UNEASY RELATIONS, NGOS
AND THE STATE IN KARNATAKA, INDIA

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prominence in the early 1980s. They have been characterized since in various ways from being part of the network of “global soup kitchens” (Fowler 1995: 1) and working as service providers and sub-contractors to the state, to providing cost-efficient, innovative and targeted services that withdrawing states cannot, or refuse to, provide. Proponents of NGOs also argue that the location of these social actors in civil society provides them with an opportunity and opening for a renewed engagement in redistributive politics. NGOs can work across existing divisions; their “location at the margins are crucial standpoints for struggles, and thus for altering the terms of public debate and the concrete management of economic and social life” (Wolch, 2001: 58). In this perspective, NGOs work to empower communities and build social capital in civil society.

The debate on the role and effectiveness of NGOs continues, even as several commentators have pointed out that the sector, though large, is still small compared to the Indian state in terms of the amount of funding and support it brings to addressing development issues.[2] Equally important is the fact that the majority of Indian NGOs tend to be small, with annual budgets that are below Rs. 500,000 per year (Table 1).[3] For many observers, the quality of NGO impacts in the face of pervasive poverty are captured in Sheldon Annis’ (1988: 209-218) frequently quoted comments on how size and small-scale

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[1] This paper draws on research conducted over several years, first in the period 1995-1997, then on shorter visits in January 1999, January 2001, January 2003, and October 2004-January 2005. It also draws on the growing body of literature on Indian NGOs and the astonishing amount of information that has become freely available through the worldwide web.

[2] Rajesh Tandon estimated the financial outlay for the entire voluntary sector (NGOs are a subset) as being Rs.160 billion for the year 1999-2000, by using Ministry of Home Affairs FCRA reports (Rs. 40 billion), PRIA surveys on philanthropic giving in India (Rs.80 billion) and other estimates on total Government funding to NGOs (Rs.40 billion). Direct funding and support received through bilateral and multilateral donors is left out of this calculation (Planning Commission, *Proceedings*, 2004: 40-41)

[3] For data on state-funded NGOs,
Planning Commission, Government of India, NGO Database. Also available at <http://164.100.97.14/ngo/default.asp > (accessed May 2004, April and May 2005)
For data on foreign funded NGOs,

powerlessness. Despite these reservations, what we do know is that the growing NGO sector, small though it may be in comparison to the state, does have an impact and is becoming increasingly diverse. This diversity reflects not just regional differences and variation between State governments but also the influence of donors and the need for NGOs to demonstrate success. The same factors also lead to the uneven distribution of NGOs within programmatic sectors and across India.

Capturing and explaining the immense diversity within the NGO sector would possibly allow for the better design of NGO related policies by states and donors. This paper focuses on describing the organizational diversity of the NGO sector across India and in Karnataka, with the intention of providing a view of how the sector functions as a whole. It will use the NGO relationship with the state as an organizing frame. The complicated nature of NGO-state relations are key to understanding the possibilities that exist for Indian NGOs to play a meaningful role in development. Elsewhere I have argued that NGO impacts are best understood in the context of parameters set by the state: the efficacy of NGO-driven, or state-driven but NGO-assisted policies turn on the question of the ability of a strong state to create openings that NGOs can then use to push for change. Strong states allow strong NGOs to flourish (Kudva, 2005).

The NGO-state relationship has been described in various ways from being closely collaborative to prickly antagonism and hostility, with a few commentators proposing that “cooperative autonomy”(Sanyal, 1994) or “reluctant partnerships” (Farrington et.al., 1993) may be a more accurate portrayal of NGO-state relations in many cases. Building on Sanyal’s and Farrington’s insights, this paper will argue that in the context of a democratic state like India, which is riven by social and economic inequities, NGO relations with the state are best characterized as marked by uneasiness, as development of the large and increasingly diverse Indian NGO sector, focusing on changing NGO-state relations in post-independence India, as it transformed from a Nehruvian democratic socialist state to one where market triumphalism and religious nationalism have become dominant forces. NGO-state relations are shaped by changes in state-society relations and by the position of the state as regulator, funder and political force at several levels and scales, providing in turn multiple points of contact and possibilities for conflict and collaboration with NGOs. The second section of the paper maps the NGO sector in Karnataka, which closely follows all-India patterns with some significant differences. One important difference being the close relationship between corporates and the government in urban areas like Bangalore, and the active involvement of the State government in the initiation of a range of NGOs.[4] This section will also describe NGO-state contact as it operates within particular *issue* areas in order to further clarify the multifarious character of the state, and hence the many points for possible conflict or collaboration.

SITUATING NGOS AND THE STATE

The tradition for papers, articles and books on NGOs is to start by defining the object of their study.[5] The NGOs this chapter is concerned with work on development issues that in some manner, reduce poverty and have an impact on the livelihoods of the poor and marginalized. It is estimated that there are between 20,000-30,000 such NGOs in India, "the NGO capital of the world" (Norton, 1995; 1). Some of these are voluntary in nature, others are membership-based, but most have employed staff. They work in many (and often across) programmatic sectors, and with particular groups. This, together with their basic orientation towards the economic and political spheres,

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Much of the polemical and image-building literature on NGOs, regardless of which end of the political spectrum it comes from, legitimizes NGO activity on two axes, the economic and the political: not only are NGOs better and more efficient at providing relief and social services than the state or the market but they are also engaged in value-driven, community-based practice that initiates and supports political and social change. Beyond the image-building literature, considerable work is being done to evaluate NGO claims of efficiency and effectiveness in both the economic and political spheres. The burgeoning critical literature reveals a complicated, messy picture of organizations adjacent to, between and intersected by state, donor, market and civil society actors, with complex networks and relationships that span boundaries. Studies have shown that NGO claims to economic efficiency need to be tempered: they are not as cost-efficient or innovative, lack broadness of reach, rarely target as deeply as presumed or claimed, and tend not to work in areas of highest poverty.[7] Political claims of supporting social justice and democratization are as difficult to pin down. In organizations that achieve some measure of success—however defined—a complex picture emerges of participatory management and organizational practices in the context of progressive legislation and a strong engaged state.[8] As important are issues of NGO capability, representativeness and accountability and how these in turn, shape an organization’s ability to effectively reach and work with people, in particular, the poor.

In contrast to theorizing on NGOs, which is still in its early phases, the Indian state, towering as it does over society, has been theorized and understood in

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6 NGO work is best understood as including *issue-based action* (where the issues may include poverty reduction, literacy, empowerment, infrastructure, health and welfare, advocacy, child labor, land rights, housing and so on), often focused on *target beneficiaries* (women, children, adivasis, dalits and so on). For many NGOs, their work also has clear *spatial boundaries* (watershed development, forest management,

asserts authority even as it often loses track of what its various entities are doing. Understanding the ways and nature of the state is however, crucial to NGO effectiveness in any sphere. It is important to grasp three aspects of state actions on NGOs: as a *regulator* the state seeks to control NGOs and make them accountable to it; as a *funder* the state seeks to selectively collaborate with groups that can elicit people's participation and make government programs more efficient and effective. For the state as *political entity* however, a strong community-based NGO is a potential threat to the local power structure and can expect to have a contentious relationship with both a cadre-based political party and other state functionaries.

The state regulates NGOs by requiring them to register, particularly if they seek state or foreign funding, and report their activities at regular intervals. The Society's Registration Act of 1860, related State Acts, the Indian Trust Act of 1882, and the Charitable and Religious Act of 1920, are the primary mechanisms for registration.[9] None of these forms of registration (NGOs may also be registered as Trade Unions, Cooperatives, Partnerships and even, a Company) are appropriate to the range of NGO activity and one result is that NGOs often stretch given definitions, leading to conflict and misunderstandings between the NGO and administrators responsible for implementing registration. Another legislation with huge implications for understanding the regulatory capacity of the state is the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) of 1976, which was originally designed to prevent the flow of foreign funds to political parties.[10] The Act was amended in 1984 to more closely monitor the flow of funds to the Voluntary Sector. Yet another way of controlling NGOs are Commissions of Enquiry, state appointed bodies that look into allegations against NGOs. Often employed as an intimidatory tactic, the most famous among them is the Kudal Commission, which in a

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[9] These Acts date back to legislation passed by the Colonial Government of India to regulate the explosion of

Emergency rule. While the state's regulatory framework has proved to be a heavy burden for NGOs, particularly small, community-based rural groups,[11] its expanding role as a funder has changed the ways in which the 16,661 NGOs (as of December 2004) that receive state aid interact with various agencies at the district, State and Central levels. Table 2 summarizes the numbers of state funded NGOs across various sectors in Karnataka and in India.

The state's role as a funder dates back to the grants-in-aid program that was started in 1956 to disburse funds to support welfare activities through the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB). The active promotion of NGOs and the expansion of the state's role as funder began with the Sixth Plan (1980-1985), formulated by the Janata Party, which came to power after the Emergency. In every subsequent Plan, the state has called for increased professionalization of NGOs and increased its allocations to NGOs through various Ministries at the Central and State levels.[12] This funding has continued to expand as the state attempts to withdraw and increasingly rely on market based mechanisms to promote development. Various institutional initiatives have also been taken to simplify state funding of NGOs. In 1986, for example, the Ministry of Rural Development took the radical step of combining two existing funding units to create a trust, Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), to fund and support NGOs. The growth of state funding is exemplified by the growth in CAPART's funding portfolio from over Rs. 545 million for about 4,000 NGOs in 1993-94, to about Rs. 3 billion to fund over 10,000 NGOs in 2002-2003.[13]

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[11] A number of reports have explored problems created by government regulations, most recently see Mohanty and Singh (2001).

[12] The Government of India gives financial assistance, technical materials and other assistance to its partner NGOs. The funding is extended through various Ministries at the Central level in the form of grants-in-aid, subsidies, government loan/bank loan, stipend, honorarium, and cash awards. Depending on the nature of the project and type of activity, the GOI provides assistance for both recurring and non-recurring

regimes, NGO-state relations are mediated through the ideological optic of the political party in power both at the Central and the State levels. The early alliance between Gandhian NGOs and the Congress fractured as the crisis of deinstitutionalization grew, and many NGOs allied instead with the Janata Party. At the same time, legislation was passed that enforced the separation between NGOs and party politics; by law registered NGOs may not be actively involved in party politics or have any of its members stand for election. As newer, professional and avowedly apolitical NGOs began to occupy the public eye, the Constitutional Amendment of 1993 that brought back Panchayati Raj (PR) changed the relationship of NGOs to political spaces at the local level.

Whether NGOs are used by political parties or party functionaries to raise funds for political activity is another issue that is constantly under debate. The rise of Hindu nationalism in general and in particular, the riots and pogroms directed at Muslims in BJP-controlled Gujarat, have highlighted the relationship between NGOs and political parties. The “saffron dollar”—signifying funds raised by expatriate South Asians through US and UK based nonprofits and charities, and disbursed through Indian NGOs allied with the Sangh Parivar—is one issue over which allegations and counter-allegations have surfaced.[14]

While NGOs may not actively associate with political parties by law, the implementation of Panchayati Raj has changed the nature of NGO involvement with elected representatives at the local level. Many NGOs

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[14] For money being raised in the US see the following report,
Sabrang Communications, India and the South Asia Citizens Web, France. 2002. The Foreign Exchange of Hate: IDRF and the American Funding of Hindutva. Available at http://stopfundinghate.org/sacw/index.html (accessed March 2004)
IDRF’s reponse is available at http://www.idrf.org/dynamic/modules.php?name=Hncontent&pa=showpage&pid=245 (accessed May 2004)
For money being raised in the UK, see the following report,

Panchayati Raj procedures, rules and responsibilities, for the communities they work with, and for elected representatives, particularly women who hold 33 percent of all seats as a result of state-imposed quotas.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE NGO SECTOR[16]

There is a sizeable literature on the development and functioning of the voluntary sector in India. Most researchers trace the development of modern voluntarism to reformist movements of the late nineteenth century. These movements, the work of Christian Missionaries, who in their zeal to recruit converts brought healthcare and education to poor, isolated rural areas, as well as Gandhian and other community development experiments in the early twentieth century, structured the subsequent growth of the NGO sector.[17] Of these, Gandhi's massive "constructive work" program of rural development (launched in Wardha, Maharashtra, from 1922-28) played a major role in influencing the voluntary sector, as it shifted the focus of voluntarism from issue-based action, particularly social and religious reform, to political content aimed at nation-building.

While there is broad agreement on the ways in which various events and movements, people and public figures have shaped and influenced the voluntary sector, the impact of specific influences changes from one region and State to another. The Gandhian movement has had a deeper impact on the voluntary sector in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, while the Left has been a strong influence in West Bengal, Kerala, and parts of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Similarly, the Church has played an important role in some

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Sewa International's response is available at http://www.sewainternational.com/awaaz_response.htm (accessed May 2004)

15 A few voluntary organizations registered as unions have actively campaigned for and encouraged their members to participate in Panchayat elections. The extraordinary success of the Young India Project in getting 5,620 of its union members elected to 124 mandals across 5 districts in Andhra Pradesh in 1995 speaks to the influence NGOs can have at the village level (D.Rajasekhar, "Winning Panchayati Raj Elections the YIP Way" *Exchanges*, Number 10 (September 1995). Bangalore: ActionAid India, 1995).

development NGOs across the nation in the 1970’s can only be understood in the context of a renewed socialist movement led by Jai Prakash Narayan (JP). The variation in the implementation of decentralization reforms is another factor to consider when understanding NGO roles at the local level. These differences need to be kept in mind as we follow the general trajectory of NGO development through three phases.

Equally important here is the role that NGOs play in poverty reduction and alleviation in each of these three phases. Academic and policy understandings of the structural causes of poverty as well as the formulation of associated strategies for eradicating poverty, are produced and disseminated by a global complex of donors, international agencies and national states, under the shadow of shifting ideological positions. NGO actions respond to both national imperatives and these global understandings of how to deal with poverty. The state shifted from implementing capital-intensive growth policies in the first phase to populist anti-poverty programs in the second. NGOs, responded by moving from mitigating the effects of poverty by providing welfare and relief services in the first phase, to claiming to attack the root causes of poverty and inequality, which the state was clearly failing to do, in the second phase. By the early 1990s as the state moved towards reducing its role, and stimulating development through macroeconomic reform and global linkages, NGOs were talking about the need to “scale-up” their activities through sustainable strategies if they wished to make a substantive impact on poverty. Four approaches to scaling up (that resonate with the Indian experience in the post-emergency period) were synthesized by Michael Edwards and David Hulme in 1992, and soon became commonly held belief. They helped shape NGO strategies to enhance their impact in the third phase: first, working with states to spread innovative methods and change state policy; second, incorporating lobbying and advocacy efforts into NGO work; third, expanding operations and targeting with NGOs collaborating selectively with the state, even as they work to hold the state accountable to its poorest and most marginalized citizens.

The dominance of the Center in the Indian state allows overarching patterns in NGO-state relations to be traced across the country as state-society relationships have changed in post-independent India. Three phases mark important shifts in NGO-state relations. NGOs have moved from a pro-state position as silent partners in consolidating nationalist development in the *first phase* (1947-1966) when the Nehruvian master frame dominated, towards a contentious antagonistic relationship with the state as the crisis of deinstitutionalization deepened through the *second phase* (1966-1988). This tumultuous period, particularly the early 1970s, saw a surge in the numbers of NGOs as agitations for change and regional autonomy gained ground. In this second phase, the imposition of emergency by Indira Gandhi in 1975 marks a deep rupture that is pivotal to understanding both the development of the NGO sector and NGO-state relations. Even as there was a phenomenal growth in NGO numbers, the state initially became more repressive and sought to control NGOs through new legislation and regulatory mechanisms. Informed by the analysis of the causes of rural poverty and strategies that could address breaking poverty cycles, this phase also saw the rise of the technocratic, managerial NGO, in specific contrast to but alongside the awareness-oriented NGO that positioned itself in an oppositional role vis-à-vis the state. A number of support NGOs were formed to provide technical, training, and managerial expertise to grassroots groups and other NGOs. The issue of NGOs needing to scale-up their efforts through active lobbying, advocacy and networking had also become important, and NGO associations and federations also began to form.

Interestingly, even as the Center sought to control and repress NGOs, in 1982, State Governments were instructed to work with and fund grassroots

Consultative Groups with members from various state agencies and NGO representatives were set up under a Development Commissioner or the Chief Secretary of the State.[18] Many NGOs seized these regional initiatives and along with increased foreign donor funds for issues relating to women and the environment, the sector continued to expand.

Following Indira Gandhi's assassination, her son Rajiv Gandhi became the Prime Minister. By then, in the words of a senior bureaucrat in Gandhi's circle of advisors, "we had realized that India was ungovernable from the Center."[19] The rise of regional political parties across India, and the phenomenal expansion of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had eroded the power of the Congress substantially, and the state was failing on economic, political and administrative fronts. Senior bureaucrats and others in Gandhi's inner circle of advisors were sympathetic to the voluntary sector as they saw in it an answer to the state's problems of reaching its citizens. A number of changes that impacted the voluntary sector substantially were being carried out at the same time: most importantly, Panchayati Raj was being reinvoked. Given these events, it is difficult to establish what exactly drove the state to actively seek partnerships with NGOs: was it the urgency of establishing effective decentralized governance in the context of regions spiraling out of Central control or was it in anticipation of the need for public service contractors who could provide various services given the first moves towards liberalizing the economy and pulling back the state? This dual focus of state imperatives is crucial to understanding the possibilities that emerged for NGO action in the 1990s and beyond.

Around the same time allocations for the Seventh Plan (1985-90) were announced. It included an entire section on the voluntary sector with a budget allocation that was reported to be five times larger than the assistance

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development, with clear rules and eligibility criteria being laid down for NGOs seeking funding.[21] As one observer put it, "voluntary agencies [had] now *officially* arrived." All of this, combined with the fact that starting in the 1980s, the state had begun to take a more pro-market stance resulted in another shift in NGO-state relations.

The *third phase* (1989-to the present) is a period of active involvement of the state in the rhetoric (and reality) of promoting "partnership" with the NGO sector, mainly through increases in state funding for NGOs. This is under pressure to be economically viable both from within and from foreign donors; a pressure that also leads to NGOs being professionalized and increasingly constituted in response to the needs of the state and foreign donors. NGO responses to the state now cover the range from strongly oppositional to closely collaborative, with the majority keeping an uneasy, sometimes reluctant, but pragmatic and often sophisticated partnership with the Indian state in its various forms.

The factors that helped the NGO sector grow in the second phase, particularly the expansion of state and foreign donor funding in the 1980s, accelerated in the 1990s as the state lurched towards a market dominated economy. Increased diversification was also seen among NGOs, reflecting their understanding of the multi-layered structural as well as policy processes that the remediation of poverty seemed to require. Farrington and Bebbington (1993: 94) captured this complex understanding:

> "… there are very many processes, relationships and socio-economic structures underlying rural peoples' poverty: landlessness, low wages, political powerlessness, occupancy of vulnerable biophysical environments, imperfect markets, adverse macroeconomic policy environments, and elite controlled policy processes are but a few. To

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> impact on poverty, then at least some of these underlying causes must receive systematic attention."

As liberalization gathered steam in the 1990s,[22] there was a simultaneous stepping up of state initiatives to partner with NGOs. At the same time, decentralization too was moving ahead, and the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution was finally passed in 1993, resulting in the re-creation of Panchayati Raj (PR) institutions across the country. The variation in the implementation of PR across the country has further highlighted regional differences in NGO-state relations.

The state, clearly interested in closer collaboration with NGOs, engaged in discussions to streamline procedural problems that blocked effective NGO-state collaboration and encourage the formation of a national level federation.[23] The Planning Commission brought together NGO and Central and State level Ministry representatives in all-India conferences in 1992, 1994 and 2002. By 2000, when deliberations on the tenth Five year Plan (2002-2007) had started, the Planning Commission had been appointed the nodal agency for all NGO-state interactions and within it, the Voluntary Action Cell (previously the NGO Coordination Cell) had assumed greater responsibilities including initiating meetings with NGOs, setting up a Steering Committee with NGO representation for drafting the Approach Paper for the Tenth Plan document, and maintaining a searchable web-based database on all organizations funded through state agencies.

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21 For recent rules and eligibility criteria see Mohanty and Singh, 2001: 50-62.

[22] The recent debate on when exactly the Indian economy began to get "reformed" (Rodrik and Subramanian, 2004; Panagariya, 2004) has some bearing on understanding increases in state funding and state support for NGOs. Clearly, the state began to open up to NGOs in the early and mid-1980s, part perhaps of the stealthier reforms under the Gandhis before the first waves of reform hit in 1991.

[23] In 1985, Bunker Roy, a prominent NGO activist who had been appointed to the Planning Commission, attempted to set up a national level coordinating agency and a "Code of Conduct" that NGOs could voluntarily

relief services. By the late 1990s, a third of CSWB's grants were allocated for "non-traditional" awareness and education programs for women. Other Ministries had also began to actively solicit NGO collaboration by setting up NGO Coordination Cells, though none followed the example of the Ministry of Rural Development in setting up a separate funding agency. In all, the various Ministries had about 200 centrally sponsored programs with a NGO component to them in place by the mid-1990s (Planning Commission, 1993). While exact and reliable figures on funding amounts for each year are hard to pull together, it was estimated recently that the Central Government had spent about Rs.10 billion in 2001 to fund over 14,000 NGOs (Mohanty and Singh, 2001: 44). NGO input into state programs however, seems mostly to be limited to implementation of government schemes to tight specifications. Despite a couple of well-publicized examples of state-initiated, NGO inspired and assisted schemes such as Mahila Samakhya or the National Literacy Mission, there seems to have been little flexibility or scope for innovation.

The clustering of NGOs was however, apparent, and in 1994 it was estimated that about 60 percent of organizations funded by the state through CAPART, CSWB, and other Ministries were in four states, three of which were performing relatively well on poverty alleviation measures: West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.[24] This clustering was a cause for concern, especially since studies were showing the widening gap between regions and States in terms of the prevalence and depth of poverty and the structural conditions that led to it. The state initiated a series of efforts to spread NGO funding into the northern States where poverty is particularly pernicious, and into the north-eastern States, where separatist violence has negatively impacted economic development. Agencies like CAPART decentralized and set up 8 regional offices between 1995 and 1999, each of which was responsible for sanctioning projects with annual budgets up to Rs.

2004, only 35.6 percent of all organizations funded were from West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh; the northern States (Bihar, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and Rajasthan, not including UP) had 23 percent of all funded organizations, and the north-east had another 16 percent of all state-funded NGOs (Planning Commission, NGO database).

The amount of overseas funding to Indian NGOs from donors—northern NGOs, foreign governments through bilateral agencies, and multilateral agencies—also increased. While international donor NGO aid continued to grow, the 1990s saw an important development in the increasing percentage of bilateral and multilateral aid (aimed at rural development, health, family planning, environment and women's development issues) being routed to NGOs through various Ministries and state agencies.[25] Twenty-two donor countries including progressive funders from Northern Europe like Norway, Sweden, Netherlands and Denmark, together provided about $600 million of India's $2 billion-$2.5 billion in annual aid income, estimated to be about 6 percent of the state's capital investment budget.[26] The Government of India's announcement in June 2003 to stop accepting bilateral aid from all but six donor countries, routing it instead through other institutions, projects and NGOs, after "prior clearances and annual consultations between the government and bilateral partners" will thus have a significant impact on NGO work in particular regions and programmatic sectors.[27] The impact of this decision is still unclear since the mechanisms for regulation have yet to be clarified. Will the bilaterals continue to provide crucial support for progressive initiatives in participatory planning, governance and the environment without established and move either to become a countervailing force or large public service contractors to the state?[28]

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[25] There are no aggregate figures available to support this since bilateral and multilateral aid giving is not under the purview of FCRA. Most people I interviewed present this perspective. This trend further strengthened the role of the state as patron.

[26] The Economist. "No More Aid Please" June 21-27, 2003, 35

[27] Government of India Press Release, "Finance Ministry to formulate new guidelines for bilateral aid in

Funding from northern NGO donors, which had increased substantially in the 1980s, has continued to grow at an average annual rate of 13.63 percent between 1991-2000, though funding focus is different from that of the state. The number of funded organizations has however, increased at only about 5 percent annually over the same period. A study of funding under FCRA classification for the period 1996-2000 shows that activities broadly falling under the rubric of “welfare” account for a little over a quarter of all receipts. Relief funds varied by year, based on when major disaster like cyclones or earthquakes hit while rural development activities account for about 15 percent and building construction activity between 11-14 percent in the same period (Account Aid, 2002: 1-8). This is in contrast to state funding, 40 percent of which went to rural development followed by 18 percent for social justice and empowerment work, and another 13 percent for activities related to human resource development, like education (Table 2).

The funding patterns of international donor NGOs did, however, undergo some shifts in the 1990s. At a global level, an increasing amount of donor resources were being channeled towards Africa and Eastern Europe in the early to mid-1990s, and towards Afghanistan and the Middle East in the 2000s. At a national level within India, some secular international donor NGOs like ActionAid and Oxfam that have increased their India budgets between 20-24 percent for the period 1996-2000 have begun, like the state, to move away from areas with established NGO presence like southern India, Maharashtra or Gujarat and started funding groups in the northern and the north-eastern regions.[29] Others like EZE, a German protestant NGO that remains one of the

Bread for the World, have cut back. This shift in donor focus has impacted Indian NGOs in different ways. A few individual activists and some of the larger NGOs have moved into the newly funded areas; in areas where funding is being phased out, small and large groups that had relied on foreign funds have begun to actively explore ways to raise money from domestic sources, particularly industries and trusts set up by corporations.[30] Most importantly, many NGOs are actively seeking and entering into closer funding relationships with the state.

Another trend, evident for some time, but yet to be reflected in the available funding data, is the increasing attention being given to urban poverty, which till recently, had been considered less pervasive. NGOs have always worked with the homeless and in low-income settlements around the issues of shelter, service provision, waste collection and income generation; a focus on participatory and effective governance, and on the needs of lower and middle-class communities is becoming more common.

NGOs are clearly continuing to proliferate though the sector still exists on the periphery of the development arena. There are, however, noticeable changes in the NGO sector in the 1990s post-liberalization third phase. Older divisions based on ideological differences are becoming even less visible as most NGOs seem to accept the rhetoric of empowerment and sustainable development being espoused from all ends of the political spectrum. The traditional divide between the NGO whose main aim is to create social change through awareness creation and group organizing and the techno-managerial NGO that concentrates on effective service delivery and income generation by eliciting people's participation continues to exist. It is not uncommon, however, to find NGOs accepting funding and contracts from one state

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Development Programmes and NGOs: A Guide on Central Government Programmes for NGOs in India.

established, larger NGOs are firmly tied to funding sources and to project oriented development work. The shift of foreign aid to service delivery oriented groups and the increasing amount of government funding being channeled through these groups also buttresses this trend. The movement from a “commitment culture to a competence culture” seems to be gaining ground.[32]

The broad patterns and trends in NGO-state relations and the emergence and proliferation of NGOs, underscored the ways in which NGOs are continually (re)constituted by the state, primarily, and by donors. The picture that emerges is drawn in the context of a federal state where tensions between the Center and States has increased, and will continue to grow as PR reforms are implemented and consolidated. It focuses much needed attention on the extent to which the state defines the arena—at all scales—within which NGOs function, and the ways in which NGOs are constituted as institutional actors in civil society.

The everyday reality of NGO work, though circumscribed by these broad trends, is as much a result of local level politics and social relations, often in a select number of villages in a district, in several districts of a State or occasionally across State lines in a broadly defined region. To fully understand NGO abilities to be effective development actors, then, it is necessary to pay attention to the diversity of local conditions and the local state. The next section will map the NGO sector in Karnataka.

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31 The case of a mid-sized NGO that works with tribal communities in southern Karnataka offers a good example: the NGO has fought a long struggle to obtain land from the revenue department, it operates balwadis, a free lunch program, a non formal education program with support from two Ministries at the Central and State level, even as it opposes Forest Department Policies and along with the people’s groups

The two extremes within which all other districts fall, are Bidar which can be compared to Rajasthan (the northern districts resemble the Hindi heartland) and Dakshina Kannada, which is at about the same developmental level as Kerala. There is also variation between taluks in districts, such as Mysore with H.D. Kote taluk being the most impoverished. Karnataka also suffers from an inadequate and unevenly distributed infrastructure that impacts unfavorably on economic development: there are chronic power shortages, and the railway and road network is barely able to link the various districts. The State is dominated by its capital, Bangalore, a city that is five times larger than any other in Karnataka, and often described as the capital of India's rapidly expanding electronics, software and biotechnology industries.

Unlike the adjoining states of Kerala and Tamilnadu, Karnataka has not seen sustained political mobilization on the basis of class or mass movements on a large scale, and on various counts is not seen as "promising territory for transformation" (Manor, 1989: 358), though area and issue specific agitations are present like the strong crop and area-specific peasant movement led by rich peasantry in the 1980s (Assadi, 1997). Caste politics, however, plays an important role in what has been described, in the context of other sizeable Indian states, as a "comparatively cohesive society" (Manor, 1989: 322). As important are informal local governance institutions, which can be oppressive in their support of structures of local power and control but in the case of Karnataka, as Kripa AnanthPur (2004) has argued, "seem to be less repressive, more functional, and more likely to survive than in some other countries of the South." Rural inequities are smaller than other parts of the country mainly due to post-independence land reforms, which saw the proportion of marginal and small land holdings rise, with benefits going mostly to tenants, not the landless (Manor, 1980). The State was ruled by the Congress Party (dominated by *vokkaliga* and *lingayat* cultivator *jati* clusters who make up a little over a fourth of the State's population but still remain

Congress, briefly, have been in and out of power. The State also has traditions of a strong civil service, R&D inputs into its agricultural policies (from Mysore State), and a relatively decentralized system of governance. Under the Janata Party, Karnataka was also the first State to reinstitute a three tier Panchayati Raj system in which a fourth of all Panchayat seats were reserved for woman and another 18 percent for members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

Karnataka has a fairly active and heterogenous voluntary sector, [34] with a large number of rural development oriented NGOs. Conservative estimates put the figure of active rural development organizations a decade ago at over 500 (Rajasekhar et. al., 1995). These organizations vary in size[35] from MYRADA (Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency) one of the largest rural development NGO's in India with an annual estimated budget of over Rs.200 million and a staff (permanent and temporary) of more than 400 to small action groups scattered across various villages and districts. The Planning Commissions NGO database also indicates that Karnataka has a larger than average clustering of NGOs that work in the areas of social justice and empowerment (Table 2). There are also a number of NGO headquarters, urban oriented NGOs and support groups mostly based in Bangalore, which work across a range of issue areas. Some NGOs are part of State and district level networks, both formal and informal. Bangalore is also the base for regional offices of many international NGO donors.[36] The phenomenon of NGO crowding in Bangalore is evident to most observers.

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version.

[34] An important group of caste and jati-based institutions rooted in the voluntary sector (but not always the NGO sector) are the various mathas. Many of the mathas, both Lingayat and Brahmin, have social and charitable organizations that serve not only people of their community but also from the surrounding areas. The long standing and growing influence of the mathas on civil society in Karnataka begs serious attention.

[35] George Joseph's (1995) study of 102 social action groups indicated that a third of the groups were small and worked in up to 25 villages, 23% were mid-sized and worked in 26-50 villages, another 25% worked in 51-

these groups (64%) started in the early 1980s, a small percentage (8%) came up in the 1990s, while the rest were started in the late 1960s and early 1970s following the all-India trend closely. Three-fourth the groups are registered as Societies, 12 percent as Trusts, while the rest had no legal entity. One organization waa registered as a Company. Of the 102 organizations in Joseph's sample only 15 had no registration with the Home Ministry and received no foreign funds.[37] The majority of organizations (75%) claimed to have not shifted their work emphasis on community development (54%), research and training (12%), and health care (8%).

There has also been considerable devolution of powers within the parameters of Panchayati Raj in Karnataka. For NGOs, this is an important development since a decentralized government offers and demands a different relationship than a centralized system of governance. Starting with the second PR elections in December 1993, a few NGOs became involved in disemminating information on the PR system, voter education, as well as encouraging their members and beneficiaries to vote and stand for election. Some support NGOs are also actively involved in training PR functionaries.

As mentioned earlier, the NGO sector in Karnataka is very varied. Apart from rural development NGOs which are often limited to certain geographic areas and organized around particular issues and target groups[38] there are a number of urban groups and initiatives organized around various issues. Some of these groups have emerged in response to specific problems, which

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36 Action Aid India, EZE, and HIVOS have their country offices in Bangalore while most other donors have South Zone regional offices.

37 80 percent have FCRA numbers, three have applied for registration, one is receiving foreign funds with prior permission and another is sponsored by an organisation that routs foreign funds to it.

38 *Issues*: credit cooperatives, income generation, wasteland development, environment, social forestry, non-formal education, health and nutrition, training and so on; *target groups*: women, children, landless laborers, tribals, dalits. Many groups combine different issues and target groups. Limitations on the size of the NGO comes out of the NGOs funding base and sometimes its ideological orientation and approach to development.

George Joseph's (1995) study of 102 organizations indicates that education and organization is the major settlements and migrant communities, and so on. A group of urban based organizations that have drawn on a similar membership pool illustrate the growing importance of corporate-State alliances in the late 1990s in an infrastructure-short city like Bangalore. One of the first examples of a citizen led urban initiative was CIVIC in Bangalore, which started in 1992 as a loose group of interested citizens who came together with the initial support of the Max Mueller Bhavan in Bangalore to create public awareness of Bangalore’s rapidly decaying urban structure; to make accountable and pressurize the concerned Authorities; and, to proactively participate in the improvement of Bangalore’s urban environment. It was registered as a Trust only in 1996, with just one employee. More recent examples of urban based groups that are driven by the agenda of improving governance, include the Public Affairs Center that initiated the innovative idea of “holding the state to account through citizen report cards” (Paul, 2004) and Janaagraha, an organization that does not use the NGO label but seeks to promote citizen participation and participatory planning through a number of different programs focused on service provision and infrastructure at the ward level, and demands for public agencies to publish accounts of their operations and finances.[39] More recently, public private partnerships in urban development and governance like the Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF), a consortium of public agencies and other citizens led by a prominent IT executive have gained a lot of attention.[40] Ian Scoones (2003; 7) describes the BATF as offering a

> “private sector led alternative to what is perceived as a poorly functioning urban authority, although many feel that as an unaccountable body it should not be the basis for providing public services in the city.”

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[39] For more information on the Public Affairs Center, go to www.pacindia.org (accessed April, 2005); on Janaagraha, go to www.janaagraha.org (accessed april, 2005)

grassroots groups in rural areas. They help evaluate programs, conduct participatory appraisals, train NGO personnel, conduct workshops, and facilitate marketing of products made by smaller groups. Their activities often create informal networks of NGOs that regularly interact with each other. These support groups produce newsletters, and pamphlets; the larger support groups sometimes have regular publishing programs. An example of a medium sized, well established support group that serves the southern region is SEARCH based in Bangalore.[41]

SEARCH was started in 1975 by an ex-Oxfam Director to train people in rural development. Every year 12-15 people graduated after a 12 month course that included a three month practical training period. In 1983 after an evaluation which indicated that 50% of SEARCH graduates dropped out, SEARCH shifted its focus to training middle and senior level NGO staff. By 1988, SEARCH had also begun to focus on gender issues, and gender training and sensitization became an important part of their work. Around the same time, SEARCH set up a Field Service, a development oriented NGO that began work in 15-20 villages and now works in about 120 villages in Tamilnadu. The focus of the field service was on organizing women.[42] By 1995, SEARCH's main activity was to provide various training programs for all levels of NGO staff: workshops for village level animators, a 6 month introductory course for junior managers, a 3 month middle management program, and team building programs.[43] It had also developed materials and trained women for participation in Panchayati Raj in a programme sponsored by the Department of Women and Child Welfare, Government of Karnataka. A training center that can accommodate up to 100 people 20kms outside Bangalore, was also set up. SEARCH also monitors and evaluates

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[41] In 1994, 36% of NGOs that participated in SEARCH programs were from Andhra Pradesh, 32% came from Karnataka, another 26% from Tamilnadu and the remaining 5% were from other States (*SEARCH News*, Volume IX, Issue 3 & 4, July-December 1994).

(drought belts in central Tamilnadu and southern Andhra Pradesh, the devadasi belt in northern Karnataka, tribal belts in central and southern Karnataka, the dalit belt and so on) and orient support work towards their needs (Stephen, 1992). Like, the Indian Social Institute (ISI) a well-known research and academic institution based in New Delhi, whose Bangalore affiliate works as a support institution that trains NGO personnel among other activities, SEARCH sees its role as a facilitator and supporter of NGOs.[44]

There are smaller support organizations that operate more informally. DEEDS in Mangalore is one such example. Set up in Madras in 1977 by a former priest, DEEDS moved to Mangalore in 1981. The majority of its work has focused on training and evaluation of NGOs in southern India. DEEDS has a total staff of ten persons, two of whom concentrate solely on training programmes and workshops. It is heavily funded by an international donor. DEEDS also publishes a quarterly Kannada newsletter. Over the years it has supported various field programs. DEEDS was actively involved in implementing the National Literacy Mission with government support from 1988-1991. It has been running a women’s legal aid programme in Dakshina Kannada for the past two years, and funds one person to form women’s groups of 40-50 in each village. A DEEDS staff member is involved in organizing fisherfolk into unions, another in organizing the sweepers of the Mangalore City Corporation who are from the Koragu tribal community, while a third person has spent the last two years organizing Gowli tribals in Uttar Kannada into a cooperative that can market forest produce, and give small loans to marginal and small farmers within the community. These organizers work alone, though DEEDS pays their salaries and other staff provide a sounding board and assist in designing, monitoring, and evaluating the

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[44] Research and training institutions fully funded by the Government began to run workshops and programs for

Another type of support group are donor-run workshops and training sessions for its partner NGOs. These are often regional in scope (the southern region includes Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, and Kerala) or are organized along programmatic issues. Donors like Action Aid India, NOVIB, NORAD, CRY, HIVOS, and other Church-based groups like EZE and Misserios bring partner NGOs together to discuss issues of common interest. These sessions are often facilitated by consultants or by staff from the more established support NGOs like PRIA in Delhi or SEARCH in Bangalore.

Networks and Federations

There are dense informal networks that exist in the NGO sector at national, regional, and local levels. Line staff seem to move between NGOs (on a regional basis) and many people in leadership positions know each other. Claims are staked and there are clear camps based on ideological and personality differences. However, Karnataka also has strong formal networks and federations of NGOs involved in rural development, and increasingly in the urban areas as well. The best known amongst these is the State level Federation of Voluntary Organisations for Rural Development in Karnataka (FEVORD-K). District level networks include the Kolar Voluntary Organisations' Network (KOVON), Mysore Town and Rural Integration (MYTHRI), Forum of Voluntary Associations in Dakshina Kannada (FVODK), Federation of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development in Dharwad District (FEVORD-DWD), and others in Bellary and Tumkur districts. Examples of issue specific networks include TANK—the Tank Awareness Network in Karnataka—consisting of NGOs that work around Kolar's 4790 tanks, the South Asia Regional Network in Bangalore that is attempting to bring together groups that work with disabled children, and the Campaign against Child Labour which has brought together various groups that work on the issue of child labour in Karnataka or the Alliances initiated by Janaagraha around

Nair, 1995).[45] The NGOs saw various advantages in networks: it was a good platform to express solidarity, share experiences and expertise, and identify developmental problems. However, it was the areas of solving procedural problems and interacting with the government that were seen as crucial. Networks also provided support to new members in obtaining funds and preparing grant proposals.

FEVORD-K is one of the best known State level rural development NGO networks. It started when AVARD initiated efforts to set up a State chapter in 1981. Following a series of State and district level meetings convened by an ad-hoc committee, FEVORD-K was incorporated as a formal society in 1982. Through experience FEVORD-K has evolved a set of guidelines that describe what the federation will not do. FEVORD-K will not build a corpus fund, or have a secretariat beyond a functional one (there are three employees in a small office in Bangalore), or conduct any evaluations of member organizations. As far as possible it does not interfere in intra- or inter-NGO differences, nor subscribe to any particular ideology.[46] Its main objectives are to promote cooperation and understanding amongst member NGOs, strengthen existing NGOs through appropriate training initiatives, and work as a liason with the government, donor agencies and other sectors (Ramaswamy and Prasad, 1990). Office bearers may not hold any political office and cannot be in office for more than two years. FEVORD-K’s 1994-95 budget of Rs.2.5 lakhs was obtained from membership dues[47] and a small grant from a donor agency (Rajasekhar and Nair, 1995). FEVORD-K has more than 150 members and they range from large hierarchical organizations to small social action groups. Organizationally, FEVORD-K has been fairly successful in setting up a decentralized system of functioning. The General Body consists of all members and meets once a year. A Board of Directors that consist of areas. In 1994-95 there were 14 such committees. FEVORD-K has been active in promoting its objectives, and has been particularly successful in projecting itself to the government and other donor agencies as a federation of rural development NGOs. FEVORD-K has also tried to set up district level networks, which have not proved to be as robust. Informal networks, in the sense that they are not registered with the government but do require some sort of membership and have a common working code, also exist. One such network started by a couple of committed individuals and supported by the interest of member NGOs—unique to Karnataka — was the Tribal Joint Action Committee (TJA), a coalition of diverse NGOs that work with tribals in southern Karnataka. This network was active for more than a decade[48] and has been crucial in bringing tribal issues to the attention of the government of Karnataka. At the other end of the spectrum, there is the Donor Agency Network (DAN) that has also met regularly since its formation in 1989. It includes all major donors that operate in Southern India.

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[45] Another 2 were affiliated only to FEVORD-K

The size and spread of the government (both Central—the GOI, and State—GOK) is vast, and there are many points of contact with NGOs. The GOI regulates and funds NGOs; and encourages selective collaboration for effective implementation of government programs. It has also entered the business of setting up NGOs (GONGO's) or fully supporting existing NGOs.[49] Collaboration between NGOs and the GOK dates back as far as 1968 when MYRADA and the Government of Karnataka collaborated in resettling Tibetan stay homes, and some welfare and development oriented projects.

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[48] Activities include workshops, training sessions, collective action on issues of importance such as tribal self-rule, anti-arrack movement, and so on. The organizations sponsor the quarterly meetings in rotation and all other costs are met through donations. The TJA Convenor volunteers his/her time. For more details on the TJA, see Kudva (2001).

[49] As a senior level bureaucrat said to me in 1995, "We are creating NGOs, and encouraging formation of groups in villages..." There are a number of GONGOs in India. CAPART based in New Delhi, with regional offices across the country is perhaps the best known, though it only funds and does not implement rural development programmes. Another well-known GONGO is Mahila Samakhya, also set up as a separate Trust which is headed by the Secretary of the Ministry of Education, or the Akshara Foundation in Bangalore of which its Chairperson said, "Akshara Foundation was launched when the state government saw the efficacy of the work done by Pratham in the slums of Mumbai. They wanted someone to run a similar

At the State level the GOK has attempted to establish institutional channels of communication with NGOs. In 1984, it set up a Consultative Group consisting of NGO representatives (including FEVORD-K) and heads of government departments to be chaired by the Development Commissioner.[50] This Group meets at least twice a year[51] to discuss issues of interest and to work out procedural and other problems between the government and the NGO sector. By government order, districts are also supposed to have similar committees, but most NGOs say that the meetings are never called, or when they are, often tend to include only those NGOs with whom the local administration is comfortable. NGO interaction with government at the local operational level is more contentious and depends on the personalities and inclinations of local bureaucrats, other government functionaries, and NGO personnel. The increasing emphasis on Panchayati Raj has also changed the balance at the local level.

The final section of this paper will take the case of three NGOs working with a particular *target beneficiary group*, women, in the States of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, to explore the conditions under which NGOs working with communities of women function in the context of PR reforms, illustrating, in the process the importance of organizational practice, progressive legislation and a strong state as conditions for NGO effectiveness (or not) in combating poverty. These cases also illustrate how NGOs can seize openings created at the local level by the twin imperatives of the Central state to move towards markets even as it devolves powers to regions through decentralization reforms.

Other fully supported NGOs include the various Nodal Agencies of the Ministries of Health and Family Welfare.

tied to donors, to the experience of associational life, and most importantly, to the role of the state as funder, regulator and development agent. What it did less well is show how NGO programs and tactics evolve at the local level, as strategies for poverty alleviation are circumscribed by the parameters of state discourses. Even as the larger debate on the NGO sector hews close to the widespread imagining of NGOs as junior partners—more, less or not at all important—who will deal with the poor and the marginalized in the task of nation-building, some NGOs hold to the idea of transformation through political change and social transformation. The result of these intersections—of the simultaneous move towards the market and decentralization, as well as the imagined role of junior partner—is that opportunities do open up for NGOs that are interested in political change. The final section of this chapter will focus on the work of three NGOs, SHARE in Tamil Nadu, Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka, and Nari Bikash Samithi in West Bengal to illustrate the contrast between the challenges NGOs working in tandem with the state claim to meet but sidestep, and the challenges that NGOs claiming to support discourses of poverty alleviation and social justice face.

Tamil Nadu in contrast to Karnataka, is generally regarded as a relatively advanced State with a well developed and diversified economy. Non-brahmin movements centered around the revitalization of Tamil identity, which started in 1926 and later developed into two regional political parties, the Dravida Kazhagam (1944) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (1949)and which have dominated state politics. The third State, West Bengal, one of India's smallest but most densely populated, was India's industrial powerhouse at the time of independence. Since then industrial production has lagged behind and the state's economy has stagnated. West Bengal is, however, distinctive in that it has made significant inroads in poverty alleviation under the longest elected Left Front government in India, which is still in power after having first won elections after the Emergency in 1977.

majority of NGOs in Tamil Nadu work in rural development closely followed by NGOs that have a focus on health and women and children's issues (PRIA and Anjaneya Associates, 2002). In contrast, a recent survey of the voluntary sector in West Bengal showed a large number of voluntary organizations active in recreation, sports and culture followed by religious activity and education; conspicuously absent were NGOs that work in rural development, an arena for concerted state action (PRIA and Society for Socio-Economic Studies and Services, 2002). Yet, the state funds rural development NGOs in West Bengal heavily (57 percent of all state funded NGOs in West Bengal work in rural development compared to 42 percent nationwide in February 2004). Given that the Planning Commission' database is weighted towards the Center, this opens up two questions: does this indicate—in some small way—the use of Central funds to counteract the Left Front's position in the countryside? Or is it reflective of sophisticated NGO tactics at the local level, where NGOs become adept at playing off one state agency against the other?

The poverty scenarios across these three states also varies. V.M. Rao has pointed out that the southern states—Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, along with Andhra Pradesh—have several distinct characteristics. Though these States have on average been more successful at implementing anti-poverty programs, poverty persists. An important factor in the persistence of poverty is the presence of active, organized non-poor groups that form alliances (including with upper layers of poor groups) to block the mobilization of the poor or those who organize on their behalf. For Rao (1998: 21), the only antidote is the "countervailing mobilization of the poor [which] would have to occur at the regional and higher levels where diverse groups interact and influence policy making." The experience of West Bengal is once again, instructive, where the Left Front used their political clout to "skillfully combine radical rhetoric with pragmatic compromises" allowing the poor to obtain a certain degree of autonomy from dominant classes even as it allowed the structural conditions of poverty, and the large scale mobilization of poor groups in political space across existing divisions to influence policymaking at higher levels. In this perspective, the state partners with the poor not with NGOs who have little impact on poverty alleviation due to their “small number, limited area of operation, liberal foreign funding and trips, hierarchy within organizations, and lack of any system of accountability.”[53]

While Rao emphasizes the structural conditions of poverty and the mobilization of the poor, a process in which he sees NGOs as playing a minor role, others like Murthy and Rao (1997: 4-9) point to both tangible and intangible dimensions of deprivation, arguing that states tend to focus on and respond only to tangible dimensions of deprivation such as lack of growth, income generation and productive employment not on intangible dimensions such as powerlessness, vulnerability and isolation. For them, NGOs have an important role as intermediaries who should work to enhance the bargaining power of the poor vis-à-vis other groups and the state, even as they help enhance the bargaining power of the state itself vis-à-vis mainstream international institutions. The difficulty of mobilizing poor people given the diversity of their institutional conditions based on gender, caste, the nature of work, agricultural conditions, social relations and power structures should rest not on skills and capacity-building alone but on changing institutional structures to combat the intangible dimensions of being in poverty. The two perspectives, though not completely dissimilar, nevertheless have very different conceptualizations of the role for NGOs in poverty alleviation.

As important are the state’s current policy responses to poverty alleviation through a patchwork of strategies, most of which aim to increase capital endowment of the poor by focusing on building their entrepreneurial skills and capabilities. One example of a heavily favored blueprint strategy — by the

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through financially self-sustaining income generation schemes. The claims made by proponents of microfinancing for both women's empowerment and impacts on deep poverty are, however, questionable.[54]

The important question here is: how do these different articulations of combating poverty play out in the strategies and tactics adopted by NGOs at the local level? The stories of SHARE, Mahila Samakhya and Nari Bikash Samithi will help unpack these questions.

SHARE is a NGO working with 4,000 poor women from landless and marginal land owning households in 27 villages in a drought prone area in Tamil Nadu. The area has been studied and mapped intensively and presents a picture, much like the rest of India, of a region where poverty has become more diverse and complex as a result of the state's agricultural policies.[55] The ability to mobilize people is also complicated in the absence of a politics of poverty where politics at the State and local level is dominated by identity and patronage structures, alliances between poor groups is non-existent and riven with caste, gender and religious structures, and poverty alleviation policies largely follow the blueprint of the capital endowment model outlined above. In this context, following Rajasekhar's argument, the strategies adopted by SHARE, which started with income generation activities in craft production for national and international markets, then adding awareness and microfinancing programs to finally having members contest Panchayat seats, have had a limited impact on poverty alleviation in the area.

The villages that SHARE works in were caste and occupation segregated, and well and tank irrigation was used to cultivate staple food grains and

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[53] V. M. Rao, *The Poor in a Hostile Society*, 26, quoting S. Iyengar and Praveen Visaria, Voluntary Agencies, the Banks and the Rural Poor.

[54] For a study questioning assumptions of women's empowerment through microfinancing, see Kabeer (2001); on how credit is utilized, and on the difficulty of working with the very poor, see Mosely and Hulme (1998) and

1950s and the 1960s, following drought and aided by state subsidies, well irrigation with diesel pumps became the norm. Cropping intensity and production increased and other employment opportunities opened up. Significant changes occurred in the area as agricultural technologies such as high yielding seeds, fertilizers, support and credit to purchase inputs, and subsidies for electricity to run pumpsets, were adopted. Some groups among the lower cultivator castes prospered, even as employment opportunities declined with the onset of mechanization, and wages between men and women continued to diverge specially in non-agricultural sectors. As water tables fell and tanks silted over, higher investments were needed to deepen wells, resulting in deeper divisions between farmers, with smaller farmers who lacked necessary capital shifting away from paddy that had become the major crop after the spread of irrigation to less water-intensive crops such as groundnut and bananas. In the 1980s and 1990s non-farm employment rose as villagers commuted to nearby towns to participate in the informal sector or worked in local quarries, rolled bidis, and worked in construction and other sectors. Surveys conducted over this period show that the disparities between groups had grown: nutritional intake in better-off households had improved while landless and marginal farmers were much worse off with shifts in crop patterns; health too had declined as a result of changing consumption patterns and worsening sanitation. The availability of non-farm work and an active dalit movement had however, resulted in some important social transformations such as the removal of untouchability and entry to temples, but had left other glass ceilings intact, which restricted dalit entry into capital-intensive farming and other profitable employment venues.

While this provides a general picture of the region, wealth-ranking exercises conducted in selected villages where SHARE works revealed further important differences between the poor and the very poor. The poor had access to a range of employment opportunities in non-farm sectors, and often (women were more likely to work as agricultural labor or in bidi-rolling, and palm leaf mat-making while men worked in higher wage jobs such as construction, quarrying, leather work and so on) resulted in differences in severity of poverty across households. Religion too played a role, unmarried Muslim women and young girls in purdah tended to be clustered in home-based work such as bidi-rolling and mat-making, and the every poor tended to borrow to cover costs during festival and rainy months.

In the decades since independence, the diversity of the poor had clearly increased and was impacted by improvements in agricultural technology and mechanization, the availability of agricultural and non-farm employment opportunities across seasons, by gender, by caste, by nutritional and health status, and by inequities of wages across sectors and between men and women. Widespread corruption in line departments and PR institutions that provide jobs, and important services such as water supply, subsidies for housing or old age pensions, and the unwillingness of banks to extend loans to poor people who lacked collateral such as land or jewellery, further exacerbated the situation.

SHARE was set up in this area in 1992, when most of these problems were already evident. The basis of its “intervention strategy” that aimed to facilitate poverty alleviation through economic development was to set up craft centers and income generation opportunities for poor women. The palm-leaf, sisal-fibre and korai mats were marketed by the NGO in both international and national markets. Most of the women that SHARE worked with belonged to dalit or Muslim communities. SHARE also provided inputs, training, as well as education and support services such as childcare, safe drinking water, and evening study centers for members and their children. Craft incomes, though low and unstable, did play a role in making the lives of some poor women more secure. However, it soon became apparent that there were problems microfinancing strategies with the aim of enhancing impact, building capacity and skills to enable entrepreneurial poor women to break through persistent poverty cycles. With donor funding SHARE started SHGs where members learned of their rights and entitlements, contributed savings, and finally contested Grama Panchayat elections. In 1995, 13 women stood for elections, and 5 won. The SHGs however, were unable to reach the poorest and most vulnerable women.

Was SHARE successful in poverty alleviation? In organizational maps drawn by villagers, the NGO is rated lower than the PDS, schools, and water supply as being important to people's living conditions, but higher than banks or cooperatives. Its members are more inclined to rank it higher. Conspicuously absent from any understanding of poverty was the possibility of elected representatives and state agents making any substantive impact by improving conditions for small and marginal farmers by improving the water table, de-silting tanks, setting equitable wage standards, or undertaking employment-oriented public works. Poor villagers, regardless of whether they were SHARE members or not, did not challenge the state at the local level, neither did the NGO engage in any policy level work through a larger NGO network. The result as analyzed by Rajasekhar (2002: 205) is a limited set of impacts. He writes:

> "The constraints are deficiencies in its technical and political capacity. The obstacles are wider socio-economic and political processes and a lack of pro-poor attitudes in other local organizations. Given that NGOs alone cannot reduce poverty and that local organizations are not pro-poor in their nature, poverty reduction remains an outstanding problem."

SHARE thus presents the case of a NGO that started to work with poor women through income generating activities, and continued to use prescribed education and awareness building as its basic mandate.[56] Did this difference in mandate and organizational practices impact MS's ability to be effective?

The main objective of MS "is to reverse the processes responsible for the subordination of women, by empowering them with self-esteem, and the knowledge with which to determine their own destinies" (Narayanan, 2002: 299). This rhetoric is backed by an organizational structure of trained women activists, the Sahayoginis, who work in ten villages to initiate and support Mahila Sanghas in each village, and help train members to become Sahayakis (leaders). A District Implementation Unit with resource people, and administrative support forms a core support team. MS works mostly with dalit and tribal women, who are among the poorest people in Karnataka. The diversification of poverty due to the agricultural and other capital-intensive development policies followed by the state, noted in detail in the area where SHARE works, is also evident in the regions where MS works. Karnataka had however, in contrast to Tamil Nadu, committed itself to implementing PR early on and pioneered gender quotas. It has held three PR elections in 1987, 1993, and 2000, and the numbers of elected women's representatives (EWRs) is currently higher then what quotas guarantee. MS strategies for sangha formation and growth are deliberate and closely monitored. Though the sanghas initially focused on carving out time and space for poor women to reflect on their lives, over time they became a forum for women's issues through which women act to obtain rights—social, political and economic—promised by the state; open up new avenues for access to the state; and use state guaranteed rights to contest power relations in political space through PR institutions.

MS now focuses its attention on the intersection of the sanghas with PR institutions. It trains sangha members to contest elections, supports EWRs to be effective and, works on establishing a wider political role for the sanghas.

some way. This committee works on voter lists, canvassing, and most importantly on monitoring grama sabha activities and supporting their elected women representatives. A recent evaluation of the effectiveness of 194 sangha members who are EWRs shows that only 7 percent of sangha women fell into the category of a “surrogate member” who was represented by her husband or a male relative, a problem that is pervasive, particularly with upper caste EWRs. In districts where poverty is more widely prevalent and caste divisions deep, sangha women tend to be less articulate and effective, and less able to challenge corruption or existing social norms. About 80 percent of EWRs have however, helped their sanghas get house sites, documents, assistance for building the sangha mane (main house) and assistance for sangha members from state programs and various poverty alleviation schemes. MS also noted that 87 EWRs, 44.8 percent, were exceptionally articulate, aware and willing to challenge corruption by male Panchayat members and other state agents. Sangha membership and three PR elections, is slowly beginning to have an impact.

There are however, some important challenges that highlight the difficulty of implementing poverty alleviation strategies. Keeping committed trained workers is a problem. More importantly, MS has found that sanghas, which are encouraged to create and follow their own programs, tend to become exclusionary and not allow other poor women to join, particularly if the sangha is engaged in economic development activity like microfinancing or has acquired some resources. The entrenched nature of anti-poor alliances across state and civil society is also difficult to combat, though one tactic that MS has started to use is to form taluk level federations to take issues up with elected representatives at the District and State levels. Despite these challenges, Narayanan writes (2002: 341), “sangha EWRs are reversing, in small but important ways, the corrupt and inefficient working of the schemes meant for the poor.” The work of MS-Karnataka thus highlights the importance anti-poor alliances, which cross the lines between state and civil society actors to form barriers that are difficult to break. The third case, the Nari Bikash Samiti (NBS) in Bankura, West Bengal, which is an apex body for a group of 22 silkworm cooperatives focuses on the issue of how a pro-poor state can break these alliances allowing the organization to be more effective. The NBS was initiated and continues to be supported by a NGO, the Centre for Women in Development Studies (CWDS) that is based in New Delhi. The area where NBS started is in the "jungles," dry and hilly. Almost two-thirds of the population are poor adivasi, who have traditionally served as the labor reserve for the development of coal mines in the nineteenth century, and later, as the forest deteriorated, for the Green Revolution inspired paddy fields. Seasonal migrations are the survival strategy that Adivasi households have adopted in the face of extreme deprivation. The forests however, remain their home and their point of reference.[57]

In 1977, a little before NBS was established, the Left Front came to power with the support of the rural poor in West Bengal. The early period of their rule was marked by a sharply conflictual, often violent agrarian politics along with broad-based state initiatives such as registering sharecroppers, implementing land reform and minimum wage levels, and securing access to credit, in an effort to radically transform local agrarian relations. In 1978, the Left Front reinstituted Panchayati Raj to implement their agrarian redistributionist policies and this proved crucial in changing political space at the local level. By 1985, PR institutions had been brought into development planning and the CPI(M) the dominant member of the Left Front, was encouraging party members to monitor and direct Panchayats in order to have a less corrupt, transparent, accountable local government. Four PR elections have followed since then, and the tradition of accountable local government that is pro-poor is well established.

early 1980s to help adivasi women avoid seasonal migration to work in the paddy fields of Hindu farmers in the *namal*, the fertile plains further east. The cooperatives were a limited success in economic terms, typically earning their members a reduction in the number of seasonal migrations from four to two, and also reducing the number of family members that needed to leave. More important was

> “the belief, openly articulated, that it has been an achievement by them [the women] against others – men in the household, men in the village, forestry officials, government officers, party representatives, Hindu farmers in the *namal* upon whom they are no longer so dependent for work, and so on.” (Webster, 2002: 247)

By 1997, the NBS working with CWDS, had expanded its role and secured benefits from Panchayats through various state programs for childcare, health and literacy. They had also actively engaged in sharing their stories, discussing and learning through NGO networks, traveling both nationally and internationally to do so. Finally, they had, through their engagement in Forest Protection Committees (FPCs) taken the political skills they had learned through NBS into another arena, which offered further possibilities of securing their forest-based livelihoods.

In 1988, a new National Forest Policy was announced that sought the collaboration of local communities to jointly manage forests with the state. Two years later the Forestry Department (which is located under the Center with a few responsibilities to the State government) was asked to set up “Joint Forest Management Committees” consisting of representatives from local government and communities. The 68 FPCs set up in Bankura District were to both protect and rehabilitate degraded forest lands. The Adivasi women from NBS were active in the FPCs in their areas, and insisted that a third of all members of the executive committee be women, based on the fact that between the villagers and the Forest Department. By 1997, CWDS had helped NBS organize the 68 FPCs into another apex body, which could enter into negotiations and make claims on behalf on the villagers on the Forest Department and other local agencies. As Webster wrote (2002: 246), “[T]he result has been that the women of the cooperatives have begun to assert a presence beyond the local that in turn has impacted the local.”

The three cases together tell a story of when NGOs can be effective. SHARE’s inability to read and respond to the context and determinants of poverty through its organizational practices and strategies led to a limited impact on poverty alleviation. MS was able to step up its impact despite local conditions that were decidedly anti-poor due to its clear mandates and strong organizational practices. It did so in a state environment that was both market and decentralization friendly, with the state offering an important opening for MS to contest poverty through strong sangha structures at the local level. Finally, NBS success’ can be seen in its being both a strong NGO using participatory, innovative practices in the context of a strong pro-poor state with effective institutions at the local level. The cases also suggest that NGOs, despite their limited impact, can play an intermediary role between communities and the state. The issue is not as much about whether NGOs can precipitate change or not as it is about recognizing that it is the relationship between NGOs and the state that has the possibility of stimulating reiterative processes that require both strong states and strong NGOs to enable change.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper began by arguing that broad patterns in the growth of the NGO sector across three phases were primarily a result of changing NGO-state relations. The complicated, multifarious nature of NGO-state relations are key to understanding the possibilities that exist for Indian NGOs to play a meaningful role in development. The dominant conceptualization is of an

The paper also made the argument that the impact of NGOs in the context of the uneasy relations of the third phase can be positive for poverty alleviation under certain conditions at the local level: strong NGO organizational practices, and a strong state with pro-poor policies, progressive legislation and effective PR institutions. Together the two arguments lay out the complex relationship between NGOs and the state in poverty alleviation in the overwhelmingly poor, yet diverse and vibrant "noisy polity" that is India.

The first two sections outlined the parameters for NGO action: changing state-society relations, the role of the state as regulator, funder and development agent that actively supports NGOs, and the role of foreign donors. Accordingly, in the first phase, NGOs were silent partners of the state who provided a limited safety net. In the second phase they moved from actively opposing the state and initiating poverty alleviation through political or economic development strategies to engaging with the state to deliver services, enhance capacity, and through this to mobilize communities to fight for their rights. Important openings were created, however, both by the hierarchical nature of the state, and by the tensions that were a result of the simultaneous movement of the state towards the market and political decentralization. In the third phase, the diversification of the NGO sector continues as macroeconomic reform, market based development policies, state withdrawal and religious nationalism gain ground. An uneasy partnership between NGOs and the state seems to be the norm with a number of NGOs clearly following the public service contractor model, encouraged by increased state and foreign donor funding, even as others see themselves as intermediaries, with the specific aim of enhancing the bargaining power of their constituents vis-à-vis the state and other groups in society.

This paper makes the point that NGOs—under certain conditions—can have

Table 1

State Funded NGO Distribution by Annual Budget Sizes, December 2004

	Small-Sized NGOs			**Medium-Sized NGOs**	**Large NGOs**	**Very Large NGOs**	**Totals**	
Total NGOs 13,533	**1-2 lakh**	**2-5 lakh**	**Subtotal: Small NGOs**	**5-10 lakhs**	**10-50 lakhs**	**>50 lakhs**	**Total NGOS Reporting**	**Total NGOS Non-Reporting**
India: Number	**1,959**	**1,956**	**3,915**	**866**	**342**	**23**	**5,146**	**4,646**
India: Percent of all NGOs	*14.5*	*14.5*	*28.9*	*6.4*	*2.7*	*0.2*	*38.0*	*34.3*
India: Percent of all Reporting NGOs	*22*	*22*	*44.1*	*9.7*	*4.2*	*0.3*	*100*	
Karnataka: Number	**62**	**87**	**149**	**71**	**25**	**0**	**245**	**229**
Karnataka: Percent of all NGOs	*13*	*18*	*31*	*15*	*5*	*0*	*52*	*48*
Karnataka: Percent of all Reporting NGOs	*25*	*36*	*61*	*29*	*10*	*0*	*100*	*93*

Source: NGO Database, Planning Commission, Government of India, 2004. Data last updated December, 2004 (accessed May, 2005).

Notes:

The NGO database only includes those organizations that receive funding from the Government of India

Size definitions are from CAF-India; Funding ranges are from the Planning Commission NGO Database

Table 2

State Funded NGO Distribution by Sector, Karnataka & India, February - December 2004[1]

	Rural Development	Human Resource & Development	Social Justice & Empowerment	Health & Family Welfare	Environment & Forests	Youth Affairs & Sports	State & UT funding	Tribal Affairs	NABARD	Others[2]	TOTAL
February 2004											
Karnataka											
Total Number	232	107	212	50	20	22	15	11		10	679
Percent of Total	*34*	*16*	*31*	*7*	*3*	*3*	*2*	*2*		*1*	
India											
Total Number	6,467	2,074	2,944	1,038	6,49	589	795	262		627	15,445
Percent of Total	*42*	*13*	*19*	*7*	*4*	*4*	*5*	*2*		*4*	
December 2004											
Karnataka											
Total Number	232	107	212	50	20	22	15	24	13	14	709
Percent of Total	*33*	*15*	*30*	*7*	*3*	*3*	*2*	*3*	*2*	*2*	
India											
Total Number	6,541	2,074	2,944	1343	649	589	795	509	367	722	16,533
Percent of Total	*40*	*13*	*18*	*8*	*4*	*4*	*5*	*3*	*2*	*4*	

Source: NGO Database, Planning Commission,Government of India, 2004, February 2004 (accessed June 2004); December 2004 (accessed May 2005)

Notes:

1. Includes NGOs funded by the state. Not preclude organizations receiving funding from several sources, including foreign donors

2. "Others" includes Labor, Nonconventional Energy production, Textiles, Science and technology, Agriculture, Road Transport and Highways, Statistics and Program Implementation in February 2004. In December 2004, it includes three other categories: small scale industries, computer & IT, and NGOs funded through NABARD.

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