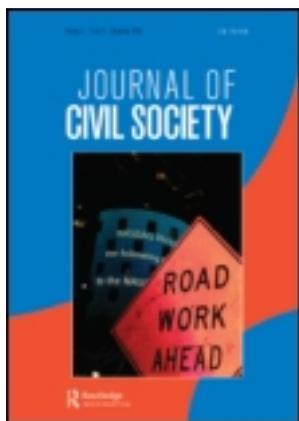


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Cut from a Different Cloth? Comparing Democracy-Promoting NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia

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Cut from a Different Cloth? Comparing Democracy-Promoting NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia

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ABSTRACT *This study compares donor-sponsored non-governmental organizations (NGOs) promoting democracy in Ghana and Indonesia. Starting from the idea that democracy and civil society are context-specific phenomena, we explore the question of what context-specificity means for individual NGOs. While donors and researchers alike stress the importance of context, context-specificity remains an ill-defined and elusive concept. Our study contributes to the debate by (1) constructing a framework which defines context-specificity at the level of organizational characteristics and (2) analysing to what extent NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia actually conform to this definition of context-specificity. Because Ghana and Indonesia represent very different contexts, we maximize the chances of finding differences in organizational configuration. Our fieldwork data from Accra and Jakarta only partly confirm this expectation. Although the mission statements echo national differences, we find remarkable similarities in terms of strategies, structures, and resources. These similarities lead us to conclude that the NGOs operate quite independently from their national contexts. In the discussion, we relate our findings to the debate on donor support to NGOs.*

KEY WORDS: Civil society, NGO, democracy, context, development aid, comparative analysis, Ghana, Indonesia

Introduction

Effective development aid requires tailoring policies to local contextual factors like local needs, local knowledge, and local cultural practices (Evans, 2004; Easterly, 2006). Also in the field of civil society and democracy, it is now widely accepted that both ‘cannot be created from blueprints’ and do not lend themselves to ‘external manufacturing’ (Howell & Pearce, 2001, p. 121). Democratic engineering has often had damaging effects because it enforces a particular organizational paradigm (Blaug, 2002). One way

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of overcoming this problem is by supporting domestic civil society organizations such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which can take the lead in promoting 'home-grown' democracy. This solution only works, however, if the sponsored NGOs are themselves rooted in their society and are sensitive to local contextual factors because 'civil societies in any context have a history and must develop in tune with their particular historical, cultural and political rhythms' (Howell & Pearce, 2001, p. 121).

Several studies have pointed out that donor funding to democracy-promoting NGOs has had the unintended effect of weakening the link between NGO and society. For instance, Henderson (2002) shows that donor support to NGOs in Russia caused them to be accountable towards their donors, rather than towards their constituencies. White argues that, due to donor support, some of the NGOs in Bangladesh have 'grown into formidable institutions, very far from the citizens' associations of classical civil society theorists' (1999, p. 321). Hearn (2000, 2007) concludes that NGOs in Africa are maintaining rather than challenging the status quo, and can even be seen as agents of Western powers. These and other observations led to the conclusion that many of the NGOs which are part of the aid system are not the ones which are so important for promoting democracy (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Ottaway & Carothers, 2000; Sabatini, 2002; Tvedt, 2006).

This critique has been widely accepted, not least by donors, who pledged to improve their approach. For over a decade now, they have emphasized the idea that a more context-specific approach is needed and that national ownership and participation are ways to achieve this.¹ However, defining and measuring the context of civil society is a difficult and multi-interpretable topic which has received little attention (Anheier, 2005; Heinrich, 2005; Howard, 2005). While the studies mentioned above clarify a lot about how donor funding causes NGOs to become detached from their societies, they do not systematically analyse what being context-specific actually means for NGOs. As a result, context-specificity often remains an empty concept. We therefore aim to contribute to the debate by exploring and substantiating the meaning of context-specificity for individual NGOs.

The analysis is guided by two questions: (1) What are the similarities and differences between Ghanaian and Indonesian democracy-promoting NGOs in terms of their organizational characteristics and (2) to what extent do these similarities and differences indicate context-specificity? In our empirical analysis, we compare the organizational characteristics of NGOs from Ghana and Indonesia. By explicitly taking variation in context as a starting point of our analysis, we maximize the chances of finding contextual differences between the NGOs. As there are currently no concrete indicators for determining whether or not the organizational characteristics of the NGOs are context-specific, we explore several possibilities. In this exploration, we link our empirical findings to aspects of the Ghanaian and Indonesian contexts. By doing so, we construct and apply a framework for determining the context-specificity of NGOs.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. First, we discuss the link between democracy, civil society, and context-specificity. Here we also explain our choice to compare the NGOs in terms of their mission, strategy, structure, and resources. Second, we describe the research methodology and the selection of organizations. Third, for each organizational characteristic, we compare the Ghanaian and Indonesian NGOs and discuss their context-specificity. We find that, despite major contextual differences, NGOs principally only differ in terms of their mission and are remarkably similar in

terms of their strategy, structure, and resources. We conclude the article by summarizing our framework and findings and by discussing donor-dependency as a potential explanation for the similarities we find.

Democracy, Civil Society, and Context-specificity

The expectation of finding organizational differences between democracy-promoting NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia is based on two premises in contemporary literature: First, that each country has its own path to democracy; and second, that NGOs are conducive to rooting democracy in society. The idea that there is one path to democracy has long been invalidated. Each country has its own path, and it is not even sure whether it will lead to the same end state (Carothers, 2002). Although democracy is often portrayed as a universal ideal, it manifests itself in many forms. In effect, the universal ideal of 'rule by the people' is an important source of variation and deviation. Democracy can only work if it is fundamentally rooted in society; it needs institutions that help ordinary citizens gain control over the decisions that affect their lives (Beetham, 1993). Because people all over the world differ in their cultural habits, their language, their history, and so on, rule by the people is bound to produce some significant differences. Therefore, 'different countries might very well be doing what is best for them, given their circumstances, by following different paths' (Munck, 2009, p. 337).

In general, a critical and vibrant civil society is believed to be important for developing democracies because it provides a counterweight to state power, promotes necessary state reforms, includes the poor and marginalized, and teaches citizens the norms and values of democracy (Clarke, 1998; Fowler, 2000; Edwards, 2004; Hendriks, 2006). There are several reasons why NGOs are conducive to rooting democracy in society. First, it is believed that they promote plurality and inclusion. We broadly define NGOs as the formal and informal associations that exist outside the state and the market (Hendriks, 2006). They can take on all sorts of forms, representing all sorts of societal groups and interests, thereby promoting plurality. Furthermore, these different groups can use NGOs to gain more control over the democratic institutions in their country. In this way, NGOs act as an alternative channel, distinct from political parties and elections, by which to present the democratic system with a more differentiated and more constant flow of input (Clarke, 1998; Biekart, 1999). Second, it is believed that NGOs have the capacity to cater to local circumstances and local needs because they are flexible and closely connected to people's life-worlds (Diamond, 1999; White, 2004). NGOs are thus the perfect vehicles to ensure that democracy becomes locally rooted and widely accepted by different segments of a population (Hadenius & Ugglå, 1996).

Although theory remains vague about what concrete differences we might expect between NGOs in different countries, it does offer some clues where we need to look. Like all formal organizations, NGOs 'need structures for defining goals, making decisions, mobilizing resources and directing resources towards goals' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 316). Successful organizations, that is, the ones that survive, have a structure and strategy that best serve the purpose of the organization and are consistent with the environment in which they operate (Mintzberg, 1983). For NGOs this means that they need to adapt their 'mission, their functions and their structures' to the social and political context in which they operate (Diamond, 1999, p. 230). Following these ideas, we will compare the NGOs on (1) The mission of the organization, (2) their organizational strategy, (3)

their organizational structure, and (4) their financial and human resources (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Mintzberg, 1983; Diamond, 1999). Together these areas capture what an organization stands for, what it does to achieve its goals, and how it is organized to do so.

Data and Methods

The research employs a comparative case study design. This approach is appropriate to study phenomena within their specific contexts. By contrasting the contexts, the way different conditions affect different outcomes of the phenomenon can be examined (Yin, 2003). In this study, Ghana and Indonesia represent the different contexts and the democratization NGOs represent the phenomenon. As Ghana and Indonesia are such different countries, we would expect NGOs to adapt to their environments and show different ‘outcomes’ in terms of their mission, their strategy, their structure, and their resources. As little is known about context-specificity, we cannot start looking for clues in the context. Instead, we start by comparing the NGOs and subsequently link our findings to the different contexts.

The NGOs have been selected by means of criterion sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is a qualitative sample, and as such it is not randomized and not representative in statistical terms. The purpose of this sampling technique is to capture the variety of a phenomenon within the boundaries of the criteria. Three criteria guided the selection. The first criterion was that the NGOs work in the field of promoting (aspects of) democracy. The second criterion was that they are supported by international donors.² The third criterion was that local experts (i.e. political scientists, NGO consultants, and representatives of major bilateral and multilateral donor agencies in the country) had to consider them to be important players in the field of democratization in their country. Based on these criteria, and the interviews with experts, a short list of organizations was compiled which captured a diverse group in terms of focus, age, and size. Table 1 provides an overview.

This article is based on extensive fieldwork data, collected in Ghana (Accra) and Indonesia (Jakarta) between 2007 and 2008. It consists of 41 in-depth interviews, principally with directors, researchers, and founding members of the NGOs. To balance their stories, interviews were conducted with the aforementioned local experts. In addition to interview data, the analysis uses annual reports, funding reports, internal documents, and NGO websites and publications. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and subsequently analysed through a process of thematic coding in the software package Atlas.ti.

Different Countries, Different Organizations?

In this section, we compare the NGOs in terms of their mission, strategy, structure, and resources. Subsequently, we explore to what extent these findings indicate context-specificity by relating them to the context in Ghana and Indonesia. In this way, we aim to demystify the concept of context-specificity and make it more tangible.

Comparing Missions

When comparing mission statements, we find clear deviations between countries in the kind of topics being tackled. Table 2 summarizes the mission statements of the selected NGOs.

Table 1. Basic characteristics of the NGOs

Organization	Full name	Establishment	Main focus	Size (number of staff) ^a
Ghana				
Abantu	Abantu for Development	1998	Gender inequalities	Small
CDD	Center for Democratic Development	1998	Political and economic issues	Medium
IDEG	Institute of Democratic Governance	2000	Political issues	Medium
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs	1989	Political and economic issues	Medium
ISODEC	Integrated Social Development Center	1987	Social service delivery and social inequalities	Big
Indonesia				
Demos	Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies	2002	Democracy and human rights	Medium
Elsam	Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy	1993	Democracy and human rights	Medium
KID	Indonesian Community for Democracy	2004	Political education and political party dialogue	Small
Partnership	Partnership for Democratic Governance Reform	2000	Civil society building and political and administrative issues	Big
PSHK	Centre for Indonesian Law and Policy Studies	1998	Legal reform	Medium
Yappika	The Civil Society Alliance for Democracy	1991	Civil society building and human rights	Medium

Source: Interviews, NGO websites, NGO documents.

^aSmall: $n < 10$; medium: $10 < n < 40$; big: $n > 40$.

In Indonesia, for example, corruption and human rights are prominent topics. The organizations tackle different aspects of these problems. *Demos* promotes ‘human-rights based democracy’ and aims ‘to promote the participation and representation of marginalised people’ (Interview Demos, March 2008). *Elsam* also sees the promotion of human rights as essential for promoting a democratic political order. According to the director, their mission is ‘to introduce human rights as a political instrument in Indonesia’ (Interview Elsam, April 2008). This requires institutional reform because the current judicial institutions are perceived to be part of the problem rather than the solution. *KID* aims at improving the quality of the democratic discourse at the local level by educating strategic young individuals about the norms and values of democracy. They argue that the nature and quality of participation is as important for improving democracy in Indonesia as the

Table 2. NGO mission statements

Organization	Mission summary
Ghana	
Abantu	Build women's capacity to participate in decision-making, influence policies from a gender perspective, and address unequal social relations
CDD	Promote democracy, good governance, and the development of liberal economic environment
IDEG	Generate knowledge and enhance citizen capacity to influence public policy choices in order to consolidate democracy and good governance
IEA	Promote good governance, democracy, and a free and fair market economy
ISODEC	Achieve economic and social justice and a life of dignity for all by promoting rights, accountability, and responsibility
Indonesia	
Demos	Enhance community capacity to promote democracy and human rights through the practice of discourse; dissemination; and cooperative networks
Elsam	Promote the existence of a society that respects human rights and democracy and attains social justice as well as gender sensitivity
KID	Facilitate commitment of citizens to democracy and facilitate their participation, so people can monitor and control public decision-making
Partnership	Promote good governance by strengthening public service governance, deepening democracy, and improving security and justice, while considering gender equality and marginalized groups
PSHK	Contribute to consistency of legal enforcement and legal reform with independent research
Yappika	Promote a democratic and independent civil society that fights for democracy and human rights

Source: NGO websites.

quantity of participation (Interview KID, April 2008). *Partnership* seeks to strengthen the democratic quality of the civil service sector and the security and justice sectors by targeting corruption and improving transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights in these sectors (2006). *PSHK* believes that more attention should be given to legal reform. According to *PSHK* 'law continues to be a crucial area in need of reform' because, 'settlement of serious law violations in terms of corruption and human rights require effective legal institutions' (2010). Finally, *Yappika* bases its work on the idea that a strong civil society movement is necessary for improving democracy and human rights in Indonesia. Besides providing grants for NGOs at the local level, they developed a more hands-on approach after the fall of Suharto because 'the environment supported involvement in dialogues with policy makers' (Interview Yappika, April 2008).

In Ghana, by contrast, the focus lies on different aspects, namely on poverty and the exclusion of vulnerable groups (Abantu, ISODEC) and on identifying and overcoming institutional gaps in the macro-political system (CDD, IDEG, IEA). *ISODEC* has its roots in service delivery work for vulnerable groups in society. They commence from the ideal that 'poor and marginalised people and their organizations achieve their economic justice' and that they 'have an effective voice in influencing decisions affecting their lives' (ISODEC, 2006b, p. 18). *Abantu* has a similar goal with a different target group, namely to promote the position of women in Ghanaian society: 'It has been set up to support women's organizations, to build their capacity for policy influencing'

(Interview Abantu, December 2007). Both organizations look at how their constituencies are served by existing institutions and stress the need for inclusion and distributive justice. The other organizations (CDD, IDEG, IEA) take a different perspective, focusing on 'systems and processes of the central government, and how policy is made and implemented' (Interview CDD, December 2007). They identify institutional problems that relate to the lack of decentralization, constitutional reform, the separation of powers, political party reform, and the quality of electoral procedures. Besides identifying similar problems, they also develop similar solutions. For instance, in order to overcome the weak position of parliament in relation to the executive, *IDEG* 'builds the capacity of parliament at the national level through workshops and seminars' (Interview IDEG, December 2007), *IEA* takes parliamentarians 'through courses on various subjects' (Interview IEA, December 2007), and *CDD* teaches 'new members of parliament about the rules and procedures of parliament' (Interview CDD, November 2007).

Context and Mission

In both Ghana and Indonesia, the mission statements and, subsequently, the areas in which the NGOs work, reflect the different problems that Ghana and Indonesia face on the path of consolidating and deepening their democracies. Despite some parallels in their historic development, Ghana and Indonesia present NGOs with a very different institutional environment. Both countries experienced a prolonged period of colonial rule where a European state imposed its repressive and extractive administrative structures. Indonesia officially gained independence in 1949 after a violent struggle against their Dutch colonizers. In Ghana, the transition of power from the British colonizers was more peaceful and took place in 1957. After decolonization, both countries had short experiences with parliamentary democracy (Chazan, 1988; Sundhaussen 1989). However, the most long-lasting regimes were the military ones, in Ghana under Rawlings and in Indonesia under Suharto. In Ghana, the transition to democracy was gradual and peaceful and took place between 1992 and 2000 (Gyimah-Boadi, 2001). In contrast, the 1998 transition in Indonesia was short and violent (Schwarz, 1999).

Currently, both countries struggle with different societal problems. In Ghana, the combination of widespread poverty and the lack of education (illiteracy rate of 42%) are an obstacle to basic democratic practices such as participation and demanding government accountability (Abdulai & Crawford, 2010). These are the issues being tackled by NGOs such as ISODEC and Abantu. In Indonesia, poverty is less widespread and the level of education is generally higher with an illiteracy rate of about 10% (CIA, 2011). Here, one of the main societal obstacles to democracy is conflict. Throughout the archipelago, past and present conflicts between ethnic and religious groups cause a lot of instability and are rated as one of Indonesia's biggest governance problems (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2009). During these various conflicts, human rights have often been violated, which explains the prominence of the topic in the mission statements of the Indonesian NGOs.

The macro-political environment also presents democratic development with different obstacles. In Ghana, for instance, the separation of powers is a significant weakness in the democratic system on which NGOs such as CDD, IEA, and IDEG work. Although both countries have a history of concentration of power in the executive, in contrast to Indonesia, Ghana has not broken with this history. The executive remains dominant, especially

over the legislative branch (Lindberg & Zhou, 2009; Abdulai & Crawford, 2010). Because Ghana functions as a two-party system, the president usually has a safe majority in parliament. His power to appoint and dismiss ministers among the parliamentarians ensures that this majority is loyal to his policy because 'every parliamentarian from the presidential party wants a ministerial appointment' (Interview University of Legon—Faculty of Law, November 2007). The dominance of the executive weakens the separation of powers, designed to ensure checks and balances between the different branches of government. In Indonesia, this is less the case because their presidential system functions differently. In order to be able to govern, the president needs to build coalitions with multiple parties in parliament, which strengthens the separation of powers (Perdana & Friawan, 2007).

A related problem with democracy in Ghana, on which each of the selected Ghanaian NGOs has some sort of programme, is the lack of decentralization. CDD, IDEG, and IEA work on it from an institutional perspective, and ISODEC and Abantu from the perspective of the participation of the poor and women, respectively. Although Ghana has decentralized structures in the form of districts, the central executive dominates these structures, leaving less space for local input and participation. The District Assemblies are only partly decentralized because the president has the right to appoint and dismiss the District Chief Executive and one-third of the assembly members. The independence of the districts is also undermined by financial dependence on the central government, which allocates only 5% of the national budget to them. This is not sufficient to attract qualified personnel and sustain a local bureaucracy. As a result, many of the bureaucratic structures at the local level still take orders from Accra (Owusu, 2005; Crawford, 2008).

In contrast, in Indonesia, an ambitious decentralization programme was implemented after the fall of Suharto. In a short period of time, the central government transferred most of its tasks along with two-thirds of its bureaucracy to the local level (Fitriani, Hofman, & Kaiser, 2005). The decentralized structure consists of provinces, districts, sub-districts, and municipalities. Except for the sub-districts, these structures have direct elections for both the legislative and the executive. As in Ghana, the most important source of income comes from the central government, which allocates 25% of its budget to the sub-national level (Perdana & Friawan, 2007).

In Ghana, the centralization of power is an obstacle to democracy, but in Indonesia dispersed power delivers its own set of problems. First of all, the aforementioned conflicts are sometimes linked to the process of decentralization. Although it helped to improve the situation in long-lasting conflicts such as Aceh and East Timor, some argue that in other cases the handing over of decision-making authority to the local level actually fuelled the fire of ethnic conflict and secessionism (Brancati, 2006). Second, Indonesia copes with much higher levels of corruption than Ghana (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2009). During the New Order regime, corruption was also high, but limited to a relatively small clique around Suharto. After the fall of Suharto, corruption spread through the Indonesian system, following the separation of powers. In the judiciary, it became so widespread that almost nobody working for it was above suspicion (Ghoshal, 2004). In addition, the process of decentralization effectively spread corruption throughout the country, bringing it closer to the people (Hadiz, 2004; Aspinall & van Klinken, 2011). Therefore, many NGOs in Indonesia, including PSHK and Partnership, see combating corruption as an important aspect of improving democracy there. To sum up, the mission statements of the NGOs in Ghana and Indonesia can be called 'context-specific'

because they relate to important issues which can be identified in the wider socio-political environment in which they operate.

Comparing Strategies

From our interview data we uncovered a range of strategies being pursued by the NGOs. Table 3 summarizes our findings, and despite some deviating strategies, like ISODEC's service delivery work and KID's focus on political education at the regional level, it also shows some remarkable similarities. First, almost every organization in our sample has embraced research-based advocacy as a main strategy, and second, within this strategy they focus on non-confrontational forms of advocacy, mainly targeting the central government.

The strategy of research and advocacy can be summarized as identifying a problem, conducting research on this problem, writing a research report with recommendations, and finally advocating these recommendations among policymakers. At Demos 'there are only two divisions, one for advocacy and one for research, but it's not really separated' (Interview Demos, March 2008). Good quality research is seen as a necessary input for advocacy activities because 'you cannot promote advocacy work without having evidence' (Interview Abantu, December 2007), and advocacy activities are 'are only taken seriously by the government when they are backed by research' (Interview IDEG, December 2008). Advocacy follows research because 'research will only fill up your bookshelves if you do not advocate the findings' (Interview PSHK, April 2008). The strategy is so appealing

Table 3. Comparing NGO strategies

Organization	Main type of strategy				
	Research and advocacy		Service delivery	Political education	Civil society capacity building
	Institutional	Protest			
Ghana					
Abantu	✓				✓
CDD	✓				
IDEG	✓				✓
IEA	✓				
ISODEC	✓	✓	✓		✓
Indonesia					
Demos	✓				
Elsam	✓				
KID				✓ ^a	
Partnership	✓				✓
PSHK	✓				
Yappika	✓	✓			✓

Source: Interviews, NGO documents, NGO websites.

^aMost of the other NGOs are also involved in political education programmes, but not as a main strategy. Furthermore, KID's approach to political education differs from the other NGOs. Whereas for the other NGOs it is more part of their advocacy work, KID has set up several democracy schools throughout Indonesia where local politicians, civil society activists, and community and business leaders follow a curriculum on the norms, values, and practices of democracy.

that even organizations focusing on community development (Yappika and ISODEC) added it to their repertoire. They had similar reasons for doing so. At Yappika, they reasoned that ‘just to channel money to NGOs is not enough’ and that they ‘also had to build experience in policy advocacy to be able to influence policy reform’ (Interview Yappika, April 2008), while ISODEC ‘wanted to have a bigger impact on society, so the idea of rights-based advocacy came in’ (Interview ISODEC, December 2007).

The range of possible advocacy tactics is rather broad, from all kinds of protests to careful institutionally embedded forms of communication and advice (Jenkins, 2006). In both Ghana and Indonesia, institutional advocacy tactics are dominant. The NGOs advocate their messages through roundtables, conferences, seminars, book launches, radio, TV, newspapers, and lobbying parliamentarians and policymakers. By employing such non-confrontational strategies, the organizations find it easier to get access to parliamentarians and policymakers and make sure that ‘they take your work into account and use it to improve the governance system in the country’ (Interview IEA, November 2008). The best guarantee for getting access and being heard is having informal contacts because when ‘people have personal friends in government, it works very well in getting issues pushed through’ (Interview CDD, November 2007). Therefore, they go playing golf with the minister (Interview Partnership, April 2008), stay in close touch with ‘the good guys in parliament and government’ (Interview Elsam, April 2008), and invite ‘ministers, members of parliament and ambassadors for an informal lunch’ (Interview IEA, November 2008).

ISODEC and Yappika are the only organizations in our sample which are prepared to employ protest forms of advocacy to put pressure on the government. They usually start their advocacy activities with institutional forms like lobbying, but ‘if lobbying brings no change, we back off and organise for a demonstration’ (Interview Yappika, April 2008). ISODEC applied the same logic in their campaign against the privatization of water in Ghana:

The water campaign started in a workshop setting with policymakers and the community. But when the minister wanted to go ahead with this water privatisation, (...) there is no compromise, so definitely something has to be done to stop it. And the only way is to demonstrate. So our mode of advocacy may be different from that of the other NGOs. (Interview ISODEC, November 2008)

Although the other NGOs join advocacy coalitions and lend their expertise to them, they do not engage directly in the activity of organizing demonstrations. Like PSHK, they ‘focus more on the research and policy advocacy, so we only do demonstrations with coalitions, not in our work plan, but indirectly’ (Interview PSHK, April 2008). Different reasons are given for not joining or organizing demonstrations. Some think it is the job of other organizations to do this (KID), others say that their donors would not approve of this strategy (Partnership), and again others point out that this would damage the relationship of trust they have built with the government (IDEG, Abantu).

Context and Strategy

In Ghana, the non-confrontational approach to influencing state officials can be placed within a context where state–society relations are quite good. In Indonesia, where

state–society relations are more antagonistic, this is, however, not the case. After a history of repression, both Ghana and Indonesia now have an enabling legal environment for democracy-promoting NGOs. By its very nature, promoting democracy is politically sensitive as it means challenging and criticizing existing state institutions. During the military regimes of Suharto (Indonesia) and Rawlings (Ghana), only de-politicized NGO activities such as relief and community welfare activities were permitted. All other independent NGO activity was looked upon with suspicion and vocal NGOs were actively repressed or co-opted (Gyimah-Boadi & Oquaye, 2000; Hadiwinata, 2003). To fight for democracy in such a context is dangerous and requires careful non-confrontational tactics in order to avoid persecution. In Indonesia, NGOs had to act like chameleons and adopt the state ideology as their own ideology (Hadiwinata, 2003). In Ghana, large groups of citizens reacted to repression by retreating into local forms of organization, outside the scope of the state (Chazan, 1988).

Towards the end of the military regimes, societal groups became more vocal, openly confronting the regime with demands for change. In both Ghana and Indonesia, the transition to democracy opened the space for NGOs to pursue their own agenda's and have their own ideologies. Constitutional provisions now safeguard the right to engage in a whole range of democracy-promoting activities such as civic education, community organization, civil society building, mobilization, lobby and advocacy, and protest and demonstrations.

Although the current legal environments in Ghana and Indonesia allow a similar range of NGO activities, state–society relations make it more likely for Indonesian NGOs to pursue confrontational strategies than NGOs in Ghana. In contrast to Ghana, the transition to democracy was particularly violent in Indonesia, causing conflicts throughout the country. This reinforced a sense of mutual suspicion and distrust, which had been building up between state officials and civil society groups in the decade before the fall of Suharto (Hadiwinata, 2003). Many NGOs proliferated to oppose the hegemony of the Indonesian state (Clarke, 1998). State officials therefore generally see civil society actors as destabilizing, and many NGOs still perceive the state as an adversary; therefore, 'many of civil society's tactics are confrontational and hardnosed' (Ibrahim, 2006, p. 7). In Ghana, state–society relations also started out from low levels of mutual trust, but since the transition to democracy there has been a growing space for interaction between NGO leaders, government officials, and even activists (Darkwa, Amponsah, & Gyampoh, 2006). State–society relations improved most notably when the opposition party NPP first came to power in 2000. While in opposition, the NPP had collaborated with many NGOs, which improved mutual understanding and trust (Interview University of Legon—Faculty of Political Science, November 2007). In such a context, it is less likely and perhaps less necessary for NGOs to resort to confrontational strategies.

Comparing Structures

In both Ghana and Indonesia, the NGOs are hierarchic organizations, which 'do not have members but they have a governing board' (Interview UNDP, April 2008). The governing board represents 'the highest decision-making body' (Interview Abantu, November 2008). The main task of the board is to outline the strategic direction of the organization, because 'at the end of the day the board decides about the issues we will focus on' (Interview IEA, December 2008). Below the board level, the management takes most of the daily

decisions. In principle, the policy will be ‘decided at the top of the structure, but in practice, all of the policies are discussed in the executive staff’ (Interview Yappika, April 2008), and ‘most of the activities are designed together with the board’ (Interview Elsam, April 2008). These boards often include founders of the organization and important national figures, as is the case with Partnership, where the board consists of ‘prominent leaders in Indonesia, from the private sector, from NGOs, from the university, and from the government we have ministers and even the president’ (Interview Partnership, April 2008). This is an understandable but also rather paradoxical situation, if we realize that the mission of quite a few of these organizations is to strengthen the position of the common citizen against the existing power holders.

Because the structures of the NGOs are closed to membership participation, the people they supposedly work for have no direct influence on the direction of organizational policy, nor are the organizations formally accountable to them. This is also the case for ISODEC and Demos, even though they are democratic membership organizations. They both regard marginalized people in their country as their constituency, but they have not yet succeeded in including them in their membership. At ISODEC, ‘the membership is very restricted, there is no mass membership’ (Interview ISODEC, November 2008), and at Demos, ‘there are about 35 members, staff members, human rights activists, journalists and academics’ (Interview Demos, March 2008). Both organizations intend to be more inclusive, but neither has succeeded in doing so because their constituencies are relatively large and sometimes difficult to reach.

In general, the NGOs in the sample experience problems in defining and limiting their constituencies: ‘the problem with these national NGOs is that they don’t have a clear constituency, unlike grassroots NGOs whose constituency is very clear, but with these NGOs the constituency is everybody’ (Interview Asian Development Bank, March 2008). Abantu and Yappika, for instance, have very large constituencies as they are working for ‘women in Ghana’ and for ‘NGOs in Indonesia’, and at many of the think-tanks and policy institutes, the constituencies are even less well defined: ‘you talk about policymakers, civil society itself, the general public itself, development partners, researchers, academics. Because our main tools are research, advocacy and training, it is quite a broad constituency’ (Interview CDD, December 2007). Not knowing exactly for whom you work weakens the link with society because then there is also no societal group to whom you should be accountable.

Context and Structure

The legal framework in both Ghana and Indonesia allows for a whole range of organizational forms. As a result, their civil society sectors are populated by all sorts of formal and informal associations such as advocacy groups, service delivery NGOs, faith-based organizations, trade unions, and community-based organizations (Darkwa, Amponsah, & Gyampoh, 2006; Ibrahim, 2006). If we take context-specificity to mean that we should find a similar variety of organizational forms in our sample, we can conclude from our empirical findings that this is clearly not the case. However, because this criterion looks at a spectrum of organizational forms in an NGO community, it does not tell us much about the context-specificity of the organizational structure of individual NGOs. As the context does not provide direct clues to what kind of organizational structure would be ‘context-specific’ in either country, we will take a more normative approach.

Democracy is about the inclusion, participation, and representation of all segments of society. According to Hadenius and Uggla (1996, p. 1623), 'to serve as an organ of socialisation into the practice of democracy, the associations in question must themselves be democratically structured'. Similarly, Robinson and Friedman (2007, p. 644) hypothesize that internally democratic NGOs 'can make a positive contribution to the process of democratisation by fostering pluralism, promoting democratic values, and enhancing political participation'. In other words, contributing to these particular aspects requires organizations that are themselves rooted in their society and open to societal input. From this perspective, we would expect context-specific NGOs in both Ghana and Indonesia to have organizational structures that strengthen their links with society and facilitate the participation and inclusion of many different societal groups.

The optimal structure for strengthening the link with society is a democratic membership organization. Organizational structures can be either conducive or obstructive to rooting an organization in its environment. A distinction can be made between two extremes, namely hierarchic non-membership organizations and democratic membership organizations (Jenkins, 2006). Hierarchic non-membership structures insulate themselves from their environment by having top-down power structures. The management and the board of the organization can determine the organizational course regardless of what happens in the environment. Interaction with the environment is carefully managed and in its most extreme form limited to the composition of the board. At the other end of the spectrum are democratic membership organizations. The bottom-up power structures make the membership the highest decision-making authority, thereby institutionalizing environmental input. By being open and accountable to the environment, the organization loses control, but achieves embeddedness.

Instead of open structures, in both countries we find hierarchic non-membership organizations that are closed to citizen participation. This seems paradoxical because, while striving for democracy, the people and groups they claim to work for are not included. Furthermore, many of the NGOs have trouble pinpointing their constituency, so it is not clear for whom they work and to whom they should account. The only two democratic membership organizations in the sample, ISODEC and Demos, are not the kind of organizations where a constituency organizes and speaks for itself. As the people for whom they work (the poor and vulnerable) are not included in their membership, they can be characterized as trustee organizations, that is, they speak for those who do not speak for themselves (Ottaway, 2000).

Comparing Human Resources

In terms of human resources, we find that NGOs in both Ghana and Indonesia are dominated by hired professionals with an elite profile, namely highly trained academics, many of whom received education abroad. The volunteers that work within the NGOs are small in number and resemble the elite profile of the staff. The core staff of every NGO in our sample is almost exclusively composed of hired professionals, like at Demos where 'almost 90% of the staff studied at university' (Interview Demos, March 2008). Managers in Ghana and Indonesia mentioned the level of education as the most important quality of their personnel. The general tendency is that 'to be a core staff, you have to have some professional competence' (Interview CDD, November 2007), and sometimes 'even the supporting staff, like the receptionist, has a good first degree' (Interview IEA, December

2007). Many of these academics received their masters or PhD at European or American universities, and among the NGO leaders are prominent national scholars such as Dr Gyimah-Boadi (formerly IEA and currently CDD) in Ghana and Dr Ignas Kleden (KID) in Indonesia. Partnership provides a good example of this elite profile. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), their staff 'is similar to the Indonesian staff we would have at UNDP' while adding: 'In fact, a lot of our staff works there now, and vice versa' (Interview UNDP, April 2008). Partnership itself not only confirms this image but even strengthens it: 'Basically we work with university graduates, not only at the policy level but also on a more practical level' (Interview Partnership, April 2008).

Organizations which started out with volunteers and activists, like ISODEC and Elsam, now also mainly work with academics. In the case of ISODEC, people who have been hired with a lower level of education are encouraged to pursue an academic degree abroad (2006a). Elsam notes that this process of professionalization has had mixed consequences, namely gaining expertise in their field of work at the cost of losing touch with society:

Before, we had the activists from the 90s generation, but since 2000 we see a different character. (...) I think the new generation has more expertise about human rights (...) but lacks the experience of organizing the basis, like peasants, workers, or the urban poor. (...) So we have very skilful staff for dealing with the government and for legal drafting, but they have a very limited knowledge about society. (Interview Elsam, April 2008)

The NGOs in both Ghana and Indonesia also resemble each other in the sense that volunteers are small in number and have a high level of education. In some organizations 'nobody volunteers' (Partnership) or the number is 'very minimal' (ISODEC). Usually these volunteers are 'either fresh graduate students or students who are in their last semester doing an internship' (Interview PSHK, April 2008). Most of them stay for a limited period or become staff members. Besides domestic students, the NGOs also receive international graduate students (Abantu) or PhD candidates (KID) as volunteers. At the level of project implementation, the number of volunteers sometimes rises. Yappika can count on about 20 active students who 'help organizing mass actions, they organise their friends and make banners' (Interview Yappika, April 2008), while Demos cooperates 'with 32 key informants, 130 local researchers, and about 1200 informants' to implement their research (Interview Demos, March 2008). However, although these volunteers perform valuable functions at project level, they have no influence within the organizational hierarchy.

Context and Human Resources

There are basically two ways of determining the context-specificity of human resources. One way would be to assess whether the people working for the NGOs reflect different societal groups. This is a difficult approach, as it requires defining important societal groups in Ghana and Indonesia, which are complex societies with multiple divisions between ethnic, religious, social, and economic groups. A more practical approach would be to see whether they have staff members who maintain a link with society. Here we can use a (crude) distinction, which is often made in non-profit literature, between organizations that are dominated by professional staff and organizations that are dominated by volunteers and activists (Hwang & Powell, 2009). While not being

mutually exclusive, these categories draw a clear picture of, on the one hand, people who are motivated by a salary and are hired because of their expertise and, on the other hand, people who work for free and are motivated by their ideals. We would expect to find a mix of both: Professionals who are hired to perform certain technical tasks to keep the organization running, and volunteers and activists who have their feet on the ground and serve to strengthen the link with the communities they work for.

Both benchmarks indicate that our findings are not context-specific. In both Ghana and Indonesia, the NGOs are dominated by professionals. More specifically, they are dominated by a group of highly trained academics, many of whom received education abroad. This means that instead of including a diversity of domestic groups, in both countries the NGOs are controlled by an academic elite. Even most of their volunteers resemble this elite profile. Furthermore, although volunteers perform some important functions at the level of project implementation, their influence at higher levels in the organization is minimal. These findings also contrast with the importance of volunteerism in wider civil society in both countries, because at community level 84% of the Indonesians are performing volunteer work (Ibrahim, 2006, p. 30) and in Ghana 'civil society is characterised by a significant level of human resources (mainly volunteers) that work for NGOs operating at different levels, in both urban and rural settings' (Darkwa, Amponsah, & Gyampoh, 2006, p. 8).

Comparing Financial Resources

In terms of financial resources, neither Ghanaian nor Indonesian NGOs manage to raise enough income domestically to sustain their organization. Interviewees named several sources of domestic income, namely membership dues, philanthropy, and marketing expertise. As none of the organizations has an extensive membership, this provides no substantial source of income. In terms of philanthropy, we find some differences between Ghana and Indonesia. In Ghana, philanthropic gifts were virtually absent. In Indonesia, some organizations managed to get some, like PSHK whose building is 'a donation from one of our founders', but none of these gifts could cover the costs of day-to-day operations (Interview PSHK, March 2008). Finally, in both Ghana and Indonesia, most organizations generate some resources by 'selling publications and professional expertise to other institutions' (Interview CDD, November 2007). During the 1990s, ISODEC raised about 40% of its income in this way. They were 'doing service delivery and consultancies for the government', but 'when we shifted focus from service delivery to advocacy (...) all of a sudden we lost all those contracts' (Interview ISODEC, December 2007). Nowadays, none of the organizations manages to raise more than 20% of its income domestically.

Because of the lack of local revenues, 'the bulk of finance comes from donor support' (Interview CDD, November 2007), and 'most of our money comes from international relations' (Interview Yappika, April 2008). Despite differences in the number of donors, the types of donors (e.g. private aid agencies, bilateral or multilateral donors) and the amount of money they get, the organizations are united by the fact that none could survive in its current form without donor support. IDEG explains that in Ghana 'most civil society organisations and most policy institutes depend upon foreign donors' and that without this foreign assistance they 'could not be operating, because internal sources in Ghana are zero' (Interview IDEG, December 2007). In Indonesia the same story is told. According to a respondent at the Asian Development Bank (Interview March 2008), 'NGOs are very

much donor oriented [as] very few come up with their own money', adding that 'if the tap is closed I do not know what will happen to them'. Such financial problems are described as 'a common problem'.

Context and Financial Resources

In terms of financial resources, we could define context-specificity as the ability of an organization to sustain itself locally without being dependent on international funding. In that case, the NGOs in both Ghana and Indonesia would not be classified as being 'context-specific' because of their donor-dependency. One might say that this finding is unsurprising as one of the selection criteria was that the NGOs receive donor funding. However, receiving donor funding does not necessarily imply donor-dependency. NGOs that receive funding still have the opportunity to reduce dependency by raising their own income. To see whether our findings really indicate a lack of context-specificity, we also need to look at the potential availability of domestic resources for NGOs. In that case, the picture changes somewhat, because the Indonesian context provides NGOs with more opportunities than the Ghanaian context.

Domestic sources of income can take the form of private giving, charging membership fees, and obtaining government subsidies (Wang, 2006). In general, sub-Saharan Africa represents the least favourable region for local fundraising, whereas Asian developing countries have more favourable indicators. Although Ghana scores better on many indicators than other sub-Saharan countries, it still scores lower than Indonesia (de Kluijver, 2010). On average, Indonesians earn about three times more than Ghanaians, with a per capita income (purchasing power parity, 2010) of US\$4300 compared to US\$1600 (CIA, 2011). In both countries, wealth is spread unequally among the population, but because of the higher level of income, there is a smaller percentage of the population living below the poverty line in Indonesia (13%) than in Ghana (29%) (CIA, 2011). The highest concentration of wealth can be found in urban centres on Java, such as Jakarta and Yogyakarta. These cities see a rising middle class with more disposable income (Asian Development Bank, 2010). Along with the growing wealth, there is a growing culture of corporate social responsibility, which creates opportunities for NGOs to raise funds (Ibrahim, 2006). Although Ghana has a comparable pattern of concentration of wealth in urban centres (mainly in the south), this has not yet translated into a stable urban middle class (Government of Ghana, 2007). Because of the widespread poverty, Ghanaians have less disposable income for membership dues or private donations to NGOs (Darkwa, Amponsah, & Gyampoh, 2006). In addition, there is virtually no culture of corporate philanthropy (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004). Finally, state support as a source of income is hardly available in either Ghana or Indonesia. Although it is possible to get government contracts for social service delivery activities, it is very unlikely to receive funding for the more politically sensitive activity of promoting democracy (Darkwa, Amponsah, & Gyampoh, 2006; Ibrahim, 2006). Summing up, in Ghana, donor-dependency can be related to the absence of local resources, whereas this is not the case for Indonesia.

Conclusion and Discussion

The main aim of this article was to contribute to the debate by giving substance to the elusive concept of context-specificity. Based on our exploration, we have created a

framework for judging the extent to which an NGO can be classified as context-specific. First, based on the premise that each country follows its own path to democracy and encounters different obstacles on its way, we expect these different obstacles to manifest themselves in the mission statements of the NGOs. In other words, a mission statement is context-specific when an NGO focuses on problems with democracy which are relevant for their country. Second, although the appropriate strategy (i.e. confrontational or non-confrontational) always depends on the specific situation, it is possible to say something more in general about strategy and context. Each country has its own type of (political) culture and state–society relations with a repertoire of acceptable and unacceptable ways of reacting to a problem. A strategy which works in Ghana might, for instance, be counter-productive in Indonesia. Third, based on the premise that NGOs act as vehicles for involving citizens, we link context-specificity to having democratic structures which are open to membership participation of all kinds of citizens. In this sense, we equate context-specificity with being open to societal input. Fourth, in terms of human resources, we find a useful distinction in non-profit literature, namely between professionals and volunteers/activists. Without becoming too deterministic, we would expect a context-specific NGO to not only work with professionals, but also have some staff that maintains a link with society (broadly defined as volunteers and activists). Finally, raising your own income and independence from external donors are used as a benchmark for determining financial context-specificity. To this principle we add a ‘reality check’ by looking at various economic indicators which represent the potential for raising an income locally.

If we relate our empirical findings to this framework, we are presented with a mixed picture in terms of context-specificity. The different contexts in which the NGOs are situated are well reflected in their mission statements, so in that sense the organizations can be classified as being context-specific. When looking at strategy, the non-confrontational approach of Ghanaian NGOs fits with the state–society relations, while this was not the case in Indonesia. The organizational structures of both Indonesian and Ghanaian NGOs lack context-specificity, as most have hierarchical structures which are closed to societal input. In terms of human resources, we find NGOs which mainly rely on professionals rather than on volunteers and activists. Finally, none of the NGOs is able to raise enough income locally to sustain its organization. However, the resulting donor-dependence was more expected in Ghana than in Indonesia because of the lack of financial resources within the country. In summary, based on our framework, we can conclude that NGOs in Ghana are more in tune with their context than Indonesian NGOs.

At the same time, the similarities we find across both countries are striking. Apart from what they aim to achieve (mission), when looking at how they do it (strategy), who is doing it (human resources), and with what kind of structure and financial resources, context seems to be of no importance. Regardless of the context, the dominant organizational configuration is that of a hierarchic non-membership organization, which is dependent on donors for its finances and owned and run by an academic elite with a bias for doing research and non-confrontational advocacy. The similarities between both countries are so strong that it seems as if the NGOs were cut from the same cloth.

How can we explain these similarities across such different contexts? One possible explanation might be the fact that all NGOs in our sample are donor-dependent. To shed light on this issue, we need to elaborate on the aspect of financial resources. Within our framework, financial resources can be seen as an overarching aspect, potentially affecting the ‘context-specificity’ of all other organizational characteristics. This

is the case because finance directly relates to organizational autonomy. We can show how this works by translating the critiques of donor funding mentioned in the introduction into the terminology of our framework. These studies basically argue that donor-dependence and upward accountability have caused mission to follow money, structures, and human resources to conform to particular organizational paradigms, and strategies to become less confrontational. One could say that donor-dependence inhibits the danger of replacing context-specificity with donor-specificity. A pure donor-specific NGO would be a professional organization (structure and human resources) which is able to apply and account for funding (financial resources), which reacts to donor priorities (mission), and which does not act in a way that puts donors in a difficult position (strategy). Although our analysis does not permit us to draw firm conclusions about the effect of donor-dependence on the organizational form of NGOs, our findings in Ghana and Indonesia seem to indicate a high degree of donor-specificity. So despite the pledge of donors to adapt their funding strategies to the local context and to promote local participation and ownership, this has not yet resulted in context-specific partner organizations.

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Notes

1. Many bilateral and multilateral donor agencies started using this terminology in their policies after signing the Rome declaration on harmonization (2003), the Paris declaration on aid effectiveness (2005), and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008).
2. This criterion did not specify the number of donors, the type of donors, or the amount of funding. With regard to these aspects, the group is highly diverse both within and between countries. In terms of the number of donors, there are NGOs that have a large number of donors and NGOs with very few donors. CDD is an example of the former, as they have received grants from, among others, the UNDP, the World Bank, the Ford Foundation, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. On the other hand, there is KID which depends for almost all of its funds on the Netherlands Institute of Multiparty Democracy, because 'so far, beside the Dutch embassy, they are the only funders of KID's activities' (Interview KID, April 2008). The researched NGOs are supported by a variety of types of donors, which include bilateral, multilateral, and nongovernmental funding agencies. Partnership, for instance, mainly relies on funding from bilateral donors who channel their funds through the UNDP (a multilateral donor), while ISODEC has a long-term funding relation with the NGO Oxfam NOVIB. Finally, there are big differences in terms of their budgets. For the year 2007, Abantu anticipated a budget of US\$0.4 million as compared to the Partnership which had an estimated budget of US\$10 million.

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