi} The WPA research hypothesises that the institutional context conditions the formation of the organisations: their interests; values, ideologies, understandings and goals; assets and capacity; decision-making processes and organisational structures affecting the agenda and commitments that organisations bring to the encounter with 'partners'; and their incentives for entering into relationships. The key issues identified and discussed in the literature as representative of institutional conditioning factors are: *historical influences, legislative frameworks, policies and institutions, globalisation forces, donor influences and state regime type*. These issues are so tightly bound with each other that it is difficult, if not arguably impossible, to fully grasp any of them in isolation.

3.1 Historical influences

The significance of history as an issue influencing all aspects of NSP-government relationships is widely accepted across the literature. That said, 'history' is a rather ambiguous issue. The literature focuses on a range of aspects related to historical influences that are of particular relevance, including; the history of NSPs themselves (their origins and evolution); the history of their relationship with the state; the evolution of state regimes; and shifting donor influences.

For example, Hilhorst describes in meticulous detail how the characteristics of NGOs' various relationships (including relationships with government agencies) in the Cordillera region in the Philippines are derived from its local political history. Sen observes differences in NGO-government relationships in different localities in India, depending on the social and institutional histories of NGOs, specific local conditions, institutional behaviours, local politics and actions of local agents based on local politics and associational culture. Stone conducted a historical case study of the governance structure of a non-profit organisation in the USA that had evolved from an advocacy organisation into a multi-million dollar contractor with the government. The study illustrated how this non-profit organisation responded to multiple and contradictory institutional logics embedded in its relationships with state agencies, local communities of

interest and its own past.

In relation to the history of the state, Brinkerhoff (2002: 58) explored the historical background of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan finding that, as a result of the historical characteristics of each country (i.e. being part of the Soviet Union), both inherited a health sector that was centralised, hierarchical and standardised, the “weight of the past hangs heavily over how the state interacts with new entities.”

3.2 Legislative frameworks and policy objectives and standards

Legislation and policy are closely related and can be used to define the space in which an NSP is able to manoeuvre and possibly collaborate with the government through service delivery and/or policy dialogue or other advocacy means. Campos et al. (2004) for example, argue that there is no precise delineation between institutions (i.e. formal rules and informal societal constraints) and policies (i.e. formal rules and enforcement).^{xxii} Several publications argue the importance of a supportive legal framework to provide for the emergence of viable NGOs for service provision and in which to create effective partnerships.^{xxiii}

The core argument of Mayhew’s in-depth legislative and historical study of NSP-government relationships in Cambodia, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Nepal is that state legislation, evolving from particular political and economic contexts, defines the environments in which NGOs operate, restricting or enabling NGO activities (i.e. the extent to which they legitimately represent civil society, to whom they are accountable and how they can be protected). The four countries varied in their legislative basis, strength and political environments, thus influencing the relative strengths of government and NGO sectors and in return affecting NSP-government relations.^{xxiv}

The influence of policy objectives and standards as conditioning factors of NSP-government relationships varies with particular sectoral programmes, context and approaches taken by various stakeholders.^{xxv} The NSP studies by Batley, Rose, Palmer and Sansom (2004) demonstrate the influence of international and subsequent national policy objectives in the health and education sectors on NSP-government relationships in six countries. Batley (2006) noted that principles of partnership were explicit in the policies of the six countries studied. However, these formal policy commitments rested on layers of historical experience of policy instability and rivalry between government, NGOs

and the private sector which led to distrust and lack of confidence that partnerships could work. Moran (2006) found that although there were legislation and policies concerning the status of NSPs in each country, there were rarely processes of stakeholder involvement that contributed toward the development of regulatory or contractual law.

3.3 Globalisation

Globalisation is intimately linked with other conditioning factors (especially legislation, policy, and donor influences). It impacts on governance, more specifically the dynamics of relationships within the government and society (including NSPs). Several authors highlight the significance of globalisation in influencing NSP-government relationships, although only one study focused on globalisation specifically (Bouget and Prouteau).

The increasing modes and effects of globalisation both constrict and broaden the possibilities for NGO-government interactions.^{xxvi} Bouget and Prouteau claim, for example, that the effects of globalisation have led to greater institutional pluralism through a downsizing of governments and an expansion of the political space occupied by civil society. Thompson (2005) used a 'governmentality' approach to examine the control mechanisms of devolution and managerial technologies in a relationship between two different levels of government in the UK.^{xxvii}

3.4 Donor influences

The majority of the literature on NSP-government relationships argues that donor agencies have a direct impact on the dimensions and dynamics of NSP-government interactions through their control of funding and knowledge opportunities and constraints. This influence may exist at many levels – through the creation of incentives, design, objectives, implementation techniques and targets. Lewis and Opuku-Mensah argue that interactions between donors, NGOs and government have become increasingly complex, ambiguous and sophisticated, particularly due to devolution and globalisation pressures.

White argues that the external influence of donors has been a critical factor behind the recent expansion of NGO-government partnerships. Case studies of contracting provide some evidence of donors playing a forceful role in convincing reluctant governments to contract with NGOs.^{xxviii} NGOs and government act as both allies and rivals, competing for donor funding as well as forming superficially collaborative partnerships to receive funding.^{xxix} Tvedt (p. 684) coined the term 'Dostangosystem' to draw attention to

particular relational issues between 'states, organisations, civil societies, and the ever-changing institutional, financial and conceptual interactions that take place between Donors, States and NGOs'. The 'Dostango' concept is meant as a non-normative, anti-essentialist, descriptive and empirically grounded term.^{xxx}

3.5 State regime type

The dynamics of NSP-government relationships vary with different political regimes. The nature of the state and socio-political contexts under which NSPs emerge are essential for understanding NSP-government relationships.^{xxxi} Brinkerhoff argues that in partnerships where semi-authoritarian states hold power, NGO partners are likely to be docile and cooperative. Whereas Wamai found that in democratic societies, NGOs in a relationship with government can simultaneously take on roles of opposition, partner and agent, as their space for manoeuvring widens.

Several studies highlighted how NSP-government relationships are the product of the space created by government over time.^{xxxii} Pereira, for example found that since democratic restoration in Chile and Uruguay, the state has taken advantage of the expertise of NGOs in three ways: cooptation of personnel formerly working for NGOs; cooptation of knowledge appropriated by means of direct service delivery, training of public personnel, consultancy services, etc.; and advocacy activities that put pressure from below, forcing the state to expand and enforce rights and entitlements. Sen found that governments are particularly distrustful of NGOs if the sector engenders political discontent and provides organisational channels through which opposition can be mounted against incumbent regimes.

Sen also explains that governments are particularly likely to scrutinise NGOs when issues of national sovereignty or state security are felt to be at stake. This has been demonstrated recently in Afghanistan, where there has been hostility towards NGOs taking a lead role in service delivery within the state. Palmer notes that in this difficult context of a fragile state, the desirability of replacing NSPs once they are in place is questionable, and this has led to primarily relational (trust and dependency based) forms of contracting between NSPs and the state.

4. Nature of the organisation

Various aspects of the *nature of the organisation*, pertaining to both the NSP and the government, are central to understanding NSP-government relationships. The literature argues that organisations should not be seen as monolithic ‘things’ but rather a series of fluid networks, alliances and individuals, with various conflictual and congenial histories. The following characteristics are important to understanding the nature of the organisation in NSP-government relationships: *Different levels of government, NSPs and their origins and values; The internal management of NSPs; boundaries; Civil society and the state; Networks, alliances, coalitions, and linkages of NSPs with government agencies; Key individuals or leaders*. These characteristics, once again, are intimately linked.

4.1 Different levels of government

Dynamics of NSP-government relationships look quite different at different levels of government, particularly in the context of decentralisation.^{xxxiii} In her three-year ethnographic study of NGOs in the Philippines, Hilhorst focused on how relationships between NGOs and the state evolve locally at village level but sit at the centre of a set of concentric circles representing political arenas in the village, region, province, country and globalised world of international development.

Clark places emphasis on the differences between NGO-government relationships at the central and local levels. He argues that there are often weak relationships between the government and NGOs at the central level but that they are stronger at the local level. Conversely, one study of contracting for health in Cambodia reveals less incentive on the part of local levels of government to support the contracting approach because it threatened local vested interests^{xxxiv}. Sen also argues that there are more obvious differences in NSP-government relationships at the local level than at the central level; these relate to historical dynamics, local conditions, institutional behaviours, local politics and the role of key individuals. He argues that the underlying theme in NSP-government relationships at the local level in India is the hostility of politicians, party workers, local elites, lower level bureaucrats and employees of government towards NGO activities. Sen explains that differences can be observed by examining the interaction of local government and NGOs in various policy arenas such as the social and economic

advancement of women and children, education, health and literacy, housing, etc. Other studies also analyse and discuss the distinct relationships occurring at different levels, through different roles the government assumes.^{xxxv}

4.2 NSPs: origins, values and size

The foundational values and the meanings NSPs ascribe to 'public action' (or social development objectives) help to condition their overall agenda as well as the dynamics of their relationships with other organisations.^{xxxvi} For example, Stone argues that an NGO's original structure and values remain embedded in it even with the growth of government contractual relationships.

Brainard and Siplon; and Kamat argue that different NGOs (i.e. community-based organisations, grassroots organisations and/or advocacy NGOs) generate different responses from government.^{xxxvii} Ramanath's study of the evolution of three NGO-government relationships in Mumbai in the housing sector found that NGO strategies had evolved towards greater complexity and sophistication in their interaction with the government and other actors in the housing field.^{xxxviii} Batley notes that large NGOs often act as intermediaries on behalf of small NGOs involved in partnerships with government. This links with Hulme and Edwards' argument that larger NGOs tend to have less autonomy than smaller NGOs.^{xxxix}

McFarlane, in his study of contracting for slum sanitation in Mumbai, concluded that the size and scale of the dominant NGO's operations, and its presence on the political map, meant that it left little space for smaller organisations to become involved in sanitation activities or in discussions or policy dialogue. In this case, the NGO was able to determine the boundaries and the agendas of its discourse with government.^{xl}

Several sources argue that the founding and development of NGOs can often be attributed to key individuals who have charismatic qualities.^{xli} For example, Sen argues that individuals have various motivations, particularly ideological and financial, for forming and/or joining NGOs which leads to different attitudes, behaviours and interactions between NGOs and government agencies and other affiliated actors through various networks.

3.3 Internal management of NSPs

Understanding the internal power dynamics, management and decision-making processes of NSPs and government agencies is important to understanding the dynamics of relationships.^{xlii} Dorman argues that pressures such as the agendas of staff, members and trustees affect how NGOs function and then affect the ways NGOs relate to the state and other NGOs.^{xliii}

In contrast to the comparative advantage claim that NGOs tend to be less hierarchically managed than government agencies, Mercer argues that NGOs are not necessarily democratic within their own institutions; rather it is common that they are authoritarian, competitive, classist and elitist. Wood and White each claim similarly: hierarchy often exists within and between NGOs and is reinforced through predominant cultural practices.^{xliv}

Lewis claims that it is crucial to interpret NGOs' internal and external operating environments, including the cultural norms that exist within and beyond organisational boundaries.^{xlv} Hilhorst argues against the application of culture as an independent variable, but rather sees culture as something an organisation 'is'. Bebbington et al. and Lewis et al. argue for the importance of understanding the existence of multiple cultures within institutions (i.e. sub-groups with sub-cultures).^{xlvi}

Mageli's ethnographic study of an NGO ('Unnayan' in Kolkata) demonstrated that staff relationships within Unnayan are often contradictory, shifting and ambivalent, situated within flows of knowledge, information and ideas. Mageli found that the fluidity of internal relationships had a significant impact on relationships external to the organisation. In her study of an NGO in the Philippines, Hilhorst describes the range of tensions and shifting alliances in the organisation associated with factors including: political involvement; family background and place of origin (commitment and reference to indigenous origins, language used, social construction of women); kinship and marriage (where family members, husband/wife works), motherhood, marriage and sexuality (singles versus those that are married, economic differentiation and livelihood).^{xlvii}

5. Boundaries

A fundamental issue of NSP-government relationships is that of the definition and application of boundaries – of the organisations themselves, between civil society and the government, within and between networks, coalitions and alliances of various organisations, and dimensions of the NSP-government relationship.^{xlviii} Questions of where NSPs begin and end, and what influences their behaviours and actions, both within the organisation and their external relationships and networks, are up for debate.

Pettigrew (p. 376) goes so far as to claim that a partnership or formal relationship established *between* organisations itself forms the “ultimate postmodern organization, characterized by fluidity, uncertainty, ambiguity, discontinuity.”^{xlix} Lewis (1998) calls for research on NGOs relationships with other agencies to identify the points of linkages, and how those linkages have occurred and continue to occur and change over time.ⁱ

Kumar argues the boundaries of the third sector have become more blurred with the rolling back of the state.ⁱⁱ Lewis (p. 126) further explains that the ‘three sector model’ (private, public and non-governmental sectors) is important for research that is being undertaken on development policy, but, “while it may be analytically convenient to separate the three sectors, the realities are far more complex.”

5.1 Civil society and the state: the position of NSPs

NSP-government relationships need to be situated in a broader understanding of civil society: what constitutes civil society, the history of struggles within civil society and between civil society and the government, the perceived boundaries of civil society, and the roles that civil society assumes.ⁱⁱⁱ

The boundaries of civil society are seen by many as fluid, or at least difficult to define. Lewis’s ethnographic research on civil society in Bangladesh found that the boundaries between state and civil society are ambiguous, constantly shifting through family ties, contracting relationships and overlapping dependencies. Mohan argues that conceptual criticisms of civil society rest upon ontological questions of whether civil society is separate from the state. In recent research on the life history of practitioners having crossed boundaries between the ‘third sector’ and the state throughout their career,

Lewis identified two forms of cross-overs; ‘consecutive’ (taking up a new position) and ‘extensive’ (simultaneously involved in both sectors).^{lviii}

Lewis argues there is a normative tendency to view civil society as a ‘good thing’ and over-simplify all NGOs as equated with ‘civil society’ whilst ignoring other organisations and forms of action.^{liv} Mercer and Mitlin et al. further explain that a commonly held view is that NGOs are a core part of civil society and help strengthen democratic processes. However, Mercer argues that the capacity of NGOs to fulfil their democratic role in civil society is circumscribed by political and economic forces that are *mediated through* governments and donor agencies. Mercer’s argument highlights not only the influence of government agencies on NGOs, but also the interconnectedness of influences from donor agencies, civil society on a broader scale and market forces.

Lewis argues for a re-conceptualisation of civil society both as a ‘system’ (i.e. institutional structure and practices) and as an ‘idea’ (i.e. projected and believed by different people at different levels of society and at different moments in history).^{lv} Similarly, Sood and Osborne et al. argue for the importance of an understanding of civil society that is embedded in context.^{lvi}

5.2 Networks, alliances, coalitions, and linkages of NSPs with government agencies

Linked to the overarching issue of boundaries is the importance of NSP and government networks.^{lvii} Much of the literature now acknowledges that NSPs are situated within wider networks that directly and indirectly influence their relationships with government agencies. In essence they are part of “complex networks of interaction that now characterize our efforts to deal with public problems” (Kumar, p. 11).^{lviii}

This has implications for how we view the boundaries of NSPs as institutions. Hilhorst (p. 3) critiqued the implicit assumption of normative literature that “NGOs constitute a single reality.” But they are increasingly seen as ‘open systems’ within a set of relationships, alliances, coalitions and networks operating through varying degrees and methods of influence and control.^{lix} Several ethnographic empirical studies have characterised this fluidity. Hilhorst’s study found that NGOs are fragmented organisations with fluctuating social networks, and argued that ‘it is in social networks that actors shape and play out the meaning of their organisation’.^{lx} Through her fieldwork on *Unnayan*, Mageli discovered an ‘organisational universe’ that was characterised by numerous alliances

and subgroups that were constantly formed and reformed across or within fragile and fluid boundaries internal and external to *Unnayan*.^{lxi} Pettigrew found in her action research study on a multi-organisational relationship in the UK that the historicity of tensions amongst different individuals and organisations was based on past informal relationships, the formation and reformation of coalitions and factions with their own agendas.

Furthermore, these alliances and networks vary in line with the great diversity of types of NSPs reinforcing the multi-dimensionality and complexity of NSP-government relationships.^{lxii} As Hewitt (2000: 49) puts it; “a review of contemporary thinking about inter-organizational relationships unerringly trips over one word – networks.”

Linked to this question of NGO networks is the observation that there is lack of unity, or fragmentation, among them. Mercer notes that NGOs are divided by class, religion, and political affiliation. In addition, NGOs tend to compete with each other for funding. Postma and Kapoor describe the dependency between international NGOs and local NGOs that is increasingly occurring at the project level.^{lxiii}

5.3 Key individuals/leaders

Individual actors are critical as active agents influencing all aspects of relationships within and between NSPs, other civil society organisations, government and donors.^{lxiv} For example, Tappin emphasises the power of personality as a determining factor in NSP-government relationships in Tuvalu, and Brinkerhoff argues that successful initiation and continuation of social development reforms in general depend upon the actions of key individuals and group who are ‘champions of change’.^{lxv} Wood and Lewis each note the ‘chameleon-like’ qualities of NGO leaders who are able to maintain leadership within their own organisations as it grows, as well as establish and maintain contact with key individuals and organisations from different sectors.

Several studies note that inter-organisational relationships between NGOs and other organisations are often based on personal (informal) relationships.^{lxvi} Maclure notes that “it is not uncommon for senior administrative personnel to move in and out of governmental and nongovernmental positions fairly regularly, and this has helped to foster inter-organizational familiarity and understanding.”^{lxvii}

Yet the majority of studies have still tended to ignore the historical and socio-political role of individuals in the development of specific organisations and their alliances, networks and relationships. Only a handful of ethnographic research studies including those by Mageli, Bebbington et al., Hilhorst and Lewis emphasise the role of individuals' motives, affiliations, and history of relations with government in organisational and inter-organisational evolution.^{lxviii}

Tvedt, in his article arguing for a 'Dostango' approach to understanding relationships, emphasises the role of 'elite circulation' in the global aid system, arguing that achievements by individuals within this system are related to the ability to exploit the range of top positions within institutional partnerships as they move between government, donor agencies, the non-profit and private sectors.^{lxix}

6. Agendas of engagement

Issues related to the ‘agendas of engagement’ that NSPs and government agencies bring to the process of working together include: *incentives for collaboration*, *pre-conditions for successful collaboration* and *the design of the relationship*. The *Whose Public Action* research suggested that collaborating agencies (a) bring their own public policy (or public action) commitments to the relationship, and (b) have incentives to collaborate that arise from the influences that have formed them.^{lxx}

Apart from the research carried out by Batley, Palmer, Rose and Sansom as reported in their 2006 articles, only one study (Welle 2001) specifically addresses the ‘definition of public action’ as an issue influencing the dynamics of an NSP-government relationship.

6.1 *Incentives for collaboration*

The incentives for NSPs and government agencies to collaborate in providing basic services include material and non-material features that are historically and contextually contingent.^{lxxi} Welle divides incentives for collaboration into ‘symbolic’ (i.e. greater dialogue, trust and transparency), or ‘real’ (i.e. contractual). Ullah et al argue that NGOs and government agencies have common goals and visions with respect to social sector development, although with very different institutional approaches. Dorman, Rose and Palmer demonstrated in separate research studies how NSPs are driven to engage in government relationships to mobilise further resources and/or establish greater influence at the macro level.^{lxxii} Palmer’s 2004 study of the health sector found that NGOs were keen to ‘fill the gaps’ in service provision but also keen to obtain resources from donors and/or the government. She explains that in some cases NGOs described how their traditional funding sources had declined in recent years, and that their willingness to be contracted by government may be a result of this general trend. But one case study of NGOs being contracted to deliver services in India (through the Mother NGO Scheme) argues that NGOs did not find the scheme financially attractive, suggesting that contracting isn’t always mutually beneficial. Yet alternatives (to financial) incentives are not explicitly addressed in the vast majority of the literature on contracting.^{lxxiii}

6.2 Pre-conditions for successful collaboration

The intrinsic value of studying government-NSP relationships is arguably in identifying pre-conditions for establishing 'successful' collaboration.^{lxxiv} There is some commonality within the literature in terms of what is seen as necessary to enable successful relationships and outcomes. Two seemingly key factors are trust, (linked to willingness) and adequate government capacity to work with NSPs.^{lxxv}

Batley, Moran, Palmer, Rose and Sansom demonstrated the resource intensity of maintaining contact, cooperation and dialogue in their research. Lack of government capacity is a particular issue in relation to the breakdown of contractual arrangements that require government contract management skill (particularly for monitoring).^{lxxvi}

Batley argues a history of distrust, rivalry, policy unreliability and legal instability between government and NSPs can frustrate the policy intent of partnerships.^{lxxvii} Farrington and Bebbington; and Hulme and Edwards argue that there is often a lack of emphasis on the importance of prior informal contacts that are necessary to build up mutual trust.^{lxxviii} Welle found that pre-conditions of successful relationships are based on a foundation of shared values and common objectives of the actors involved. One specific aspect of mistrust in relation to contracting is lack of faith that government's will actually release the (donor) funds promised to them.^{lxxix} Ullah et al. conclude that trust, recognition of comparative advantage, favourable regulatory frameworks, effective monitoring, transparency, and continued commitment are essential preconditions for successful and sustainable collaboration.

More generally, Lewis recommends that each partnership requires new definition and adaptation in accordance with different contextual needs through a general process that includes identifying the goals of the partnership, designing a range of mechanisms for achieving the necessary inter-organisational and inter-personal linkages, and reviewing purposes and progress regularly. Processes of organisational learning, inter-organisational communication, and techniques of adaptation of successful models will be of central importance. Once principles are agreed on, specific practices can be adapted to local conditions and active partnerships can then be developed.^{lxxx}

Preconditions for successful collaboration might well differ according to different types of engagement (e.g contractual or non-contractual). For example, it has been specifically

argued that contracting is likely to work best when the services to be delivered are *easily specified*, where *performance can be monitored* and *when sanctions/penalties can be imposed* for non-performing contractors.^{lxxxix}

6.3 Design of the relationship

Several publications highlight the importance of the dynamics of the relationship's design in establishing the precedent for its success or failure.^{lxxxii} Brinkerhoff argues that the initial definition of 'partnership' at the onset of the relationship is crucial; more and/or better outcomes are attained if there is synergy during the design phase of the relationship, rather than if partners acted independently. Brinkerhoff and Lister suggest that synergy ought to occur through mutually agreed-upon specification of objectives, mechanisms for combining efforts and managing cooperation and determination of appropriate roles and responsibilities. Gideon argues that NGOs are rarely involved in the design of projects, but are merely invited to execute them. But the limited number of case studies of formal contractual relationships seem to suggest that whilst sometimes NGOs do play a support role and have little involvement in project design, on other occasions they have been contracted by government to deliver projects of their own design.^{lxxxiii}

In her comparative study of partnerships between RuralAid, WaterAid, and local government, Welle found that, if there is mutual respect for the resources each bring into the relationship, there can be a higher degree of interdependency and reciprocity.^{lxxxiv} In an empirical study comparing three case studies of 'master' contractual relationships with direct contracts between the government agency and a non-profit organisation in the US and India, Kumar found several advantages and disadvantages of this type of complex contractual arrangement.^{lxxxv}

7. Nature of the relationship between NSPs and government agencies

The issues associated with the 'nature of the relationship' between NSPs and government agencies in the literature include: *dimensions of the relationship; roles of participants; formal and informal interactions; methods, modes and strategies of interaction; accountability; autonomy and room for manoeuvre*. These issues are inextricably linked both with each other and the other issues identified in the literature review and this working paper, particularly boundary perspectives as discussed in the previous section.

7.1 *Dimensions of the relationship*

NSPs commonly carry out different types of activities - service delivery, advocacy and/or policy dialogue - through a range of relationships, separately and simultaneously.^{lxxxvi} Within these different activities, there are different dimensions and levels of relatedness, of connection. Several publications discuss multiple dimensions through which relationships occur between NSPs, different levels of government, and donor agencies.^{lxxxvii} Smith and Gronebjerg for example, argue that overall, links are made across different dimensions such as the legal framework under which nonprofits can operate, the role they play offering services and efforts made to influence the government agenda.

Sood found empirically that the boundaries between NGOs and government could be understood in terms of: *issue-orientation* (ideology of the NGO); *financial dimension* (NGOs utilising financial and material resources that the state could have employed); *organisational dimension* (NGO management of human and technical resources); *policy dimension* (encompassing the issue of how deeply NGOs can participate in the formulation of development policy).

Wamai (2004) explains that the depth or scope of a collaborative relationship can be understood in terms of the diversity of the relationship, diversity of levels of interactions in both organisational structures, amount of resources devoted to their operations and the prevailing political will.

Matlin describes two domains (i.e. organisational and sectoral) in which interactions occur between the state, the market, NGOs and civil society. Within the *organisational domain*, Matlin points out that each entity has its own objectives although a mutuality of interests is crucial to the relationship. The *sectoral domain* occurs in an overlapping space in which the NGO lies somewhere within state, civil society and market domains. Depending on the particular function of the relationship, the NGO may position itself in a specific area of overlap, although moving to other areas as the relationship evolves, making it more complicated when both service delivery and advocacy work are occurring.^{lxxxviii}

Nelson created a framework to explore and examine interactions occurring within six dimensions of the relationships between donor agencies and NSPs: *technical, resource, values, interpersonal, political and legal*. He argues that the integration of NGOs into larger aid systems can be better understood by taking into account the dynamics occurring within each of these different dimensions. Nelson argues that by taking these different dimensions equally into account, a fuller account of NGOs' relations with other organisations in the aid system can be provided.^{lxxxix}

7.2 Roles of participants

In order to understand the dynamics of the relationship, it is important first to understand the roles that NGOs, different levels of government, donor agencies and associated network organisations play.^{xc} Roles are often perceived differently by each member, signifying past and ongoing tensions. For example, Lister explains that levels of equality in a relationship were interpreted differently by each participant: the INGO referred to it as a 'partnership' whereas the NNGO did not. The donor agency that was involved referred to its relationship with the INGO as a 'partnership' but the INGO saw it more formally.

Krishna argues that different roles will be played by local governments and community organisations in different types of partnership, but, if these are appropriately structured, they can provide a basis for institutional strengthening at the local level. Pereira explains that the role of NGOs in partnerships is usually linked to the provision of local services for which they tend to have a natural legitimacy. Migdal, however, contends that the motive is different; by inviting NGOs to take over responsibility for welfare provision, the government is able to bypass vested local interests, through the co-optation of local populations. Migdal explains that this is a response to pressures of global capitalism for

government to move from the role of directly administering welfare while maintaining control of the allocation of funds to NGOs.

Kumar mentions the ‘interesting paradox’ that NGOs want to have contracts, but often do not want to be called contractors.^{xcii} Pereira distinguishes between the roles of NGOs acting as partners versus challengers, but explains the contradictory ‘double nature’ of NGOs, arguing that NGOs typically cannot be reduced to one category (i.e. ‘challenger’ or ‘partner’) as both tend to occur simultaneously, though in different dimensions. Wamai also describes the role of NGOs in relation to government as partners or challengers depending on the attitude that dominates their approach to public structures; both roles can be seen as being in cooperation with government.

Several sources discuss tensions between service delivery and advocacy roles in NSP-government relationships. Many case studies of contracting have been concerned with the disjuncture between the roles that NSPs play in delivering services and their ability to influence policy discourse regarding those services.^{xcii} Matlin argues that NGOs may occupy different points on a continuum between positive and negative relationships with the state, in both advocacy and service delivery roles.^{xciii} Bouget and Prouteau, also argue that there may be serious conflicts between the advocacy and service delivery functions of NGOs, creating distrust and conflict. Ramanath found that each NGO she studied evolved from having predominant roles of advocacy (i.e. confrontational) to those of service delivery (i.e. collaborative). These findings are in contrast to predominant views such as Korten’s (1990) thesis, which argues that NGOs evolve through four phases, beginning with very focused work (i.e. relief work), expanding to service delivery work with the state, and then engaging in advocacy and policy activities. Ramanath also found that features of advocacy and policy dialogue continued within each of the NGOs after they began taking on service delivery work, although the tactics each NGO employed changed over time.^{xciv}

The research by Batley, Moran, Palmer, Rose and Sansom, explores the ‘indirect’ provider roles of government in contracting, regulating, facilitating and maintaining policy dialogue with non-state service providers of basic education, health-care, water and sanitation as being weak, due to problems of capacity, information availability for monitoring, and political and economic instability.

7.3 Formal and informal interactions

Interactions between government and NSPs tend to be formalised in some way (i.e. some written documentation or an evolved non-written high level of trust that is culturally recognised as being formal), although, as noted earlier, there are always coinciding informal modes of contact through organisational alliances and networks and through key individuals within the organisations.^{xcv}

Farrington and Bebbington and Hulme and Edwards argue that deliberate attempts at NGO-government collaboration have tended to under-emphasise that a wide range of formal and informal interactions often already existed. Similarly, Brinkerhoff (2002) explains that NSP-government partnerships incorporate formal features such as performance contracts with NGOs for service delivery and sharing of staff between public sector agencies and NGOs. At the same time, they also often contain different levels of informal interaction that Pettigrew refers to as 'back-staging' or interactions that occur 'behind the scenes' of formal requirements. Pettigrew contends that the combination of formal and informal interactions can also be perceived as complex vertical and horizontal levels of participation maintained through a range of communication channels. Welle distinguishes 'symbolic' (i.e. formal, usually contractual) and 'real' (i.e. based on dialogue, trust and transparency) collaboration.^{xcvi}

Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff argue that when governments initiate partnerships, interactions tend to be top-down (i.e. more formal) whilst, when non-profits initiate partnerships, interaction tends to be bottom-up (i.e. more informal). In bottom-up initiated partnerships, non-profit organisations are mainly concerned with policy advocacy or constituent empowerment, which is rarely the case when the state is the initiator.

Interactions formally stipulated in partnership arrangements can change during the partnership, for example adding policy advocacy to service delivery. Informal interactions can themselves be crucial to how relationships evolve. Van Slyke finds that the way nonprofits are managed *evolves over time* from a principal-agent to a principal-steward relationship with government, and that trust is not necessarily assumed at the beginning of the contract but is built through interaction and communication and over time a more relational form of contracting, based on mutual exchange and reciprocity, is formed.

7.4 Modes and strategies of interaction

Some publications have theoretically and empirically described the methods, modes and strategies of interaction that members of an NSP-government relationship adopt.^{xcvii} These varied strategies and means of interaction and channels of communication impinge significantly on the quality and process of NSP-government relationships.

Stone explains that relationships between organisations tend to occur more strongly in one of two orbits: one that is hierarchically ordered under government contracting agencies with conformity of rules and regulations, and the other that is more loosely structured around interpersonal relationships. But the two can, and often do, co-exist. Pettigrew explains that types of participation vary and are related to rules of inclusion and exclusion, determined by the explicit and implicit exercise of power.

Several sources discuss the role and effects of communication in NSP-government relationships.^{xcviii} Lewis found that problems within the partnership were based primarily on conflicts between centralised project cultures and local realities, particularly through discrepancies of language and local dialect.^{xcix}

Welle found that three elements were crucial in determining interactions in her comparative research study of two different relationships: power relations and channels of communication – with the length of the relationship influencing both. Welle identified power relations as being closely linked to the way in which resources (in this case, water) are valued and access is controlled. Communication is related to reciprocity and dialogue was found to be a vital component of the quality of the relationship, allowing flexibility and mutual understanding, and helping to create trust and transparency. For example, the Water Aid-Rural Aid relationship changed over time from a ‘master-servant’ dynamic to one in which Rural Aid had much more room for manoeuvre due to institutional changes in Water Aid that provided the opportunity for more open dialogue, transparency and accountability.

Brown and Troutt claim that research on non-profit/government relationships should focus on how to improve communication and understanding, contributing to theories of partnership effectiveness. Along these lines, Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff explain that technological development (i.e. communication through the Internet) has had an influence on organisational structures and process which has in turn influenced the ways

in which non-profits engage with each other. Maclure's 2007 study is noteworthy, since it concludes that the 'remarkable degree' of regular informal contact among state and CSO officials through e-mail messaging and frequent use of cell phones greatly reinforced the development of inter-organizational familiarity and understanding. Yet, Brainard and Siplon claim that theory does not yet account for the effect of communication technology on relationships with other organisations, actors, alliances and networks.

'Backstaging' or informal day-to-day communication is also an important aspect of interaction. Postma (p. 454) explains that, although there is agreement in the NGO and aid communities of Mali and Niger for example that 'listening is at the cornerstone of effective partnership', there is much less appreciation of how everyday 'talking' is basic to actual practice.

The use of varied strategies and tactics by NSPs and government engaged in relationships are examined and discussed in several sources (Hulme and Edwards 1997; Najam 2000; Dorman 2001; Ramanath 2005). Dorman's research finds that NGOs tend to avoid being 'political' to keep the relationship with the government non-adversarial. She explains that NGOs use different non-confrontational tactics to undertake advocacy: *passive resistance* (empowerment through alternative strategies), *collaboration* (working closely with ministries but with little interest in changing policy), *entryism* (attempting to penetrate the state machinery to influence policy directions from within) and *opposition* (protests, high-profile appeals, demonstrations).

Hulme and Edwards describe a range of communication tactics used in attempts to control or influence other actors. These range from persuasion, through financial inducements to direct coercion, and can be applied through formal means (financial transfers, accounting, contracts, reporting systems and registration) or informal means (information flows, staff exchanges, patronage, seminars or discussions).

Ramanath demonstrates that NGO relations with the government are not simply either confrontational or cooperative, but are defined by combinations of various interactions. In efforts to gain and retain legitimacy, NGOs are likely to use multiple interaction styles both simultaneously and sequentially.^c

Batley et al. categorised forms of contractual interaction into three types:

1. Tight, hierarchical contracts between governments and NSPs which, in practice, were often poorly specified and monitored due to problems of government capacity, lack of trust between the partners, and unclear legal status of the contractor;
2. Loose but hierarchical agreements where, in principle, government was contracting an NSP but the 'rules of engagement' were unclear or not respected – leading to tensions in water concessions (Sansom) and the contracting out of school management (Rose); and
3. Loose collaborative agreements which may break down where there is lack of trust about the fulfilment of mutual obligations, but may be sustained where the partners have a mutual interest in maintaining their commitment in return for the commitment of the other. The health sector presented examples of formally agreed joint ventures between government and independently funded NGOs in Pakistan (Palmer), and forms of informal co-production between government, NGOs and community organizations in water and sanitation in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Malawi (Sansom). Batley concludes that while formal opportunities for dialogue have increased, often under donor influence, they are often in practice limited in three senses.^{ci}

7.5 Accountability

Accountability is an issue that permeates all stages of NSP-government relationships: accountability of the NSP, the government agency, the donor, other affiliated individuals and partners, and accountability to the poor. Krishna explains that there are three different directions of accountability: *upwards or vertical* (to higher levels of administration or funders), *downwards* (to users or citizens) and *horizontal* (to network organisations or partners). In practice, upward accountability tends to be emphasised over the other two types due to the powerful role of donors, and to the vertical accountability that exists in all government systems.^{cii}

White warns that 'franchising the state' to NGOs may erode mechanisms of accountability rather than strengthen them. NGO expansion, even under franchise, may lead to a bypassing of the state and the further erosion of state services. Mayhew explains that lines of accountability are often not defined and that government has little capacity to regulate NGOs accountability. Therefore, Mayhew (like Rose) claims that in practice, NGOs are often primarily accountable to donors which impose stringent functional accountability measures but which are themselves accountable neither to

recipient governments nor to beneficiary communities. In a research study of the accountability of a relationship with an INGO, NNGO and a donor agency, Lister observes that accountability operated upwards rather than downwards.^{ciii}

Haque contends that ‘partnerships’ tend to empower NGOs rather than the poor, expanding the power of donors and NGOs whilst weakening the power of the poor and often sidelining local government. Seckinelgin argues similarly, that although institutional relations are often discussed in relation to NGO accountability, most of these discussions emphasise ways to achieve efficient and effective coordination of these relationships, rather than how accountability to the poor can be achieved. There are however, cases where attempts have been made to involve communities or clients in the process of monitoring and regulation of service providers.^{civ}

7.6 Autonomy, identity and room for manoeuvre

The maintenance of organisational identity and autonomy, particularly on the part of the NSP in a relationship with government, is a central issue that is discussed from a variety of perspectives.^{cv} Smith and Gronebjerg (2006: 5) explain that “whether their dealing with one another can be characterized by ‘cooperative autonomy’ remains doubtful. They appear as much rivals as partners.” Hulme and Edwards, and Streeten ask whether NGOs and the government have become so close that NGOs have lost their autonomy and can no longer resist becoming mere agents of government.

Hilhorst uses the notion of ‘room for manoeuvre’ to analyse the social space actors have to pursue their ideas and projects. The way NGOs expand their ‘room for manoeuvre’ depends on their effectiveness in enrolling others into the network of actors who become partially, though rarely completely, enrolled in the project.

The limited available research into contracting NGOs to deliver services suggests that levels of formality within contractual relationships differ greatly and that this impacts on the autonomy of the actors and their room for manoeuvre in different ways. Formality in relation to contractual arrangements relates to levels of specification of inputs and outcomes, and in essence control mechanisms by the contracting party. An absence of formally assigned roles and responsibilities can lead to overlaps in function, weak accountability, and conflict between the parties.^{cvi} On the other hand, where formality means over-specification in terms of how a service should operate, it can restrict

innovation and make it virtually impossible for the NGOs to fulfil the terms of the contract.^{cvii} In the Mother NGO scheme in India, for example, NGOs complained that MOUs were too informal with no objective grievance mechanisms, leaving government in a position of power in relation to the NGOs.^{cviii} There is some evidence to suggest that formality isn't locked into a straightforward relationship with contract type - for example, even seemingly tight, performance-based agreements in Afghanistan are described as 'vague' in their specifications.^{cix}

In her 2007 study of service delivery partners in the USA, Gazely found that partnership formality was less in service sectors where government dominates, posing the question of whether level of formality (control) is related to existing government investment or involvement in the service being contracted. She concludes that *when government-nonprofit partnerships are formed to address specific public needs, norms within policy areas influence the amount of control that government partners exert*. She also finds that loss of formality rarely equals loss of control.^{cx}

Several publications discuss autonomy as it relates to financial in/dependence and political space.^{cx} Clayton found that nearly 50% of NGOs working in the sanitation and water sector at community level in Ghana and Nepal were completely dependent on government contracts as their sole source of funding and were subsequently not able to build their own capacity or to advocate.^{cxii} Gideon argues that when existing NGOs are persuaded to scale up their activities in order to compete for funding, they often abandon their original ideologies in the attempt to meet targets and performance indicators, thus compromising their autonomy. Sood found that in terms of autonomy, both government and NGOs are working to enhance the space for NGOs' policy influence in specific areas, through financial means and technical resources. The question is whether, with large amounts of government financing, NGOs will become 'instruments of government policy'. NGOs tend to be critical of relationships with government, as there is mistrust and fear that they will be coerced into conforming to bureaucratic guidelines.^{cxiii}

Autonomy is, at least partly, a subjective matter. Ullah et al. found, for example, through their study of contracted NGO-government relationships in the health sector, that NGOs may follow government guidelines but decide their own operational strategies in accordance with their philosophy and values, allowing them to retain their own sense of independence.^{cxiv} Kumar similarly found that contracting does not have an overall effect

of re-directing NGOs away from their original missions and goals or lessen their ability to carry out innovative work. Kumar also found that contracting does convert non-profit organisations, NGOs and civil society organisations into 'convenient conduits for achieving the public purposes of the state', therefore making it difficult for them to be fully accountable to the concerns of communities. Cho and Gillespie (2006) however, explain that the literature suggests negative consequences for nonprofits emerging from government-nonprofit contracts including a dilution of advocacy role; goal displacement; loss of autonomy generally; increase in overhead costs; and poor quality from an over-emphasis on fiscal accountability.

Fowler discusses the identity struggles of non-government development organisations (NGDOs), characterising them as having 'third sector' and voluntary characteristics, but also as actors in a complex development process in which they try to maintain their identity (i.e. values, beliefs and development philosophy). Fowler contends that NGDOs seldom talk about their beliefs explicitly; rather these emerge through statements about their perception and analysis of development generally and how this is translated into action. Although the NGDOs may articulate one set of beliefs, they often carry out practices that are quite different. These inconsistencies are often accepted for reasons of survival in the aid system.

The struggle over the organisation's identity is handled through its internal governance or management structure; the NGDO is more likely to be able to hold onto its founding principles and voluntary values if the system of governance internally allows it.^{cxv} Fowler argues that a lack of shared beliefs between individuals within an NGDO results in a lack of trust, hierarchical management and a control orientation which reduces the ability of the NGDO to respond rapidly and in a participatory manner to its primary stakeholders (i.e. the poor).^{cxvi} This again signals the importance of understanding the internal power dynamics of each organisation involved in the relationship.

8. Effects of the relationship

Several empirical studies discuss the effects of relationships on the NSP, government agency, donor agency, community beneficiary or associated network members^{cxvii}. These effects are portrayed as negative, positive or neutral.^{cxviii} The effects of NSP-government relationships have to do with all of the issues presented in this working paper. However, as the relationship evolves, it may in turn, change organisations' agendas, challenging their goals and identities, and perhaps even the underlying institutional environment.^{cxix}

8.1 Isomorphism

The issue of isomorphism emerges repeatedly in theoretical and empirical literature discussing relationships of NSPs and government agencies.^{cxx} As applied to organisational relationships, isomorphism is the result of different entities interacting with each other and becoming more alike in identity, form and structure. Considering NSP-government relationships and the general assumption that NSPs are typically the weaker actor in the relationship, isomorphism theory assumes that the NSP takes on more and more of the characteristics of government. Fowler demonstrates this through a mapping of the intersection of NGDOs, government and the market and how NGDOs become more hierarchical and bureaucratic.

Ramanath explains that isomorphism is expected to take place in an organisational field because the system of organisations is defined both by relational linkages and by shared cultural rules and meaning systems. Resultant rationalised myths of organisational structure create an assumption of isomorphic change in terms of structural features, internal decision-making processes and behavioural features. Ramanath explains that, as more NGOs shift from confrontational to cooperative positions with government, institutional theorists inform us that it would be reasonable to expect that organisations will become more homogenous or more similar in their structure, culture and output. Ramanath cites several sources (i.e. DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Meyer and Rowan 1992; Bidwell 2001) to show that there is ample evidence in research using organisational theory to support the claim of isomorphism.^{cxxi}

However, this perception of 'isomorphism' in NGO-government relationships is strongly challenged by Ramanath through her research. She argues that NGOs are so diverse in their tactical activities within NSP-government relations that they do not all fall under the isomorphic spell of government. She observes in her study of three NGO-government relationships in the housing sector of Mumbai that the three similar and proximate NGOs each used different strategies in response to the same environment to maintain their own autonomy. She analysed the means (strategies and tactics) and the structures adopted by NGOs to carry out housing activities. Although each NGO started to display a certain degree of uniformity in their strategies of engagement with the government (e.g. all NGOs actively sought and accepted appointments as delivery agents of the State), organisational interventions and tactics suggested a less uniform pattern of organisational adaptation.^{cxix}

9. Conclusion

Research into what influences and determines the nature and outcomes of relationships between NSPs and government is still in its formative stage. The questions remain perhaps more sophisticated than the answers: *How do macro-institutional conditioning factors influence the potential for successful collaboration? How non-governmental are NSPs in reality? What design of relationships is most likely to result in successful outcomes for poor people?* Certainly there is a need for further empirical work to more deeply address these and related questions.

It is difficult to form general conclusions when dealing with relationships that are influenced by such a multitude of potential variables. What is certain is that an ever-more complex picture is emerging, in which the space that NSP-government relationships operate within is formed and constantly adapted through history, local, national and global contexts; these relationships are determined not only by the nature of the organisations and the individuals they are made up of, but increasingly by external networks; and the incentives for organisations to engage in these relationships, their forms of interaction, and how these interactions are designed and operate in practice all influence the degree of successful outcomes. None of these factors can be prioritised above another - especially since they are so inherently inter-linked.

The *Whose Public Action?* (WPA) research on NSP-government relationships in education, health and sanitation sector programmes in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh complements has explored the key issues that have emerged in the literature review. The WPA research hypothesises that the institutional context conditions the formation of the organisations: their interests; values, ideologies, understandings and goals; assets and capacity; decision-making processes and organisational structures affecting the agenda and commitments that organizations bring to the encounter with 'partners'; and their incentives for entering into relationships. Historical influences are a central component to all stages of the WPA research at the contextual (i.e. country), organisational and relationship levels. The WPA research has prioritised the identification and analysis of legal requirements for the registration and activities of NSPs in each country and has identified key sector-specific policy areas or programmes for study, in which there are expectations of partnership at an international as well as national level. The WPA research framework has included examination of donor influences within each case study

and government relationships in association with different governmental regimes in each country, over time. The nature of the NSP and different levels of government involved in the particular relationship under study within each of the cases is a core area of the WPA research as well as the various networks and alliances associated with the relationship. The WPA research is looking not only at financial incentives, but also ideological and other non-material incentives. In addition, the WPA research is looking at the vertical, formal, contractual arrangements of the relationship and the horizontal, informal interactions occurring between different individuals within the relationship as well as within networks and alliances associated with the relationship. Finally, the WPA research examines how different organisations and individuals within the relationship are accountable and the ways in which each seeks to maintain its own autonomy through the course of the relationship.

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ⁱ The original literature review is published on the WPA website:
http://www.idd.bham.ac.uk/research/Service_Providers.shtml

ⁱⁱ The literature review did not cover government's relations with other forms of non-state providers. Nor did it seek to deal with all possible relationships unless these appear in this literature. Notably, relations of 'contract', which are an important part of much of the literature on public-private partnership, are a relatively unexplored and under-represented area of research. This finding was confirmed through a later unpublished annotated bibliography that looked specifically for case studies of contractual relationships.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sanyal 1994; Stone 1996; Lewis 1997, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2008; Streeten 1997; Sood 2000; Welle 2001; Mercer 2002; Wamai 2004; Pereira 2005; Selsky and Parker 2005; Lewis and Opuku-Mensah 2006; Mitlin et al. 2007

^{iv} Farrington and Bebbington 1992; Sanyal 1994; Clark 1995; Fowler 1997; Hulme and Edwards 1997; Najam 2000; Young 2000; Baccaro 2002; Lewis and Opuku-Mensah 2006; Smith and Gronebjerg 2006; Mitlin et al. 2007

^v For example, Sansom (2006) explains that, increasingly, governments in developing countries recognise that the public sector alone cannot provide adequate water and sanitation services to all. Moran (2006) argues that the rise of NSPs and subsequent case for government-NSP relationships have arisen in response both to perceived state failure to provide services and comprehensive democratisation. Plummer (2002:1) argues that in the 'context of the widespread decentralisation and devolution of responsibility to local levels of

government, some municipalities have quickly found that they have neither the human nor the financial resources to meet the extent of their obligations’.

^{vi} The case for NSPs filling the gaps left by state failure (Farrington and Bebbington 1992; Sanyal 1994; Stone 1996; Hulme and Edwards 1997; Robinson 1997; Sood 2000; Baccaro 2002; Batley 2006; Moran 2006) is made partly on the grounds of their greater efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery (Sanyal 1994; Clark 1995; Bouget and Prouteau 2005; Mitlin et al. 2007). Addressing the exponential rise in the numbers and scope of NGOs internationally, Hulme and Edwards (1997) argue that they have been part of the process of ‘rolling back the state’. Many donor organisations have favoured NGOs (or NSPs more generally) as a means of democratising, remedying poverty, strengthening civil society, and substituting for government agencies.

^{vii} Farrington and Bebbington (1992), for example, in an international study comparing 70 cases of government agencies working with NSPs to provide agricultural services, identified different areas in which NGOs have been innovative and successful. For example, they have developed systems approaches to technological development, used diagnostic and participatory methods, restructured social organisations and introduced new management approaches, which government typically finds difficult to introduce.

^{viii} Farrington and Bebbington 1992; Lewis 1997, 1998, 2001, 2003; Sood 2000; Welle 2001; Wamai 2004; Mayhew 2005; Sanyal 1994; Clarke 1998; Fowler 1998; Grindle 2002; Haque 2002, 2005; Lewis and Opuku-Mensah 2006

^{ix} Lewis 1998; Brinkerhoff 1999; Sood 2000; Pereira 2005; Ramanath 2005; Mitlin et al. 2007. Brinkerhoff contends that the involvement of NGOs in service delivery provides them with opportunities to extend their influence to policy planning and implementation. Pereira argues that NGOs can also be understood as social movements aiming to counter what they perceive as oppressive government agendas and practices. Sood notes that one of the critical roles NGOs can perform is to enhance government accountability by researching laws, analysing current policies and evaluating budget allocations. The NSP is therefore valued as a ‘watchdog’ over the government.

^x See for example Hoppers (2007) study of integrating formal and non-formal education in Uganda.

^{xi} More specifically, it has been argued that NGOs may have hierarchical and bureaucratic characteristics and a consequent lack of democratic accountability, particularly as they expand in size and scope; that NGOs may not reach the poor, particularly the ‘poorest’ of the poor; NGOs may not challenge oppressive power relations within communities (e.g. local elites); Scale of coverage is often limited and patchy; There may be competition between NGOs leading to fragmentation and overlap; NGOs may have little autonomy from donor agencies and undergo ‘depoliticisation’ (Sanyal 1994; Stone 1996; Fisher 1997; Fowler 1997; Robinson 1997; Streeten 1997; Wood 1997; Edwards and Hulme 1998; Fowler 1998; Hudock 1999; Smilie and Helmich 1999; White 1999; Zaidi 1999; Fowler 2000; Sood 2000; Akhtar 2002; Dorman 2001; Haque 2002, 2004; Hilhorst 2003; Lewis 2003; Abrahamsen 2004; Agge 2006; Lewis and Opuku-Mensah 2006; Tvedt 2002, 2006; Mitlin et al. 2007)

^{xii} Hulme and Edwards (1997)

^{xiii} Mitlin et al. (2007) explain three trends that impinge on the ability and scope for NGOs to create systemic or reformist alternatives: the continued deepening of the democratization-cum-neoliberalisation agenda; the increasingly dominant poverty agenda in international aid; the relatively more recent hugely pernicious security agenda.

^{xiv} In a detailed research study of the legislative histories of NSP-government relationships in Bangladesh, Vietnam, Cambodia and Nepal, Mayhew (2005) found that each of the four governments wanted to maintain supremacy over the public sector but recognised that they alone were not sufficient to provide adequate health services, and therefore sought NGOs to fill the gap. In her doctoral study of NGOs and the Zimbabwean state, Dorman (2001) explains that the ideological commitments of NGOs and the government are generally similar at a broad level and that both benefit materially and non-materially from engaging in a relationship to provide basic services. Furthermore, Dorman argues that there tend to be strong cultural and social connections between élites working in government agencies and NSPs. Sood (2000)

explains that, although tensions exist between the state and NGOs, both sets of actors realise the fundamental benefits that can come from partnership.

^{xv} For example, see the Afghanistan Health Sector case; Palmer 2006.

^{xvi} Hulme and Edwards 1997; Lewis 1997; WDR 1997, 2004; Fowler 1998; Najam 2000; Welle 2001; Plummer 2002; Brinkerhoff 2003; Crawford 2003; Pettigrew 2003; Cornwall and Brock 2005; Haque 2005; MacDonald and Chrisp 2005; Rao and Smyth 2005; Lewis and Opuku-Mensah 2006.

^{xvii} Hulme and Edwards 1997; Lewis 1997, 2003, 2008; Fowler 1998, 2000; Pender 2001; Welle 2001; Brinkerhoff 2002, 2003; Pettigrew 2003; Abrahamsen; Cornwall and Brock 2005; Rao and Smyth 2005; Lewis and Opuku-Mensah 2006

^{xviii} For example, Pettigrew (2003) differentiates between 'symbolic' versus 'real' partnerships and Batley (2006) between 'formal' and 'real' dialogue. Welle (2001) argues that 'partnership' is flexible and a 'good' word but 'it tends to hide more than it reveals about the real issues it deals with'. Lister (2001), in her examination of relationships between a bi-lateral donor agency, an international NGO and a national NGO in Central America finds that, although there might be good working relationships, it can be questioned whether there is a genuine sharing of skills, responsibility and accountability and whether there is enough synergy to characterise a 'partnership'.

^{xix} Bhat et al. further argue that partnerships are driven by context, are partly written goals, and are a dynamic process evolving over time with trust and concern for the other party. Contracting, on the other hand, is driven by a set of rules since everything is written down, and the emphasis is on control and monitoring.

^{xx} Rao and Smyth (2005) argue that through the emphasis on partnership, there has been increasing encouragement to bring the state back through an emphasis not only on the market, the state and civil society, but also donor (multi-lateral and bi-lateral) agencies.

^{xxi} For example, Smith and Gronebjerg (2006) argue that NGO-government relationships are conditioned by economic and market structures, household and local community structures. This includes the *nature of institutional relations* (which institutions are dominant and how they operate and maintain their dominance); *nature of the economy*; and the *nature of the political structure*.

^{xxii} Campos et al. applied a New Institutional Economics theoretical framework to examine the evolution of the Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP) in the Northern Areas of Pakistan and the key factors for its institutional success: high degree of beneficiary participation, leadership characteristics and access to financial resources.

^{xxiii} Collignon and Vezina 2000; Tuvalu 2000; Brinkerhoff 2002; Mayhew 2005; Batley 2006; Palmer 2006; Rose 2006

^{xxiv} For example, Mayhew found that in Nepal, government and legislative frameworks are weak; NGOs are very active and perceived as providing a critical input into development activities. In contrast, the government in Bangladesh reacts very differently to the strength of its NGO sector which it sees as a threat to its own hegemony.

^{xxv} For example, Lewis (1998) argues that partnerships in Bangladesh can be understood partly as the product of changing policy agendas and dependency on the provision of international aid. Lewis argues that Northern NGOs operate in an increasingly complex policy environment that is going through three primary types of change: 1) A steady shift from direct implementation of projects by NGOs towards partnerships with local organisations; 2) An increase in direct donor funding; and 3) emphasis by donors on relief and emergency work in the 1990s, which is often at the expense of longer-term development activities.

^{xxvi} Ramanath, for example, argues that NGO-government interactions occur in the space created by the state in interaction with global pressures, which have been a major factor in spurring macroeconomic and structural reforms that have led to a scaling up of NGO activities.

^{xxvii} Governmentality argues that government systems have shifted from that of government to governance which is described as the increasing involvement of actors from outside the formal boundaries of the state in the process of governing (i.e. networks of inter-connected actors from the public private and voluntary sectors of supra-national and sub-national institutions have created multi-levelled systems of governing rather than the hierarchy dominated and defined by the central state).

^{xxviii} For example, see Waldman (2006)

^{xxix} Brinkerhoff (2003:115) similarly explains 'it is unlikely that partnerships would have been achieved without the incentives of donor funding ... the initial terms of the partnerships between government, NGOs and citizen groups pre-determined by donors'. Kudva argues that uneasy partnerships between NSPs and government appear to be the norm in public service contractor models that are encouraged by government and foreign donor funding. Lister used organisational theory to explore issues and processes of power (i.e. means of power, scope of power, amount of power and frameworks of power) in a relationship between a national NGO, international NGO and a bi-lateral donor agency. Lister found that the key element defining the base of power is the control of financial resources; donor organisations determine the parameters of activity as they control the resources. Lister found that the INGO was 'doubly dependent', first on the donor agency (financially and technically) and second on the NNGO (for legitimacy and information). The donor agency had operational influence over the INGO which had to create the necessary processes, procedures and timetables to fulfil the conditions expected by the donor agency. There were no effective mechanisms for the INGO to exert either structural or operational influence over the donor agency. In formal collaboration, the INGO and NNGO had operational influence over activities although the INGO exerted structural influence over the NNGO. However, Lister found that the INGO went along with NNGO practices they did not agree with, possibly due to informal and personal relationships and/or the need for NNGO resources.

^{xxx} Tvedt (2006: 684) explains, "It should not be seen as a term that degrades the NGOs because of their dependency on state funds or their closeness to states. The Dostango-term does not carry with it the conventional, saddening story of organisational decay because of state connections, where formerly independent and strong NGOs gradually became co-opted by states and therefore inevitably and gradually degenerate. This is primarily because there is no such simple one-to-one relationship between financial dependence and autonomy, or 'closeness' to states and development potential ... instead encourages historical analyses of state/NGO relations in different countries and regions, based on an understanding of the NGOs as living, ever-changing and not sedimentary phenomena, in relation to states and 'beneficiaries'".

^{xxxi} Postma 1994; Sanyal 1994; Lewis 1998; Sen 1999; Dorman 2001; Brinkerhoff 2002; Wamai 2004; Pereira 2005; Ramanath 2005; Smith and Gronebjerg 2006; Ullah et al. 2006

^{xxxii} For example, Postma contends that the effects of post-colonial influences (i.e. the superimposition of an inorganic governing model and the dismemberment of decentralised decision-making bodies) have had implications for state/society relationships and the position and role of NGOs within those relationships. Ramanath's study of housing in Mumbai illustrates that the government increasingly came to occupy a more decisive position in the ecosystem of NGO-government interactions and created the space for the emergence and institutionalisation of NGO strategies. Sood argues that 'empowerment NGOs' and 'support NGOs' threaten the government because they can appear to challenge the government's control and power over its financial and material resources. There is often government resentment at the amount of funding NGOs receive from donors. Mayhew (2005) explains that government may wish to regulate or restrict NGOs when they feel that NGOs siphon off resources that might otherwise have come to the government or where they are afraid that NGOs could challenge government ideology.

^{xxxiii} Collignon and Vezina 2000; Clark 1997; Sen 1999; Wamai 2004; Hilhorst 2003; Krishna 2003; Kudva 2004; Mendonça 2004; Pereira 2005

^{xxxiv} Soeters and Griffiths (2003) p.81

^{xxxv} For example, Kudva claims that NSP-government relationships are shaped by changes in state-society relationships and by the position of the government as *regulator* (requiring NGOs to register), *funder* (state seeks to selectively collaborate with groups that can elicit people's participation and make government programmes more efficient and effective), and *political force* (strong community-based NGOs are potential local power structures). These different government positions provide multiple points of contact and possibilities for conflict and collaboration with NGOs. Mendonça examined decentralised social policies and their impacts on relationships between the state and civil society in Brazil using Evans' (1996) concepts of

synergy (i.e. embeddedness and complementarity). Findings indicate that, although decentralisation did give more autonomy to local governments which therefore led to deeper relationships with civil society organisations, it transferred mainly tasks and responsibility rather than power. Mendonça therefore concluded that it was difficult to produce synergistic relationships. Pereira focused on the effects decentralisation is having on relationships between NGOs and different levels of government in Chile and Uruguay. Pereira found that in both countries the participation of community organisations in the provision of basic services creates the conditions for clientelism and reinforces dependency on government. This raises the question of whether greater community participation through decentralisation has occurred for the benefit of local authorities or local community empowerment. In general, Pereira finds that smaller NGOs are usually left out of funding by central government, so they turn to local municipal sources. Larger NGOs have tended to turn to central government agencies and INGOs for funding.

^{xxxvi} Farrington and Bebbington 1992; Stone 1996; Hulme and Edwards 1997; Streeten 1997; Coston 1998; Fowler 1997, 1998; Najam 2000; Brinkerhoff 2002; Nelson 2006

^{xxxvii} For example, CBOs are often viewed as the most effective catalyst for 'bottom-up' development but are often dependent on technical expertise from the government. Advocacy NGOs tend to be focused on raising public awareness on a variety of issues and are often in a competitive or conflictual relationship with the government.

^{xxxviii} Similar to species within an ecosystem, Ramanath found that there is no normative direction of evolution within each of the NGOs. Each NGO faced different internal and external forces that promoted, prevented or otherwise shaped its attempts to make a 'major' shift in housing strategies through unique sets of constraints arising from path dependent factors. Each NGO also coped differently with uncertainties caused by variations in its resource environment. Ramanath suggests that a heterogeneous landscape of NGO-government housing strategies and tactics found in their formative years is likely to persist.

^{xxxix} Sood also found that there are distinctions about which NGOs governments will work with due to various levels of proximity between different types of NGOs and government; in general, government officials tend to prefer not to work with small NGOs.

^{xl} McFarlane (2008)

^{xli} Hulme and Edwards 1997; Wood 1997; Sen 1999; White 1999; Lister 2000; Tappin 2000; Corder 2001; Brinkerhoff 2002; Hailey and James 2002; Bebbington et al. 2003; Hilhorst 2003; Lewis et al. 2003; Mageli 2005; Ramanath 2005; Lewis and Opuku-Mensah 2006; Tvedt 2006

^{xlii} Stone 1996; Fisher 1997; Wood 1997; White 1999; Dorfman 2001; Hailey and James 2002; Mercer 2002; Bebbington et al. 2003; Lewis 2003; Lewis et al. 2003; Mageli 2005; Ramanath 2005

^{xliii} Dorman proposes that NGOs need to be examined from the inside. This argument emerged as a result of Dorman's observation that most studies of NGOs in Africa evaluate them as development organisations, rarely examining the dynamics of NGO decision-making other than to categorise them as 'donor-driven' or 'GONGOS'.

^{xliv} Furthermore, as Mercer argues, NGOs are often staffed by urban middle-class elites with no roots in under-privileged areas. Wood (1997: 88) argues that, within NGOs, vertical lines of communication tend to replace horizontal ones with only the leaders having a sense of the whole picture and staff ceasing 'to be generalists as sections and divisions are created to cope with the increasing specialisms and complexity of the programme'. Wood explains that rigid NGO leadership makes it nearly impossible to create a management structure that engenders participatory decision-making, in spite of the fact that the leader often promotes it. There tends to be a contradiction in that the means are not consistent with the envisaged ends.

^{xlv} The context in which NGOs operate is risky, conflict-prone and unstable, especially in failing states. The context may also contain particular cultural challenges and dimensions of management; many NGOs work in communities very different from themselves and may increasingly include staff from a wide range of backgrounds. NGOs may take on a range of tasks that need to be managed in accordance with the specific features of the activity (often in different development sectors), the relationships it seeks to maintain, and the internal structures and process of the organisation itself.

^{xlvi} Hilhorst argues for the value of using the notion of culture to understand dynamics within

and between organisations. This perspective of culture shifts away from concerns about what organisations accomplish and how efficiently they do so to what it means to be organised within that particular organisation. Hilhorst explains that culture becomes a quest for understanding how things, events and interactions come to be meaningful. Bebbington et al. and Lewis et al. explain that these multiple cultures struggle for access to resources, legitimacy of some types of knowledge over others, different language uses, participation in decision-making, etc.

^{xlvii} Aside from differing backgrounds and family alliances, Hilhorst also found that internal NGO tensions affect organisational management and staff expectations, ideological interpretations of NGO activities, ideological constructions about clients, and different ways of behaving with local men and women where the NGO was working.

^{xlviii} Fisher 1997; Lewis 1998, 2003, 2004; Mercer 2002; Pettigrew 2003; Kamat 2004; Wamai 2004; Mayhew 2005; Osborne et al. 2005; Lewis and Opuku-Mensah 2006; Nelson 2006; Tvedt 2006

^{xlix} In addition, Mohan argues that defining the non-state sector is not straightforward, the boundaries between state and NSPs are blurred. Wamai argues that in practice, relationships between NGOs and the government are not defined between the sectors but between government agencies, individuals in the government, individual NGOs or a small group of well-connected NGOs.

ⁱ Lewis's (1998) argument is based on his ethnographic research on a multi-agency partnership on an aqua-culture project in Bangladesh in which he found that the partnership had a range of inter-agency linkages at various levels: farmers with farmers; farmers with NGO staff; farmers with researchers and local government staff, large NGOs with small NGOs, NGO staff with the research institute and different levels of government with researchers and NGO staff.

ⁱⁱ Kumar argues that this has brought with it new challenges that differ from that of direct government involvement: ... the task of problem solving has become a 'team sport' that has spilled beyond the borders of government agencies and now engages a far more extensive network of social actors – public as well as private, nonprofit and for-profit, whose participation must be coaxed and coached, not commandeered and controlled.

ⁱⁱⁱ Fisher 1997; Lewis 1998, 2004, 2008; White 1999; Sood 2000; Dorman 2001; Mercer 2002; Mohan 2002; Kamat 2004; Mayhew 2005; Osborne et al. 2005; Mitlin et al. 2007.

^{liii} Lewis (2008: 138-139) further explains that the boundary between state and the third sector "is regularly transcended by both consecutive and extensive forms of cross-over. At one level it is merely a conceptual boundary, an idea that helps to map out the complex landscape of organisational life and the shifting institutional relationships of the neo-liberal policy terrain. As such it is highly artificial, since in the real world of organisations people constantly carry ideas, relationships and practices with them as they travel across from one side to another, as they change jobs, develop alliances or operate simultaneously in both sectors."

^{liv} Lewis explains that the tendency to equate NGOs with civil society obscures the history of state-society struggles. Kamat also contends that constructing the NGO debate as 'state versus civil society' is analytically misleading as NGOs are as much a part of remaking state institutions and process as they are part of reconfiguring civil society.

^{lv} This dichotomy emerged from Lewis's research on civil society in Bangladesh, with the motives of examining the perceived fragility of civil society and whether or not the concept had value outside the 'West' where the notion of civil society was initially conceptualised. Lewis contends that civil society in Bangladesh can be better understood as a locally adapted idea acknowledging the role of power relations and blurring of boundaries between civil society, household and kin networks, the state and the market.

^{lvi} In her research study on NSP-government relations in water distribution in Gujarat, India, Sood argues for the importance of focusing on the distinction between state and civil society through an approach that is driven by context-specific attributes (i.e. historical, social and cultural characteristics). She argues that there are problems with conceptual and theoretical understandings of civil society and NGOs' role in it as most literature refers to both as in opposition to the state. Furthermore, specific associations and organisations within civil society interact with different manifestations of the state at different levels of government with

different roles and ideologies. Osborne et al. also argue for the importance of a contextually-relevant notion of civil society that can be understood as a cluster of linked, albeit divergent, concepts by different stakeholders rather than a unified system. This argument emerged from a contextually-derived view of civil society in post-communist Hungary. Civil society was an aspiration of opposition groups during the Communist era, but these groups have since transformed into various organisational formations.

^{lvii} Hulme and Edwards and Mageli also maintain that knowing about alliances and networks may contribute to our understanding of how NGOs function. Tvedt recently claimed that the connections, networks and alliances between NSPs, donors, states and researchers/consultants have hardly been researched.

^{lviii} Farrington and Bebbington 1993; Fisher 1997; Fowler 1997; Lorgen 1998; Hewitt 2000; Lister 2000; Sood 2000; Brainard and Siplon 2002; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002; Bouget and Prouteau 2003; Haque 2005; Henry et al. 2005; Mageli 2005; Lewis and Opuku-Mensah 2006; Nelson 2006

^{lix} Sanyal 1994; Stone 1996; Fisher 1997; Fowler 1997; Hulme and Edwards 1997; Lorgen 1998; Zaidi 1999; Najam 2000; Brainard and Siplon 2002; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002; Mercer 2002; Hilhorst 2003; Lewis et al. 2003; Kamat 2004; Henry et al. 2005; Mageli 2005; Ramanath 2005; Lewis and Opuku-Mensah 2006; Nelson 2006; Tvedt 2006

^{lx} Hilhorst explains that social networks are formed around several different elements through shifting constellations within and external to the office that cannot be reduced to two or three networks.

^{lxi} Mageli describes the impossibility of separating Unnayan from the non-NGO world as workers and projects related to Unnayan did not constitute a bounded entity but were intimately woven into political and institutional systems across Kolkata. Unnayan's only point of cohesion was at the very initial stages of its existence. As time has passed, Mageli explains that Unnayan has become increasingly complex with numerous individual and organisational alliances, agendas and loyalties in the NGO and non-NGO world that sometimes behave in conflict with organisational goals meant to unite them. Mageli claims that organisational fluidity takes several forms; as an individual's life changes, the inclination to participation in development activities also changes. But, as Mageli argues, 'concepts such as NGOs, the state, authorities, outside agencies, the poor, political parties and so on continue to be employed in development discourse in a manner which suggests their bounded nature' (Mageli 2005: 265).

^{lxii} Robinson 1997; Lorgen 1998; Lister 2000; Najam 2000; Sood 2000; Lewis 2001; Welle 2001; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002; Mercer 2002; Sood 2000; Kapoor 2005; Ramanath 2005; Batley 2006

^{lxiii} Kapoor highlights several problems resulting from this dependency; small NGOs sometimes lose their credibility with partner villages as they are not effective in addressing primary concerns and this loss of credibility is de-motivating to committed social activists and damages people-centred processes. Postma's research study comparing INGO and NNGO relationships in Mali and Nigeria revealed power imbalances during decision-making and implementation phases of the partnership. For example, Postma describes how, during a meeting between partners, northern NGOs did most talking, while local NGOs hardly spoke. Furthermore, NNGOs tend to be blamed if the project goes wrong but are not given credit if it goes right.

^{lxiv} Hulme and Edwards 1997; Wood 1997; White 1999; Lister 2000; Tappin 2000; Brinkerhoff 2002; Bebbington et al. 2003; Hilhorst 2003; Lewis 2003; Campos et al. 2004; Mageli 2005; Ramanath 2005; Tvedt 2006

^{lxv} The second set of hypotheses driving the research carried out by Campos et al. in Pakistan, referred to specific characteristics of village organisation (VO) managers as leaders: if the manager has any formal education, the VO should perform better; and if the manager has any previous small business experience, the VO is more likely to succeed.

^{lxvi} White explains that larger NGOs tend to form alliances having considerable influence on each other through key individuals. Hulme and Edwards contend that formal links between NGOs and the state worked best where there were longstanding informal contacts and staff transfers. Lister found that the dominant mechanism for linkage and collaboration between

organisations is individual relationships between key actors at the central level, particularly between the INGO and NNGOs. Lister argues that organisational perspectives give limited understanding of partnerships and that the role of personal relationships is not adequately taken into account in management theory. Ramanath used the 'nature of leadership' as one of her key categories. This category highlights the 'distribution of authority in and between organisations, decision-making authority of members and nature of control exercised by dominant coalitions within each organization' (Ramanath 2005: 428). She found that, in terms of leadership, not only do leaders respond to changes in their institutional environment, but they also play an active role in strategically shaping their own contexts.

^{lxvii} Maclure, 2007, p.29

^{lxviii} Mageli's study of an NGO in Kolkata found that as the NGO grew, its fluidity was based strongly on the various motives of individuals to engage in activities within the organisation or other alliances external to the organisation. Bebbington et al. argue that where innovation does occur, it is because of the personal attributes and the professional and personal backgrounds of the particular task managers involved. Hilhorst argues that determining the level of 'manoeuvring' an NGO can exercise in its relationships with other organisations requires an understanding of how far NGO staff members can get others to internalise their ideas and follow proposed actions. For example, Hilhorst found that the staff of NGOs originating from the province in which they work, their tribal affiliation and family standing may cut across political differences in shaping relations with different levels of government. Also NGO staff members have often spent time working in government agencies. Lewis (2008) current ESRC NGPA study on the life history of practitioners that have worked within government and civil society. He found that in terms of what he learned about the boundary, "at one level it is a merely a conceptual boundary, an idea that helps to map out the complex landscape of organisational life and the shifting institutional relationships of the neoliberal policy terrain. As such, it is highly artificial, since in the real world of organisations people constantly carry ideas, relationships and practices with them as they travel across from one side to the other, as they change job, develop alliances or operate simultaneously in both sectors" (p. 138)

^{lxix} Tvedt explains that individual elite members are recruited into NGOs, research institutions, grassroot social movements, the UN and other donor agencies, and often continue to circulate from one institution to another and back again. Due to these transfers, individuals are found to share ideological and practical positions on all sides of the table. The legitimacy of the 'elite' is maintained by the fact that organisations and institutions in the global aid system share a common culture.

^{lxx} See the Whose Public Action? Working Papers:

http://www.idd.bham.ac.uk/research/Service_Providers.shtml

^{lxxi} Farrington and Bebbington 1992; Hulme and Edwards 1997; Sen 1999; White 1999; Lister 2000; Tappin 2000; Welle 2001; Brinkerhoff 2002; Hilhorst 2003; Lewis et al. 2003; Wamai 2004; Mageli 2005; Ramanath 2005; Lewis and Opuku-Mensah 2006; Ullah et al. 2006

^{lxxii} Dorman demonstrates how the Zimbabwean ruling party used the state to set up a pattern of authoritarian rule in which NGOs and other civil society groups sought to be included in the hegemonic framework of the ruling élites. Dorman argues that, while NGOs may not always have accepted the government's entire agenda, few wanted to be excluded from access to spoils, which are social and cultural as well as material.

^{lxxiii} McLoughlin, C. (2008) Unpublished annotated bibliography on contracting between NGOs and government

^{lxxiv} Although there is no singular or objective definition of 'successful collaboration', the literature usually relates success to how efficiently the relationship achieves its desired outcomes.

^{lxxv} Farrington and Bebbington 1992; Postma 1994; Hulme and Edwards 1997; Lewis 1998; Lister 2000; Dorman 2001; Welle 2001; Brinkerhoff 2002; Mayhew 2005; Batley 2006; Moran 2006; Sansom 2006; Ullah et al. 2006

^{lxxvi} Clayton 1999

^{lxxvii} Batley 2006

^{lxxviii} Farrington and Bebbington; and Hulme and Edwards

^{lxxix} see Mundy 2007

^{lxxx} Lister further explains that relationships appear to be strongest if there are multiple linkages or networks, that connect the organisations involved. For example, Lister argues that if all relationships are managed by organisation leaders, the partnership is vulnerable to changes in individuals and patterns of organisational leadership.

^{lxxxi} LaRocque 2007: 54

^{lxxxii} Gideon 1998; Lewis 1998; Brinkerhoff 1999, 2002; Lister 2000; Welle 2001; Pettigrew 2003

^{lxxxiii} An example of NGOs working to their own design is HIV/AIDS programmes in Brazil (see [Health Reformplus, \(2000\)](#)). An example of them working with little say in how the contract operates is Ghana rural sanitation (Welle 2001).

^{lxxxiv} Welle found that whereas the relationship between WaterAid and Rural Aid was based on social values of partnership as an end in itself, between Rural Aid and local government the 'partnership' was based on economic values as a means to efficiency. The Rural Aid and local government partnership was recognised as being a contract, therefore failing to include mechanisms fostering mutuality in its practical model as the 'rules of the game' were non-negotiable.

^{lxxxv} In terms of the advantages of hiring a non-profit master contractor, Kumar found a higher degree of flexibility in hiring and firing of personnel, ability to acquire additional funds through other public or private sources, ability to move quickly without administrative burdens or political pressure, possibilities for experimentation, continuity in the relationship and a general higher level of quality. Kumar further explains that the limitations/constraints to master contractual arrangements included a loss of ownership by the state of work and products, a lessening of advocacy and an inflexibility of funding allocated by the state. For two of the master contracts and all three government officials, the 'contract' was perceived as the best available tool to achieve the objectives of the programme because of its operational advantage. The third master contractor felt that a 'grant' was better as it provided more flexibility, creativity and autonomy to the provider.

^{lxxxvi} Farrington and Bebbington 1992; Sood 2000; Moyo 2001; Matlin 2001; Bouget and Prouteau 2003; Moran 2006; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002; Ramanath 2005; Nelson 2006

^{lxxxvii} Sood 2000; Matlin 2001; Wamai 2004; Nelson 2006; Smith and Gronebjerg 2006

^{lxxxviii} Matlin (p. 14) explains that 'where the crunch of reality enters is that NGOs are often simultaneously trying to carry out both advocacy and service delivery functions'. Often, in taking on combined roles of advocacy and service provision, there can be serious conflicts of interest between the two and that the tendency may be against the longer-term interests of both the NGO and the community that it 'represents'.

^{lxxxix} Nelson's dimension framework is further explained: *Technical dimension* refers to the capacity to make something happen, expertise in a field and capacities and methodologies for work. This includes the skills and organisational assets the organisation employs; *Resource dimension* refers to financial and other resources, and the strategies employed to secure them; *Values and mission dimension* refers to the organisational features that define their purposes and strategies; their vision and identity; *Interpersonal relationships* "includes friendships and antipathies among individuals, the movement of individuals among organisations, relationships across the boundaries between state and non-state" (non-profit and for-profit organisations), and between sectors of activity (development, environment and human rights), and the exercise of charisma and leadership; *Political life* "may be submerged or prominent, but NGOs form structured or informal ties with other organisations through networks or alliances; they may embrace or avoid partisan political allegiances or affiliation with social movements"; *Legal dimension* "embraces the statutory, regulatory, contractual and other formal arrangements that shape the NGO". NGOs may be regulated, belong to professional associations, enter into contractual obligations and make quasi-legal agreements.

^{xc} Migdal 1998; Lister 2000; Matlin 2001; Krishna 2003; Kumar 2004; Wamai 2004; Bouget and Prouteau 2005; Pereira 2005; Ramanath 2005

^{xci} The fieldwork for the *Whose Public Action?* research project also found this paradox in three of the nine cases.

^{xcii} See Maclure's 2007 study of the education sector in Burkina Faso.

^{xciii} In an advocacy role, NGOs may have either a positive relationship, collaborating with the government in getting an important message to some section of society, or a negative relationship in being critical of some government deficiency and seeking to change government attitudes. In service delivery, an NGO might be contracted to deliver a service to a community or it may be in a more negative relationship, providing a service that the government is failing to deliver or fund adequately.

^{xciv} Ramanath explains that the notion of 'service delivery' is itself multifarious, demanding a variety of tools (i.e. balancing of programmatic with institutional objectives; cajoling bureaucratic and political elites; inviting and retaining technical and governmental competency; creating and sustaining internal consensus for change; and mobilising sufficient financial resources). One of her primary findings is that NGOs become increasingly complex over time, as measured by the number of roles that they engage in.

^{xcv} Lister 2000; Welle 2001; Henderson 2002; Brinkerhoff 2002; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002; Hilhorst 2003; Pettigrew 2003; Wamai 2004; Ramanath 2005

^{xcvi} The dichotomy between 'symbolic' and 'real' collaborative relationships is linked with levels of formality and informality in the relationship, and the degree to which each dominates the relationship. For example, if the relationship is based almost entirely on a contractual arrangement, collaboration is likely to be more 'symbolic' than 'real'.

^{xcvii} Farrington and Bebbington 1992; Postma 1994; Hulme and Edwards 1997; Stone 1996; Fowler 1998; Lewis 1998; Lister 2000; Dorman 2001; Welle 2001; Wilson 2001; Brainard and Siplon 2002; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002; Pettigrew 2003; Brown and Troutt 2004; Ramanath 2005; Thompson 2005

^{xcviii} Postma 1994; Lewis 1998; Dorman 2001; Welle 2001; Brainard and Siplon 2002; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002; Brown and Troutt 2004

^{xcix} On the other hand, Lewis also found that partnership could create feedback loops and channels of communication that did not exist previously. He argues that the process of generating active partnerships is likely to require several key attributes that require the space and time for communication channels to be built between actors, allowing for risk sharing, the negotiation of conflict and difference, the formation of personal ties between individuals from different partner groups, and an open exchange of problems and ideas to facilitate learning.

^c Linked to the processes and complexities of partnerships/relationships, Ramanath found that there were constant shifts in strategies and tactics when one or more were seen not to work, but each NGO used different tactics in response to the same macro-level environment. She argues that 'in efforts to gain and retain legitimacy and relevance, NGOs are found to shift strategies in succession' (Ramanath, p. 9).

^{ci} First, they take place at the policy design stage in set-piece events rather than in continuous interaction over policy implementation. Second, they often involve NSPs very cursorily. Thirdly, they typically include larger NGOs which have capacity to represent themselves in such events.

^{cii} Rose shows how private providers of education in South Africa are subject to multiple layers of (upward) accountability that are not only to do with education performance but also to tax and labour law authorities; while NGOs in Pakistan and Bangladesh are more accountable to funding donors than to line ministries.

^{ciii} Lister explains that the INGO had no accountability to the NNGO although there was some NNGO accountability to the INGO based on financial accounting. The INGO was accountable to the donor agency although there was no donor accountability to the INGO and few opportunities for the INGO to influence policy.

^{civ} Rose describes programmes in Bangladesh (BRAC) and Malawi (SCF) to involve local communities in school management so as to increase local accountability, although it presents dangers of local elite capture. Also, during fieldwork for the Whose Public Action project, it was found that several NGOs involved community members to a significant degree (i.e. the Orangi Pilot Project – Pakistan, Shelter Associates – India, Doorsteps Schools - India)

^{cv} Postma 1994; Fowler 1997; Hulme and Edwards 1997; Sanyal 1997; Streeten 1997; Coston 1998; Gideon 1998; Najam 2000; Sood 2000; Tappin 2000; Dorman 2001; Brinkerhoff 2002; Hilhorst 2003; Campos et al. 2004; Lewis 2004; Mayhew 2005; Pereira 2005; Ullah et al. 2006

^{cvi} Baruah's 2007 study of slum sanitation in India is an example.

^{cvii} An example is Ghana, where contracts were described as ‘take it or leave it’. Welle, C., (2001)

^{cviii} Bhat, et.al 2007

^{cix} Sabri, B., Ahmed, B., Kakr, C., and Perrot, J (2007)

^{cx} Gideon 1998; Sood 2000; Tappin 2000; Dorman 2001; Lewis 2004; Wamai 2004; Pereira 2005

^{cxii} Clayton 1999

^{cxiii} However, Sood used interdependence theory to demonstrate that the co-optation of NGOs within the drinking water sector has not occurred; many NGOs have maintained their autonomy whilst working with the government due to their strength in numbers (i.e. through the network of Pravah) and influence at the local level. Wamai argues that the main issue is about how much space the NGO can carve out for itself and how much autonomy the political system will allow them. Tappin for example, argues that for NGOs in Tuvalu, retaining autonomy from the government is a challenge because it is such a small country. Dorman found through her research on NGO-government relations in Zimbabwe, that situation-specific factors maintained political space for Undungu’s (i.e. an NGO) work. As long as Undugu’s activities did not threaten the power status quo it was politically beneficial and encouraged. Gideon claims that smaller NGOs, or those with more radical agendas (e.g. gender equality, land redistribution and class equality) posing a threat to state sovereignty face increased marginalisation.

^{cxiv} Lister, in her study of relationships between an INGO, NNGO and a donor agency in the US, found that there were different levels of dependency and space autonomy felt by each organisational actor. For example, between the INGO and NNGO, the INGO considered the NNGO to be dependent on them, although the NNGO actually felt a limited amount of dependence. Both the INGO and the donor agency agreed that the NNGO was dependent on them, although the NNGO perceived independence in its work on the ground.

^{cxv} Fowler identifies three common governance structures: Self-regulated (strong and coherent identity unless loss of leadership occurs); Self-selected oligarchy (the more common structure with a governing board that allocates staff and volunteers); Constituent-based (less common, with identifiable political and economic groups as part of the constituency though they do not govern the organisation).

^{cxvi} Fowler identifies several other sources that influence the organisation’s identity: political affiliations, motivations of social groupings, promotion of national values, specific issues (e.g. the environment), technological advancement, particular ideologies, personal inspiration, support for other organisations, and historical and social dimensions.

^{cxvii} Postma 1994; Gideon 1998; Lewis 1998; Sood 2000; Tappin 2000; Lister 2001; Welle 2001; Brinkerhoff 2002; Feiock and Jang 2003; Wamai 2004; Pereira 2005; Ramanath 2005.

^{cxviii} For example, Welle’s study in Ghana found that the principle of efficient delivery tends not to be socially sustainable if it is imposed as a top-down initiative. Postma found that NGOs are too concerned about ‘doing’ and fulfilling immediate donor requirements to be truly sustainable in the long run. Gideon argues that it remains questionable whether the use of NGOs as agents of service delivery has either led to bureaucratic reform or enabled governments to weaken the influence of powerful local networks. Sood argued that, in India, NGOs have predominantly been co-opted by the government. Tappin found that the government of Tuvalu had not formalised routes through which NGOs could participate in development processes. This lack of direction presented limitations for NGOs, leading to a lack of systematic and close collaboration in planning, programming and implementation on both sides. A lack of understanding of each other’s priorities led to duplication and inefficient use of resources as well as sustainability questions that were linked with a lack of human resource capacity and cultural impact. However, the increase in financial resource and expert power resulted in greater recognition of the value of NGOs by the government in spite of power imbalances. Wamai described three different consequences of NGO-government relationships in the health sectors in Kenya and Finland: changing health care systems (i.e. trends in both countries have followed global shifts in ideas about good health – particularly Health for All); changing

nature and scope of the NGO health system; and emerging scope and types of collaboration (as a response to the shift in participation at every level). Also in the health sector, Brinkerhoff observed differences in the behaviour of medical staff in response to new incentives resulting from an NGO-government partnership

^{cxix} Ramanath claims that NGO-government relationships are made up of complex and interdependent struggles that evolve over time. Similarly, Lewis explains that dependent partnership can become active over time or vice versa. Campos et al. also argue that the character of the relationship whether one of substitution or complementarity does not remain constant over time; the relationship is not static and may become more or less dynamic. For example, Stone found that fiscal matters came to increasingly dominate the NGO board's agenda as contracting requirements took up more and more of the board's time. Stone explains that originally the NGO's board was really involved in local, state and national networks, but dropped them as contracts and funding grew in importance. The NGO's board also dropped its direct involvement in programme issues except to hear staff reports. Ultimately the organisation split into two as it could not survive the rapid expansion and internal value conflicts that arose as a result.

^{cxx} Saidel 1991; Farrington and Bebbington 1992; Stone 1996; Fowler 1997; Wood 1997; Sood 2000; Dorman 2001; Brinkerhoff 2002; Ramanath 2005

^{cxxi} Farrington and Bebbington 1992; Fowler 1997; Wood 1997; Sood 2000; Brinkerhoff 2002. Stone (1996) also cites Wolch (1990) and Smith and Lipsky (1993), claiming that isomorphism has occurred as non-profit organisations experience rapid goal succession to make their programmes and planning processes reflect government priorities. In addition, much of the literature explored here also claim that as non-profit providers enter into relationships with government, they increasingly feel compelled and subsequently organise to bring their organisational structures, missions and thought patterns into conformity with more top-down, bureaucratic activities, because of their financial dependence on the government.

^{cxxii} Ramanath argues that two primary factors condition variations in organisational response to isomorphic demands, path-dependency and variability in resource environments. Path dependency is related to the organisational commitment to founding values and entrenchment in tried and tested practices that are complicated by internal political struggles and the extent of leadership commitment to realising goals. She explains that the embeddedness of founding principles, core values and beliefs, past experiences of leaders and housing philosophies have either delayed or forestalled NGOs' tendency to make a complete shift towards adopting service delivery roles for the government.