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# **Non(?)-Governmental Organizations in Norway: a Study of Power Within the Norwegian Model of International Development**

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I, Sverre Berg Ofstad, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

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## List of abbreviations

GCS	Global Civil Society
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MID	Minister of International Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NNGO	Northern Non-Governmental Organization
SNGO	Southern Non-Governmental Organization
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMSC	Private Military and Security Company
RAM Light	Resource Allocation Model Light
TAN	Transnational Network
UN	United Nations

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## **Abstract**

Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) have risen to the forefront of the development sector. Yet, for a group of development actors that are explicitly non-governmental, it is conspicuous that their rise to prominence owes itself to State funding. This conundrum has spurred a debate about whether NGOs represent the poor and marginalized, or the States that fund them. In this thesis I contribute to the debate by examining the type of development actors that emerge from the Norwegian State-NGO relationship. Through semi-structured interviews with 10 Norwegian NGOs, I examined the ways in which the State exerts its influence on NGOs, and vice versa. By employing Foucault's governmentality approach to the study of governance, I found that the State controls the development efforts of Norwegian NGOs by orienting their activities towards quantifiable targets. These organizations are therefore in a compromising position where they must meet these targets, but also pursue more qualitative targets to help the poor. NGOs, however, are not passive actors, but rather continuously try to mold the structures of their relationship with the State in a plethora of ways. Nonetheless, their influence is mostly confined to development policy, and so when foreign policy objectives undermine development goals, NGOs find their power diminished. Through my research I found that Norwegian NGOs does not provide an alternative approach to development, but rather constitute a dynamic and heterogeneous piece in the wider 'Norwegian development project.' However, the relationship between the State and NGOs is not an enabling one, but rather a controlling one, and so the whole of the Norwegian NGO sector remains the sum of its independent and fragmented parts.

Key words: Norway, Non-governmental organizations, Upward accountability, Foucault, power, governmentality, State-NGO relationship.

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## 1. Introduction

In the 1980s, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began their rise to prominence within the development sector. This was a time filled with an almost incessant optimism for the potential of non-state actors in eradicating poverty and fighting injustice. Hailed as non-partisan, effective, and truly altruistic alternatives to State-led foreign aid, the NGO sector grew rapidly. Today, NGOs based in member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), administer roughly \$50bn every year (Bouret and McDonnell 2015). NGOs have grown into significant political actors, mobilizing people to change policy outcomes on the national and global level. Moreover, they provide vital services in areas such as education and health to millions of people every day. Yet, the romanticism surrounding NGOs in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century is now gone.

As the NGO sector proliferated, so did an increasing skepticism revolving questions such as: what are their agendas? Who runs these groups? Who are they accountable to? And not least: who funds them? The answer to the last question is quite the oxymoron. For a group that is explicitly non-governmental, it is noteworthy that OECD-based NGOs rely on the State for 40% of their funding (Bouret and McDonnell 2015). This reliance on State-funding is the focal point of a larger debate about the agency of NGOs. The principal question that this debate seeks to answer is this: Do NGOs comprise an independent realm representing the interest of the poor, or are they curtailed by their reliance on State-funding to the point where we should consider them State-actors?

### 1.1. Problem Statement

This debate tends to boil down to the question of whether States have power *over* NGOs or vice versa. In this thesis, however, I join another group of authors who are more interested in how power works *through* these actors. Thus, I shift the focus to how development processes emerge, transform, and crystallize through the State-NGO relationship. To do this, I utilized the ‘governmentality’ concept of Michel Foucault that directs analytical attention towards the process of governance. As a Norwegian myself, and having followed our country’s public discourse on aid and development for many years, I chose to locate the study in Norway. Two other reasons make the Norwegian context well-suited for a study of the State-NGO relationship:

Firstly, not only are there few studies on the Norwegian State-NGO dynamics, but as the State itself commissions most research on Norwegian aid, independent research is scarce. Secondly, the current government, instated in 2013, has introduced policies with consequences for the entire Norwegian aid system. The purpose of this study is therefore to examine the Norwegian State-NGO relationship in light of these recent changes to contribute to the scarce, but growing body of independent research that seeks to understand Norwegian NGOs.

Through interviews with 10 Norwegian NGOs, I investigated their interactions with the State in order to answer the following three research questions:

- How does the Norwegian State shape its relationship with NGOs?
- How do Norwegian NGOs shape their relationship with the State?
- What kind of development actors emerge from their relationship?

Before moving on to a description of the study's context, an important definitional problem must be solved.

## **1.2. Defining NGO**

Due to its potential breadth of activities, an NGO requires a broad definition. An NGO is therefore any private actor that claims to pursue public goals, hence making a representative claim on the behalf of some social group (DeMars and Dijkzeul 2015). Here, I narrow the focus to those NGOs with the goal of reducing poverty, inequality, and injustice in developing countries.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, any mention of NGOs refers to development-oriented NGOs. When it is required to distinguish between NGOs based in donor countries and developing countries, I refer to the former as Northern NGOs (NNGOS) and the latter as Southern NGOs (SNGOs). Southern NGOs have a central position in the thesis because Norwegian NGOs carry out the vast majority of their projects and programs through them (Norad 2017a). Moreover, as explained later, the State's influence affects the relationship between Norwegian NGOs and SNGOs as well.

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<sup>1</sup> The term, «developing countries» is not unproblematic. While the World Bank stopped using the term in acknowledgement of the diversity of developing countries, the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals still use the binary distinction of developed/developing countries (Fantom 2016; UN 2015). While acknowledging the immense diversity within the «developing countries» category, I use the term to denote the countries where NGOs implement development activities.

### **1.3. Thesis Outline**

This thesis comprises nine chapters. Chapter 2 provides the context of my study. Here, I present a typology of the ‘Norwegian Model’ for development aid, as well as its inherent problems. It is within this context that the Norwegian NGO-State relation transpires. Chapter 3 consists of a literature review as well as the conceptual framework used for my research. Here, I analyze existing theories on the State-NGO relationship, review their claims, and use this to lay the theoretical foundation for my own research. Concepts used throughout my research such as power, resistance, freedom, and governmentality are examined. Chapter 4 explains my methodological choices. Chapter 5 elaborates on the Statal structures that civil society is embedded in. Here, I present an overview of Norwegian aid and its trends, as well as the accountability mechanisms the State employs in its relation to NGOs. Chapter 6,7, and 8 each answer one of my research questions. In these chapters, I present the empirical findings from my interviews with NGO employees, and connect them with the existing theoretical and empirical literature in places where this provides a greater understanding of the subject. Lastly, Chapter 9 provides a summary of my research findings and a reflection on the broader significance of my findings.

## **2. The Norwegian Model**

Norway’s own vibrant civil society predates the country’s role as a prominent development actor. In fact, the Norwegian social democracy originates in mass social movements that championed political freedom and independence (Selle and Wollebæk 2010). These were explicitly conflict-oriented organizations that sought to influence national politics at the State level. However, in the 1960s, the State institutionalized these organizations, and another form of organized civil society sprung forth: one that focused on issues of poverty and human rights in developing countries (Selle and Wollebæk 2010). Therefore, in the early post-war period, many of the currently largest NGOs emerged, including Norwegian Church Aid, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and the Norwegian Red Cross. These organizations were largely independent, and funding from the government remained low (Tvedt 2009). However, in the beginning of the 1980s, following the steps of major donor countries such as the UK and the US, the Norwegian State invested massively in NGOs (Tvedt 2007a). This time therefore marks the beginning of the

‘Norwegian Model’ to development, referring to the uniquely close relationship between the State and civil society in development efforts.

## **2.1. Typology of The Norwegian Model**

The Norwegian Model is primarily characterized by the transfer of funds from the State to civil society. From 1981 to 2017, the share of Norway’s total aid expenditure channeled through Norwegian NGOs increased from under 5% to 13%, while the entire aid pie increased from NOK 2.4bn to 36.6bn (Norad 2017a). In other words: Whereas the State provided Norwegian NGOs with under NOK 120m in 1981, official funding now totals NOK 4.75bn. Compared to the 9% OECD-average then, Norway channels a greater share of its aid through nationally-based NGOs (Norad 2017a). To facilitate the sector’s growth, the government had to alter State legislation. In 1962, the State required Norwegian NGOs to provide 50% of their funding from other sources than the Norwegian State. In 1979, this decreased to 20%, and in 2001 it further declined to 10% (Tvedt 2009). As a result, most Norwegian NGOs receive over half of their funds from the State, and many over 80% (Lervåg and Slenes 2010). The Norwegian Model, however, is characterized by more than just money flows. Tvedt (2009) outlines the features that separates it from similar models in other countries:

- The number of NGOs funded by the State is proportionally greater in Norway than elsewhere.
- The political consensus between NGOs and the Norwegian State is stronger compared to most other countries.
- ‘Elite circulation,’ i.e., the circulation of leaders between different NGOs and State agencies pervades the Norwegian Model.
- The leaders of Norwegian NGOs enjoy great freedom in their allocation of funds because the State prioritizes control at a higher level.
- Lastly, the Norwegian model enjoys greater public support compared to most of similar aid models.

The last point is important. Compared to most others, Norwegians show a remarkably high level of trust towards their public institutions (OECD 2017). Therefore, the State dependency of NGOs is largely perceived as unproblematic (Toje 2013). Indeed, Norwegians tend to imagine

their country as largely peaceful and altruistic. Even most politicians, authors, and researcher tend to completely disregard our colonial past (Nustad 2003). These sentiments are best exemplified by Norway's 'founding father', Einar Gerhardsen. In the debate on aid that followed World War II, the former prime-minister stressed that Norway must contribute to development because our country has "throughout its entire culture and history represented freedom and democracy, and because everyone knows that we cannot be suspected of having an interest in exploiting people" (as cited in Nustad 2003, p. 20). Yet, despite the widespread notion of Norway as an altruistic, peaceful country, there are still those that remain highly critical of the Norwegian Model.

## **2.2. Issues with the Model: Conflicting Agendas**

Terje Tvedt, one of the most outspoken critics of the Norwegian Model, relabels it the "southern political system" due to what he perceives to be a conflation of development and foreign policy goals (Tvedt 2007a). Inherent to the southern political system, he claims, is the juxtaposition of the different agendas of development policy and foreign policy objectives:

*What creates good development vs. What serves Norwegian interests abroad.*

In instances when these two agendas are incompatible, it becomes a question of what matters most: the interest of Norway or the interest of the poor. Tvedt concludes that the Norwegian State has invaded civil society in order to diversify its national foreign policy instruments. However, in doing this, the State also loosened the monopoly that it once had on foreign policy as it became dependent on civil society to carry out its foreign policy objectives (Tvedt 2007a). Tvedt further states that in order to protect itself from external criticism and legitimize itself, the southern political system has funded "most of what has been produced of films, research and journalism on the non-European world the last couple of decades" (Tvedt 2007a, p.620). These sentiments are corroborated by a report conducted by the Research Council of Norway, which found that the lack of independent studies is among the greatest challenges of research on Norwegian aid (2007). Even more problematic, the report found that the dependence on State-funding could lead researchers to hold back on conclusions that conflict with official policy preferences. However, this does not mean that the State has somehow absorbed Norwegian NGOs.

On the contrary, Norwegian NGOs have had significant impact on the State. Toje (2013) argues that the development sector has successfully lobbied to achieve some degree of what he labels ‘the NGO-ification’ of Norwegian foreign affairs. When interviewing a senior official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), he stated: “In Oslo we are spending very little time tending the national interest – it is like working for a global NGO...The logic and language of Norwegian foreign policy has become that of the NGO” (Toje 2013, p. 25). Yet, much like Tvedt, Toje is concerned about the potential conflict between development and foreign policy. For instance, he questions the link between State dependency and the noteworthy reluctance of Norwegian NGOs to at least acknowledge the possibility of a conflict of interest between their activities and those of the Norwegian military in Afghanistan.

Sri Lankan author Goonatilake is more one-sided in his critique of the Norwegian Model. In his book *Recolonisation: Foreign Funded NGOs in Sri Lanka*, he accuses Norway to use NGOs as a front to colonialize Sri Lanka (2006). The Norwegian government, he contends, uses NGOs to manipulate politicians, institutions, and political structures to promote Norwegian investment and trade at the expense of Sri Lankan sovereignty. And indeed, Norad has actively promoted Norwegian investments in Sri Lanka for many years. A comprehensive study of these investments shows that their effect on poverty reduction have been negligible, and that some Norwegian businesses may have moved to Sri Lanka simply to avoid stringent health, safety, and environment requirements in Norway (Norad 2009). Thus, whether Norway deliberately practices a form of neo-colonialization or not, Goonatilake’s criticism still sheds light on another competing set of agendas inherent to the Norwegian Model:

*What creates good development vs. what creates profit.*

Through its own financial fund, estimated at 8.4tn<sup>2</sup>, the Norwegian State conducts commercial activities all over the world. For instance, the oil company Statoil, where the State has a 67% ownership, depends on successful operation in many developing countries (Statoil 2017). Thus, development goals risk becoming undermined by profit motives. For instance, in Angola, Statoil financed a demining machine on the condition that Norwegian People’s Aid promoted the interests of Statoil (Solli 2011). Perhaps even more worrisome, is the State’s involvement in the

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<sup>2</sup> As of December 2017.

arms industry. Norway owns shares in multiple arms manufacturers, whose weapons contribute to conflicts in developing countries such as Sudan, Angola, and Egypt (Bandarage 2011). As the falling oil price has had a massive negative impact on the Norwegian economy, the importance of ‘what makes profit’ might stand stronger than ever in relation to ‘what creates good development.’

Lastly, the Norwegian Model could also create a barrier for NGOs to chase what they perceive as the most salient development goals. For instance, when former Minister of the Environment, Erik Solheim, stated that he would begin to treat development and environmental issues as one, all the major NGOs developed a focus on the environment (Toje 2013). Therefore, it is not necessarily the largest, most efficient, or best organizations that receive the most State-support, but rather those who support political priorities. The potential harm in this is that organizations without the necessary expertise and partnership in developing countries, “follow the money” in order to stay afloat. Hence, another set of conflicting agendas appears:

*What creates good development vs. what ensures our organization’s continued existence.*

These potential conflicting agendas necessitates the question: Are Norwegian NGOs always able to do the things that create good development, or are they implicated in the State’s pursuit of other policy objectives? Their financial dependency on the State does not somehow prove that NGOs are co-opted by it. Indeed, despite the harsh criticism, Tvedt admonishes those who presuppose that the close relationship between NGOs and States is somehow intrinsically bad, and therefore does not deserve proper analysis (2007b). Likewise, Toje contends: “It is not possible to draw conclusions about how exactly the NGOs are influenced by their close proximity to the state: there is quite simply a gap in the research” (2013, p. 29). Before attempting to close this gap, I turn to the existing literature and theory on the State-NGO relationship in other parts of the world.

### **3. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

Although the State-NGO connection is uniquely strong in Norway, this power relation is studied within a plethora of contexts and through multiple theoretical lenses. In this chapter I present a review of these various studies due to two reasons: Firstly, the literature review situates my own



research within the broader theoretical and empirical field. Secondly, it provides me with the concepts and theories needed to answer my research questions. The review is organized in the following way:

First, I expound on the two major theories describing NGOs as powerful, autonomous actors: the agential theories. Secondly, by reviewing empirical evidence, I challenge their conception of civil society as a largely independent sphere. Then, I contrast the agential theories with structural theories, which maintain that the relationship of NGOs with the State severely restricts the former's agency. Although both theoretical camps highlight important problems of the State-NGO relationship, they tend to utilize a limited conception of power that fail to grasp the processes of governance. Therefore, in the final section of the chapter, I propose that Foucault's conception of power and 'governmentality' provides the most useful tools needed to answer my research questions.

### **3.1. Agential Theories**

The agential theories, which assert the autonomy and agency of NGOs, are many and varied. However, they all share the conception of civil society as a sphere of free association, independent of the State and the market (Lipschutz 2005). Proponents of these theories describe the rise of civil society as a result of globalization processes, particularly advances in communication, transport, and technology, as well as the emergence of a Northern middle-class increasingly occupied with international issues of justice and development (Kelly 2007). The growth of global civil society actors is therefore conceived to be a bottom-up, participatory process (Baker and Chandler 2005). Their principal argument is that this process eroded the authority and sovereignty of the State, thereby shifting political power to non-state actors.

Agential theories disrupt the largely state-centric approaches of understanding the international, while also employing overlapping concepts (Kelly 2007). As a result, they pressure disciplinary boundaries, and create theoretical diffusion and confusion (Kelly 2007). While the above paragraph provides the general claims of agential theories, the next section untangles this theoretical jumble, and outlines two dominant agential theories: Transnational Network (TAN) and Global Civil Society (GCS) theory.

### *3.1.1. Transnational Network Theory*

For TAN theorists, the organizations themselves are not as important as the shared principles, values, and norms that mobilize through them. They assert that globalization produced a transnational civil society independent of the market and the State, which includes economic actors, scientists, experts, activists, and of course NGOs (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Price 2003). Economic concerns do not motivate these activists; they connect with one another by virtue of their shared concerns about justice and inequality to create networks, which they foster by a constant exchange of information (Price 2003). Their informational network is what makes them influential as it allows them to connect with organizations across borders in order to “carry and re-frame ideas, insert them in policy debates, pressure for regime formation, and enforce existing international norms and rules, at the same time that they try to influence particular domestic political issues” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998. P, 219). Therefore, even though devoid of any legislative power, transnational networks persuade some national or international authority by means of their expertise, moral influence, and claim to political legitimacy (Price 2003). It is their moral status, rather than their coercive capacity which makes them powerful.

Keck and Sikkink (1998) describe the mechanism through which transnational networks influence politics as a ‘boomerang effect’: When a State blocks domestic actors from expressing or alleviating their or others’ grievances, they network with international allies to pressure the State. These networks provide access, leverage, information, and money to the local civil society actor that would otherwise not be able to attain them. Among other things, TAN theorists point to the international ban on land mines, the promotion of women’s rights, and even the end of the cold war as instances of successful advocacy by transnational networks (Joachim 2003; Price 2003).

To summarize, TAN theorists argue two central points. Firstly, civil society constitutes an independent sphere that challenges and diminishes the power of States. Secondly, this power emanates from within States, but transnational networks allow these actors to join forces to address social ills. Global Civil Society theory agree with the first argument, but not the second.

### *3.1.2. Global Civil Society Theory*

Contrary to TAN, Global Civil Society theory posits that NGOs operate in a global civil society existing beyond the national. The argument is that the global civil society transcends the national, forming a world-wide arena where individuals participate in public debates, come together to solve complex issues of the contemporary world, and where the marginalized can oppose prevailing power structures (Bartelson 2006; Chandler and Baker 2005). Global civil society includes a variety of actors, but NGOs are the forefront, capable of exerting considerable power over the State (Kaldor 2005). If governments fail to cooperate with this global force they will bear “crippling burdens of pressure”, and see their foreign policy objectives constrained (McArthur 2008, p.57). Therefore, GCS states that global civil society signifies a shift and diffusion of power.

Perhaps the biggest optimist about the emancipatory potential of the purported global civil society, is professor Lester Salamon who described its emergence as an emancipatory ‘associational revolution’ (1994). Writing in a time where NGOs grew rapidly, he explained the emergence of global civil society not just due to globalization processes, but also as a natural result of the neoliberal pressure of reducing State expenditure in developing countries, as well as a growing concern for participatory development. The power of NGOs, he asserts, is evident by their sheer number and funds. Salomon’s arguments are far from unique. Makoba (2002), for instance, posits that the World Bank’s Structural Adjustment Programs led to a decline of the African State, which created a ‘vacuum’ that necessitated a growing NGO presence on the continent. He points to the number and funds of NGOs as an “attest to their growing critical role in the development process” (Makoba 2002, p. 7). Likewise, McGann and Johnstone (2005) argue that the rise of NGOs originated from the failure of State-led development to address problems caused by poverty and globalization. In their analysis of the power of NGOs, they further contend that the global diffusion of power “created the space and demand for NGOs in the political landscape” (p. 162). They point to the influence of NGOs in international summits and international institutions such as the World Bank as evidence of their power. Yet, these authors’ optimism for NGOs is not unyielding. Their analysis includes a warning: If NGOs grow too close to the State, their emancipatory potential will be jeopardized.

### 3.2. A Critical Examination of Agential Theories

In agential theories, civil society is described as “The emergence of a global citizenry in a world-wide public sphere” (Baker and Chandler 2005, p. 2), «outside the institutional complexes of the family, market, and state, and beyond the confines of national societies, polities, and economies” (Kaldor, Anheier, and Glasius 2003, p. 4), and as “distinct from the loci of government authority within as well as above politics” (Bartelson 2006, p. 375). These ideas about civil society as distinctly separated from the State derive from the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, who provided a typology of civil society that many following theories on civil society build upon (Ershova 2015). Hegel asserted that civil society is a distinct arena that exists between the family and the State. According to Hegel, true freedom is the expression of our individual capabilities, and it is within civil society that individuals are free to do this (Ershova 2015). However, Hegel asserted that this freedom depends on the State for the administration of laws and public goods to protect the individual’s right to life and liberty within civil society (Stillman 2012). Moreover, since people pursue individual and therefore selfish needs, the State must regulate civil society so that individuals work towards common goals for the greater good (Stillman 2012). Thus, Hegel concluded that a well-functioning civil society cannot exist without the State.

Tocqueville, furthered these ideas to build what is now the theoretical foundation of agential theories of civil society (Whaites 2000). While Hegel asserted that civil society constitutes more of a mediating sphere between the family and State, Tocqueville saw this relationship as oppositional. It is within civil society that the minority—'common folk'—can organize and defend themselves from the tyranny of the majority—the State (Brinton 2010). It is within civil society, not the oppressive State apparatus, where people come together to fix common problems, help citizens in need, and petition the State on behalf of the minorities (Whaites 2000). Moreover, a well-functioning civil society also prevents the centralization of power as it acts as a counterbalance to the natural inclination of democracy to concentrate power within centralized governments (Brinton 2010). As the State perceives civic association as a threat, it wants to suppress civil society: “despotism... sees the isolation of men as the best guarantee of its own permanence (Tocqueville as cited in Brinton 2010, p. 455). From the writings of Tocqueville thus emerges what is called a ‘liberal’ conception of civil society as not only distinct, but also as an egalitarian sphere in opposition to the State.

However, to what degree can we really say that civil society forms an arena separated from the State? An examination of the empirical evidence makes any such claim dubious. Moore et al. (2005) for instance, challenge the Tocquevillian civil society through their analysis of the institutional environments of civil society around the world. They conclude that the organization of the State and the policies it implements greatly affects the incentives and opportunities for civic mobilization, and therefore also the type of NGOs that emerge. Furthermore, in many countries, the organizations with the closest ties with the government were those most likely to provide the poor a voice in policy-making. However, these organizations were often those attending the most public demonstrations, which provides evidence against State co-option. Similarly, Chambers and Kopstein (2006) argue that the presence/absence of the State in a decision-making arena determines the degree of participation of civil society actors. Moreover, they find that even in areas where the State is not present, it often provides the platform of negotiation between civil society actors. In Japan, Ogawa (2009) shows how the government actively promotes a ‘volunteer subjectivity.’ Through media, the government encourages volunteerism in State-projects that can only succeed through civic engagement. Moreover, through educational reforms, Japanese schools now actively promotes “a sense of civic engagement for proactively participating in public life” (Ogawa 2009, p. 106). Yet another author, Risse, (2002) shows how governments often subcontract NGOs, and that NGOs often provide monitoring capacities and supply information to the State. He concludes that “it would be preposterous to claim that the International NGO world represents global civil society against the interstate system” (Risse 2002, p. 344).

These studies point to the issue of conceptualizing civil society and its NGOs as autonomous from the State. On the contrary, subjects within civil society are always constructed differentially via their relations to the State. Moreover, since these relations are always produced at the local level, the State-NGO relationship must be studied locally. The next group of theories take the issue of NGOs’ autonomy one step further, and argue that the State’s influence on civil society is so great that it produces crippling effects on the agency of NGOs.

### **3.3. Structural Theories**

Proponents of what I here group together as structural theories of civil society, perceive NGOs as participants in a system with well-defined structures that constrain their agency. In stark

disagreement with agential theories, they argue that since civil society can only exist through its relationship to the State, NGOs ultimately remain powerless (Jordan 2011). To the concept of a bottom-up global civil society, they propose a top-down, State-controlled civil society with little room for agency. In the end, although NGOs have contributed to slight changes to politics, it is the State that decides “which opportunities are opened and which remain closed” (Reimann 2006, p. 64). Thus, in world politics, States matter, and the opinions of civil society are dispensable when necessary (Anderson and Rieff 2005). Therefore, structuralists conclude that the development efforts of NGOs do not represent an alternative to that of States, International Organizations, or the International Financial Institutions.

Some structural accounts of NGOs agree with agential theories on one point: Failed State-led development necessitated the proliferation of NGOs. However, their analysis of the underlying motives differs. Hershey (2013) for instance, claims that the NGO proliferation that followed failed State-to-State development, was a deliberate strategy of Western donors to further subjugate developing countries. While structural adjustment programs weakened the State by undermining its sovereignty and increasing its debt, the World Bank simultaneously promoted NGOs as an effective alternative to State-centric development, thus further weakening the role of the developing country State. Likewise, in their article with the illustrative name, *the Missionary Position: NGOs and Development in Africa*, Manji and O’Coill (2002) argue that Western donors had to promote NGOs in order to continue their dominion of the African continent. As widespread opposition by African citizens followed the detrimental effects of structural adjustment programs, donors promoted and co-opted NGOs to keep socially engineering African countries, only now with a more ‘human face’. Indeed, some structuralists argue that globalization itself was a deliberate strategy of the State to deal with the crises of the Western States in the 1970s (Carnoy and Castells 2011). They argue that in a world where decisions are increasingly made at a global level, NGOs, or “neo-governmental organizations” are used to “enhance the ability of States to create and maintain regulatory rules.” (Raustiala 1997, p. 737). Thus, this group of authors describe NGOs as a foreign policy tool of the State.

Other, less radical critics of NGOs, do not explain them as foreign policy tools, but rather emphasize how the State significantly limits their potential to alleviate poverty and suffering. They describe NGOs as passive organizations, steered by the will of their donors. Fowler (2011)

for instance, contends that the pro-NGO policies of donors that started in the 1980s standardized their practices, language, and implicated them in a geopolitical agenda of Western interests. He portrays NGOs as passive organizations that tacitly accepted donors' «neoliberal economic solutions to poverty» (Fowler 2011, p. 47). He concludes with a foreboding prophecy: If NGOs fail to transform themselves they will end up as harmonized complements to official foreign aid. According to Banks, Hulme, and Edwards (2015), NGOs are well on their way to realizing Fowler's prophecy. State donors, they contend, pressure NGOs to be non-political, weakly rooted in civil society, short-sighted, and focused on upward accountability, instead of downward accountability. They conclude that NGOs are plagued by an inner conflict between doing what is best for the poor and what is best for the donor. Most often, NGOs opt for the latter.

**Accountability** refers to «‘the right to require an account’ and ‘the right to impose sanctions if the account or the actions accounted for are inadequate’» (Cavill and Sohail 2007, p. 232).

When talking about NGOs, we distinguish between two types:

The **upward accountability** of NGOs to State donors. NGOs must prove that they allocate the funds as planned, and that they work towards the planned development targets.

The **downward accountability** of NGOs to its partners in developing countries, and to those benefiting from their projects and programs. NGOs must ensure that development projects and programs represent, and to the greatest extent possible, fulfill the needs of, its

The issue of accountability forms a central theme in structural accounts of NGOs. As Wright (2012) notes, as States channeled increasingly large sums towards civil society, they also implemented increasingly strict reporting and monitoring mechanisms. In order to achieve this, they rely on a plethora of checklists, forms, and procedures that formalize the development initiatives of NGOs. In doing this, structuralists argue that donors have isolated development outcomes from their broader context, thereby reducing them to quantifiable metrics (Srinivas 2009). This entails a shift in focus from the qualitative aspects of development to numbers, statistics, and efficiency. As a result, NGOs have become professionalized, distanced from their grass root connections, and depoliticized (Kamat 2004). Wright proposes “one simple way” to fix this dilemma: establishing an intermediary funding agency, for instance the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (2012, p. 130). However, whether the DAC, comprising of

the very States that Wright critiques, would have less stringent accountability measures remains questionable. Implicit in Wright's 'simple fix,' however, is an argument endemic to much of the structural literature on the NGO-State relationship: it is inherently contradictory. Therefore, NGOs must free themselves from State funding to alleviate poverty and suffering.

### **3.4. A new Research Agenda**

Although power is central to analysis of NGOs and the State, academic discussion has favored one specific form: the intentional act of exerting power over another in order to force a response that otherwise would not have happened (Lipschutz 2005; Barnett and Duvall 2005). This conception of power is ubiquitous in both agential and structural accounts of civil society. In this chapter, I have shown how the former point to the number and funds of NGOs as a testament to their power, and how structuralists equate the authority and sovereignty of the State with power. However, these theories therefore confine their analysis to the type of actors involved, rather than examining the *processes and practices* of power (Sending and Neumann 2006). The analysis then becomes a question of the presence of agency and structure, without investigating their inner dynamics. Therefore, by focusing on the processes of power, the observation by agential theories that the NGO sector grows rapidly, or that NGOs attend meetings with the World Bank, becomes uninteresting. We must examine what happens through these processes. Likewise, as Tvedt (2007b) points out, the mere existence of State structures and control mechanisms is not that important; what matters is how NGOs interact and possibly transform them. Moreover, by only concentrating on those institutional arrangements that restrict the autonomy of NGOs, structural theories tend to neglect the empowering effects that the State-NGO relationship produces for NGOs (Tvedt 2007b). Therefore, studying the State-NGO relationship requires that we study the processes of governance, and pay attention to the entire spectrum of its effects.

Many other commentators share these sentiments. They call for a new research agenda: One that refrains from romanticizing NGOs as autonomous actors existing beyond State structures, but which also does not consider their closeness with the State as inherently bad, and therefore not worthy of further analysis (Tvedt 2007b; Nelson 2007; Sending and Neumann 2006; Gabay 2013; Andersen 2015). As Ebrahim (2005) notes: while the influence that donors exert on NGOs is well-documented, there is little documentation of "the specific mechanisms through which this



external influence is both exerted and resisted” (p. 77). In this thesis, I therefore utilize the ‘governmentality’ approach of Foucault, which allows the analysis of the *processes* of power between the State and civil society. Hence, what follows is an exposition of Foucault’s concept of power and governmentality.

### **3.5. Power, Freedom, Resistance, and Governmentality**

Conceiving power as relational is fundamental to the Foucauldian conception of power. Power is not something that exist externally to social relationships, but is always directed towards another individual. Moreover, Foucault defines power as a mode of action on the action of others’ “to structure the field of other possible actions” (Foucault 1982, p. 791). Thus, power is not necessarily exercised on individuals, but rather their actions. It is our relationships that defines the practices we are capable of doing: Particular power relations produce particular kinds of actors that are empowered to do particular activities. Therefore, instead of talking about power *over* something, we should be talking about power *to do* something (Barnett and Duvall 2005).

Foucault also denied the identification of power with political power, thus moving the analysis beyond State institutions. Power must not be equated with sovereignty, authority, or law and repression; these are only some of its specific manifestations (Lemke 2010). Therefore, he opposed the views of previous philosophers such as Marx and Gramsci who conceptualized power as located mostly in some central agency, i.e., the State (Daldal 2014). An often-assumed corollary to such a conception of power is that we can then easily distinguish between the powerless/powerful in order to make a normative judgement about who is good/bad (Daldal 2014). This assumption would, however, be wrong in more than one way because power is not only oppressive:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses'. it 'censors' it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (Foucault 1991, p. 194)

Power produces; domination is only one of it forms. More specifically, power produces field of possibilities: ‘faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results,

and possible inventions may open up' (Foucault 1982, p. 789). This field of possibilities corresponds with a positive conception of freedom.

### *3.5.1. Freedom and Resistance*

Traditionally, freedom classifies into two distinct conceptions: negative and positive. According to the former, freedom is achieved when there is an absence of obstacles, barriers, or constraints (Carter 2016). In this sense, I am unfree when others prevent me from doing what I want to. On the other hand, positive freedom refers to the possibility *and* ability to realize one's fundamental purpose (Carter 2016). Foucault exemplifies the necessity of using this concept of freedom by showing the absurdity of the negative conception of power: "one may as well leave people in slums, thinking that they can simply exercise their rights there" (Foucault, 2001b, p. 351).<sup>3</sup> Thus, an individual can achieve a greater degree of freedom when engaged in an asymmetrical power relation. Freedom and power do not occupy mutually exclusive spaces; their interplay is much more complex (Foucault 1982). In sum, the mere absence of barriers is not enough to have freedom, it requires the presence of a field of possibilities.

It is through resistance that the individual strives for its freedom. We are not simply inert matter animated by power, but continuously try to shape our own field of possibilities (Foucault 1997a). Power relations are not stable, but are characterized by "innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporally inversion of the power relations" (Foucault 1991, p.27). Therefore, Foucault does not deny agency, but rather emphasizes how it is situated within a structural context. In fact, since he asserts that power emanates from everywhere, his theory actually presupposes some form of agency:

If there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would simply be a matter of obedience. You have to use power relations to refer to the situation where you're not doing what you want. So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance. (Foucault 1997a, p.167)

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<sup>3</sup> This resembles the capability approach to development propagated by Nobel laureate, Amartya Sen.

Thus, resistance *is* power: the power to change your relations. Resistance however, does not merely refer to the act of denying an act of power, but rather engaging and modifying its configurations: “to say no is the minimum form of resistance” (Foucault 1997a, p. 168). Foucault refers to resistance as creative process where people actively interact, confront, transform, strengthen, and even reverse power relations (Flohr 2016). As these relations are everywhere, and always resisted and modified in multiple directions, an actor’s field of possibilities will always go beyond the expectation of any actor involved in the power relation (Foucault 2016). The effects of power therefore produce unintended effects on the field of possibilities for all involved actors; its effects cannot be assumed a priori.

Foucault’s conception of power is intricately tied to his concept of governmentality, because the relationship between the State and those governed by it is just one of many forms of power relations (Miller and Rose 2008). Like other power relationships, the study of governance requires the study of how the State shapes the field of possibilities of those whom it governs.

### 3.5.2. *Governmentality*

In order to move the analysis of political governance beyond its institutions, Foucault developed the concept of governmentality.<sup>4</sup> Governmentality refers to the strategies of the government to shape the field of possibility over those it governs *towards specific ends* (Foucault 2001b) This means that the government does not only restrict individuals, but also empower them to perform certain activities. Thus, we need to study the field of possibilities produced by the government and those whom it governs. More specifically, governmentality directs the analytical focus towards how the State, in its relation with other entities, combine, arrange, and fix relations of power (Lemke 2007). These relationships are not only shaped through law and sovereignty, but also by influencing “customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking, and so on” (Foucault 2001b, p. 209). More concretely, the State shapes its relations through systematized and regulated modes of power—‘techniques of government’—based on specific forms of reasoning—‘rationalities’—that defines the object of intervention, as well as the means to achieve it (Lemke 2010). Therefore, governance can be studied by examining the techniques of government, and the rationality underlying them.

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<sup>4</sup> Government of the State is only one form of governance. Governance takes many forms including the government of children, of the mentally ill, and even of the soul (Foucault 2001b).

Investigating the rationality of governance means to examine how objects of governance are represented, and the knowledge that underlies this representation. In order to achieve specific objectives, the government requires the knowledge of things, and how to regulate them (Foucault 2001b). Thus, knowledge is not neutral, but used to achieve the objectives of governance. The creation and dissemination of this knowledge requires specific procedures of notation, ways of collecting, presenting, calculating, and judging statistics (Miller and Rose 2008). These processes accentuate certain aspects, while diminishing others. Indeed, the very stability of State agencies does not only depend on the generation, circulation, and storage of knowledge, but also its repression (Lemke 2007). The representation of an object of governance therefore renders it amenable to particular interventions and regulations—to techniques of government.

‘Techniques of government’ refers to the mechanisms the government uses to align the conduct of individuals and groups with socio-political objectives (Foucault 2001b). The techniques of government ensure that people conduct themselves in a desirable way, and many of them are only loosely associated with the formal organs of the State (Miller and Rose 2008). These technologies include, but are not limited to: Methods of examination and evaluation, accounting procedures, routines for the timing and spacing of activities in specific locations, standardized tactics for the training and implantation of habits, professional vocabularies, and even the architect of the location where an intervention takes place (Gaventa 2003). However, these techniques of government always interact with the techniques of the self, the procedures used by individuals to maintain and transform their identity: “The government of the self by oneself in its articulation with relations with others” (Foucault 1997a, p. 88). Techniques of the self derive from the freedom and resistance which resides within every individual. As the techniques of government and the techniques of government continuously interact with one another, government becomes a “a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself” (Foucault 2016, p. 26).

Foucault did not endow his concept of governmentality with a specific research framework. Therefore, it has been utilized in numerous ways to accentuate different aspects of government processes (Lemke 2010). Below, I outline some of these studies that orient themselves towards the State-NGO relationship.

### 3.6. Governmentality Studies of NGOs

Gabay (2013) uses governmentality to study relations of power between, on one hand, State agencies and neo-liberal hegemonic discourse, and on the other hand, NGOs in India and Malawi. He found that these NGOs are in a difficult position of ‘monitory oppositionality’, being in opposition, but also implicated in hegemonic discourses on poverty. However, by being aware of how specific power relations produces them in different context, these NGOs can exert significant influence on State agencies. For instance, some NGOs’ direct relationship with United Nations agencies brought them resources and prestige, while for others it only brought domination and closure. Therefore, by being aware of how their relations constituted them in different settings, some NGOs were able to navigate power and take advantage of particular relations in specific contexts to “transform and expand meanings of social justice and poverty eradication” (Gabay 2013, p.131). Thus, Gabay concludes that the ‘monitory oppositionality’ of some NGOs enables them to push for better solutions to poverty.

Lipschutz (2005) employs governmentality to answer the question: “Is GCS a space or locus of sovereign agents or merely a structural effect?” (p. 229). His genealogy of civil society resembles that of the structuralists: He traces its origins to the rise of a global neoliberal regime in which it is embedded. Yet, similarly to Gabay (2013), he argues that the convergence of civil society and the State could be emancipatory for the former if it is done strategically. However, he contends that civil society has failed to do so. Even worse, he asserts that “power remains unexamined and largely ignored by those engaged in the dramas of progressive social action” (Lipschutz 2005, p.232). Therefore, Lipschutz concludes that civil society constitutes an extension of the State. Yet, as Sending and Neuman (2006) point out, Lipschutz fails to provide a proper account of how civil society can transform and redirect power. The State certainly controls civil society to an extent, but this does not mean that power only flows from the State to civil society.

Whereas TAN theorists point to the international ban of landmines as a demonstration of civil society’s power, Sending and Neumann (2006) employ a governmentality-lens to argue that in Norway, the push for this ban started as a government initiative. Through interviews with Norwegian civil society and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they show how the latter enrolled non-State actors to “perform governance functions by virtue of their technical expertise,

advocacy, and capacity for will-formation” (Sending and Neumann 2006, p. 664). However, as the State involved civil society, the latter was able to influence the outcome of the process. Initially, the MFA enrolled NGOs only to aid in the clearance of landmines in a handful of countries. But, due to the progressive advocacy of these NGOs towards the State, they eventually managed to push for official activism on the international scale for the complete ban of landmines. Therefore, they argue that in the late modern society, civil society has been redefined “from a passive object of government to be acted upon into an entity that is both an object and a subject of government” (Sending and Neumann 2006, p. 652). They conclude that as the State engages civil society, the latter is drawn closer to decision-making arenas where it influences policy outcomes.

Finally, through governmentality, Joachim and Schneiker (2014) examine the relationship between British and American NGOs, and their much-criticized private military and security companies (PMSCs). Through their study they find that the NGO’s criticism of the PMSCs is curtailed by their dependence on the companies’ protection in fragile countries. Moreover, the PMSCs are supported by the British and American governments, and so the dependency of NGOs on State-funding further diminishes their scope for criticism. Nevertheless, through their convergence with PMCSs they are empowered to define rules and behavioral codices through multi-stakeholder dialogues. Still, the ‘price’ of their convergence with the PMCSs is that they are not allowed to criticize them publicly. Thus, Joachim and Schneiker (2014) derive at the same conclusion as Sending and Neumann (2006): These NGOs are both a subject and an object of governance.

These studies show some of the breadth of the governmentality approach to studying power and governance: the concept can be applied to a plethora of power relations to examine how processes of governance transpire, and how these relations produce different types of actors. With these conceptions of power, resistance, freedom, and governmentality, it is possible to examine how the relationship between the Norwegian State and civil society shapes the field of possibilities for NGOs.

## 4. Methodology

In this chapter, I explain different aspects of the research methods I used to answer my research questions. In accordance with the ‘research onion’ proposed by Busch (2016) this chapter divides into the five stages of my research strategy: Ontology, epistemology, research design, data collection, and data analysis. Lastly, I discuss the principles I followed to ensure the quality of my research, as well as the issues of generalizability and ethical considerations.

### 4.1. Ontological Considerations

As the answers to my research questions are found in the relationship between NGOs and the State, a relational ontology underpins the entire research strategy. To explain relationalism, it is instructive to first elaborate on its opposite ontology, substantialism. Substantialism posits two main points: Things act on their own accord, and action takes place *among* the phenomena under investigation (Emirbayer 1997). Because entities possess certain defining features irrespective of their relations to other entities, the researcher can understand their relationship by understanding each individual entity and use this knowledge to deduce their relationship. The analytical focus is therefore on entities.

In opposition to substantialism, we find relationalism. In social sciences, relationalism can be traced back to Karl Marx and Georg Simmel, but it is not until the past few decades, much due to the works of Foucault, that it has gained traction (Emirbayer 1997). At the heart of relationalism is the rejection of the substantialist emphasis of starting the analysis with pre-given units. Rather, phenomenon cannot be divorced from their relationality as this is what constitutes them in the first place: Entities derive their meaning, significance, and identity from the roles they play within relations (Emirbayer 1997). These relationships are constantly changing, and when they do, they change the actors that take part in them. In other words, actors are embedded in relations and context that are ongoing processes that exert influence on the actors themselves (Emirbayer 1997). Applying this to the study of NGOs means that instead of conceiving them of having fixed properties, they become sites for investigations of relations (Andersen 2015). This opens an analytical space where the NGO can only be understood with regard to its State ‘counter-part.’ Therefore, instead of attempting to define the substance of NGOs, relationalism directs the analytical attention towards the practices that happen *through* them. The point here is not to make some philosophical argument for why relations must come before entities. Any

methodological choice will emphasize some aspects of the studied phenomenon, while leaving out others (Andersen 2015). The argument for relationalism is simply to change the analytical focus towards relations instead of on NGOs themselves. Moreover, by now, it should be clear to the reader that Foucault's conception of power and governance are well-grounded in a relational understanding of the world.

#### **4.2. Epistemological Considerations**

Some researchers have, unconvincingly, tried to apply a positivist approach to the study of State-NGO relations. Kim (2011) for instance claims the NGO's maturity and the State's regime type decides the autonomy of an NGOs. In a similar fashion, Dimaggio and Anheier (1990) claim that "One can predict the legal form of most organizations if one knows the industry and nation-state in which they operate" (P.139). However, this research neglects the specificity of the history, locality, and context in which NGOs operate in.<sup>5</sup> As Hirsch (2002) points out, the term NGO relates to such a heterogenous group of actors, and so organizations such as Greenpeace, Oxfam, and Doctors Without Borders are only comparable in a limited sense, despite their similar functions and organizational principles. Moreover, countries utilize a range of different funding mechanisms, each enabling and constraining NGOs in different ways (Griffin and Judge 2010). Additionally, the actions of the State leads to largely unpredictable consequences for civil society. Even destructive political acts such as displacement and conflict have shown to facilitate the growth of civil society (Whaites 2000). The point is that there is no simple causal relationship between the characteristics of the State and civil society. Hence, instead of *explaining* and *predicting* the State-NGO relationship, I strove for an *in-depth understanding* of it by using an interpretivist approach that focuses on the subjective experience of Norwegian NGO workers.

Interpretivism is an epistemological branch positing that the study of the social world requires a fundamentally different research procedure than that of the natural sciences. Research on social phenomena must account for the fact that humans and their socially constructed world does not operate according to the natural laws (Bryman 2012).<sup>6</sup> Since humans produce their own

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<sup>5</sup> Moreover, while Kim's (2011) reduction of the NGO-state relationship to two variables is overly simplistic, Dimaggio and Anheier (1990) neglects any formative power that NGOs might have.

<sup>6</sup> At least not natural laws that are discernable with our current knowledge and research tools.



surroundings through their own interpretation, meanings and actions must be studied according to the subject's frame of reference (Williams 2000). The 'objective' world becomes less important as actors make their choices according to their subjective understanding of the context. For instance, an NGO perceiving that it should not argue against its donor will not do so, even though the donor does not mind. Moreover, interpretivists state that because the social world is not reducible to causal laws, phenomenon must be studied in their context; hence my emphasis on *understanding* rather than *explaining* (Bryman 2012). Due to these epistemological standpoints, interpretivism allow the possibility of gaining in-depth knowledge about highly contextualized social phenomenon.

One last note, in order to defend my epistemological decision from a common attack: interpretivism should not be equated with subjectivism, the doctrine that all knowledge is entirely subjective. If this was true, then any interpretations would be just as valid. "The donor wants to kill me" is probably not a legitimate interpretation by a Norwegian NGO employee. Rather, interpretivism is concerned about the realm of inter-subjectiveness (Heracleous 2004). This means that even though social reality is socially constructed, it is done so through a group effort; very few would question whether the State really exists or not, despite being socially constructed. Nonetheless, finding the underlying cause of why deviant opinions and actions occur can be just as interesting as locating widely-shared intra-subjective experiences.

### **4.3. Research Design**

At a basic level, the research design consists of four primary choices (Busch 2016). These are interrelated and overlapping, but still not entirely dependent on one another; many different configurations are possible here. Hence, I address these four choices individually in the following section.

The first choice is between an intensive or extensive design, referring to the use of a small or large sample. Here, I employed an intensive design, i.e., a smaller sample size of ten NGOs. I chose this method since it is suited to study complex problems with many variables, as these problems require comprehensive interviews to ensure their in-depth understanding (Busch 2016).

Closely related to this is the choice between a qualitative or quantitative approach. As I seek in-depth knowledge about meanings and practices within and between NGOs and the State, I

employed a qualitative research design. Generating an intensive understanding of the covert and subjective nature of power does not lend itself to quantitative analysis. Moreover, as research on the NGO-State power relation in Norway is scarce, my approach was largely inductive, i.e., I began my research without many expectations about how the world I researched looked like (Busch 2016). In other words, theory was not my point of departure, but rather used as a guide alongside my analysis in a dynamic matter. Therefore, the qualitative approach allowed me the flexibility to cross-reference emerging concepts with the existing theory. The constant comparison between theory and emerging concepts allowed me to explore relevant aspects as soon as they emerged (Bryman 2012). Hence, unlike quantitative research that utilizes preconceived standardized codes, my interpretation of the emerging data along with existing theory shaped the codes I used for further analysis.

The last two choices concerning temporal aspects and selection of main research design are interrelated, and so will be dealt with simultaneously. As already emphasized, the State-NGO relationship must be studied contextually due to the complexity of their relationship, and the plethora of variables that affect it. Therefore, I employed a case study design limited to Norwegian NGOs financed by the State to ensure a deep understanding of the context (Bryman 2012). The small sample size in conjunction with the case-study design allowed me to seek the in-depth knowledge needed to answer my research questions. Lastly, in terms of temporal considerations, a longitudinal study would have a value-added effect as there are current processes that could alter the Norwegian State-NGO relationship. These include: the appointment of a new Minister of Foreign Affairs following the September elections; the government's announcement to shift Norwegian development efforts towards Northern Africa (MFA 2017a); and lastly, many interviewees applied for funding through the new application system, RAM Light, for the first time this October. However, due to time constraints, I employed a cross-sectional case study design.

#### **4.4. Data Collection**

I chose to collect the data through semi-structured interviews because of my focus on the interviewee's frames and understandings of the themes I asked about. The semi-structured form provided the interviewees with the flexibility to pursue themes they thought to be important (Bryman 2012). Additionally, it also provided me with flexibility to modify the questionnaire to

the participant. Although the essence of the question remained the same, some were slightly adjusted in order to gain an in-depth understanding of each NGO's relationship with the State. Prior to the interview, I researched the NGO so that I could ask questions about specific changes to the organization such as adjustments in donor agreements and thematic focus areas. Nonetheless, I made sure that the questionnaire had a certain structure to ensure comparability between the interviewees. The questions derived from my emphasis on relations, and pertained mostly to the practice of the NGO towards the State (See Appendix A for an example of one of the interview guides I used).

#### **4.5. Sampling**

The last part of my methodological considerations was to pick a sampling method that could help me answer my research questions. Following along with the intensive research design, the sample consisted of ten NGOs. Initially, I wanted to utilize a form of purposive sampling based on two criteria: Relevance and breadth. Firstly, the relevant NGOs were those receiving funding from the State. Secondly, I wanted to ensure a variety of NGOs were represented so that they differed in certain characteristics that I thought would be important for their relationship with the State. However, many NGOs either declined or did not answer my request for an interview despite multiple attempts. Because of this, I could not be selective, and my sampling approach was more akin to convenience sampling. Moreover, despite multiple attempts I was not able to obtain an interview with either the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Norad. The implications of these issues are discussed more closely in Chapter 4.7 and 4.8. Despite these setbacks, I still managed to achieve a considerable breadth in my sample (Table 1).

I contacted the interviewees through e-mail where I explained the general themes of what I wanted to discuss, as well as my research questions (See Appendix B for an example of an interview request letter). I conducted eight of the interviews at the offices of the NGOs, and two over video chat due to the long distance to their headquarters. The interviews were recorded, and subsequently transcribed to prepare them for analysis.

Table 1: Key sample characteristics

NGO	Main areas	Total annual funds (millions of NOK)	Official funding as a percentage of total funding
1	Education	51-100	81-100%
2	Diverse	101-150	81-100%
3	Diverse	51-100	81-100%
4	Agriculture	51-100	81-100%
5	Education	1-50	21-40%
6	Diverse	500+	41-60%
7	Diverse	500+	61-80%
8	Education	1-50	61-80%
9	Microfinance and Education	151-200	41-60%
10	Education	500+	1-20%

*Note:* To ensure anonymity, ranges are given instead of exact numbers.

#### 4.6. Analysis

In order to make qualitative research unbiased and rigorous, researchers have come up with many different criteria (Anderson 2010; Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Bryman 2012). For my research, I adhered to the concept *justifiability*, created by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) as an equivalent to the *validity* and *reliability* criteria commonly used for quantitative research. I chose their method due to two reasons. Firstly, they employ the same interpretivist approach towards social science as I. Secondly, I also follow their guide on coding and analysis, and therefore, by also using their criteria for quality, I ensured a coherent framework for my data analysis.

The justifiability concept of Auerbach and Silverstein stems from the acknowledgment that subjectivity in the social sciences is inevitable. Therefore, we need criteria to distinguish

between justifiable and unjustifiable ways of using subjectivity when interpreting data. A justified subjective interpretation fulfills three criteria:

- **Transparency:** Those reading your research must know how you arrived at your answers. This ensures that the researcher does not simply make up their conclusions. I strove for transparency by meticulously describing my research process.
- **Communicability:** The participants and readers of your research must be able to make sense of, and understand its concepts and themes. Communicability can be maximized by explaining the themes and concepts to other researchers or the research participants. I worked towards achieving communicability by discussing the research with my supervisor, and e-mailing the interviewees their direct quote to ensure that I interpreted them correctly.
- **Coherence:** The data must be organized in a systematic manner that tells a coherent story of the studied phenomena. Following a specific framework for coding and analysis helps organizing data in a coherent way. Here, I utilized the five steps to systematically code and analyze qualitative data as described by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003):
  1. I read each interview carefully, and extracted the segments of the text that were relevant to my research questions.
  2. Then, I combined the relevant text into categories of ‘repeating ideas.’
  3. These repeating ideas were combined into larger groups expressing common themes.
  4. Using these themes and existing literature, I constructed theoretic constructs to make sense of the data.
  5. Lastly, I combined repeating ideas, themes, and theoretical constructs to create a theoretical narrative of the Norwegian State-NGO relationship.

#### **4.7. Generalizability**

As I utilized a form of non-random sampling, I cannot claim that my sample is representative of every Norwegian NGO. Moreover, as I have stressed throughout this thesis, the State-NGO relationship is highly contextual. Therefore, I am not able to assert any absolute, general statements about their relationship outside of the Norwegian context. However, as Williams

(2000) notes, every interpretivist study produce some form of *moderatum generalization*. This refers to the possibility of making approximate comparisons between similar cases. Every day, we make many judgements about truth-probabilities, and when new evidence arise we include that in our evaluation (Williams 2000). Moreover, I can expect the theoretical constructs that emerged from my research to extend beyond my sample, even though other NGOs experience them differently (Auerbach and Silverstein (2002). Therefore, by having followed quality criteria for social research, my thesis adds to the methodological pluralism of studies on the Norwegian State-NGO relationship,

#### **4.8. Limitations**

There are some issues that unfortunately lowered the quality of my research. Firstly, I was not able to obtain any interviews with Norad or the MFA, despite multiple attempts with many different people inside these agencies. Therefore, the role of the State in my research was examined through official documents, and also indirectly through my interviewee's interaction with it. However, much could have been gained from interviewing State officials directly to ask about their perception of their relationship with NGOs, and the rationality behind certain decisions. Secondly, as I interviewed the participants I noticed that some were reluctant to talk about potentially 'harmful' subjects. This was notable in the mumbling and many hesitations following some of the more critical questions. This is perhaps best exemplified by one interviewee, when prior to one of her answers muttered: "I don't know if, hmmm, OK. I can't imagine that this could be problematic in any way" (NGO 6). Therefore, even though I promised them anonymity, some interviewees might have been holding back. Lastly, as I had trouble recruiting NGOs for my research, a couple of categories did not reach theoretical saturation, i.e., when no new or relevant data emerges regarding a broader theoretical category (Bryman 2012). For the sections where this is the case, I generally state that more research is needed. Nonetheless, I chose to include unsaturated categories because, even though I am not able to say anything conclusive about them, they still point to important aspects of the Norwegian Model, and can be used to guide future research.

#### **4.9. Ethics**

In order to avoid any moral transgressions, I adhered to the guide to ethical research, as described by Bryman (2012). Firstly, in order to avoid *harm to participant* and ensure their

*privacy*, the recorded interviews were kept safe, and not discussed with anyone else besides my supervisor. Moreover, I ensured that the participants remain unidentifiable. Lastly, as the participants are aware of, the records will be deleted after I have concluded the research. Secondly, I ensured *informed consent* and avoided any *deception* by providing the interviewees with a summary of my research outline prior to the interview. Moreover, before each interview, I asked for approval to record the interviews, and provided the participants with the option to exit the interview whenever they wanted. Additionally, I also gave them the possibility to approve all their direct quotes that are used in my research. This had the added effect of quality-assuring my findings, as it made sure that I interpreted their sentiments correctly.

## **5. The Structures of the Norwegian Model**

In order to contextualize my analysis, this chapter provides a short description of the structures and mechanisms of Norwegian aid, with particular emphasis on those important to my research questions.

### **5.1. The Politics of Norwegian aid**

The Parliament is the supreme legislature in Norway, and therefore also determines the country's development policy in two principal ways: By prioritizing the countries, regions, and thematic areas of aid, and by deciding the total aid budget (Norad 2017b). The government oversees 18 different administrative ministries, the important one here being the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In accordance with the overall development policy decided upon by the Parliament, the MFA determines its details. Moreover, The MFA also distributes bilateral and multilateral aid, emergency relief funds through Norwegian and foreign NGOs, and channels some aid towards NGOs through Norwegian embassies (Norad 2017b). The MFA consists of many directorates, one of which is the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad). Norad provides development expertise to the MFA; communicate the results of, and evaluate Norwegian development efforts; and most importantly, channels State funds to international and Norwegian NGOs (Norad 2017b).

Most aid channeled by Norad towards civil society in developing countries goes through Norwegian NGOs. While roughly 20% of Norwegian aid goes towards civil society, only 14% of

this again goes directly to local civil society (fig. 1).<sup>7</sup> The justification for this lies in the Norwegian NGO’s thematic and technical expertise, their solid management and quality assurance systems, as well as the lacking competence and capacity of Southern NGOs (Norad 2017a; MFA 2017a). Moreover, their in-depth knowledge of local conditions enables them to evaluate the needs, partners, and strategies for “the best implementation of development aid” (Norad 2017a, p. 18). Thus, most of Norwegian aid towards the development of civil society in developing countries goes through Norwegian NGOs. These NGOs, however, always partner with local actors.

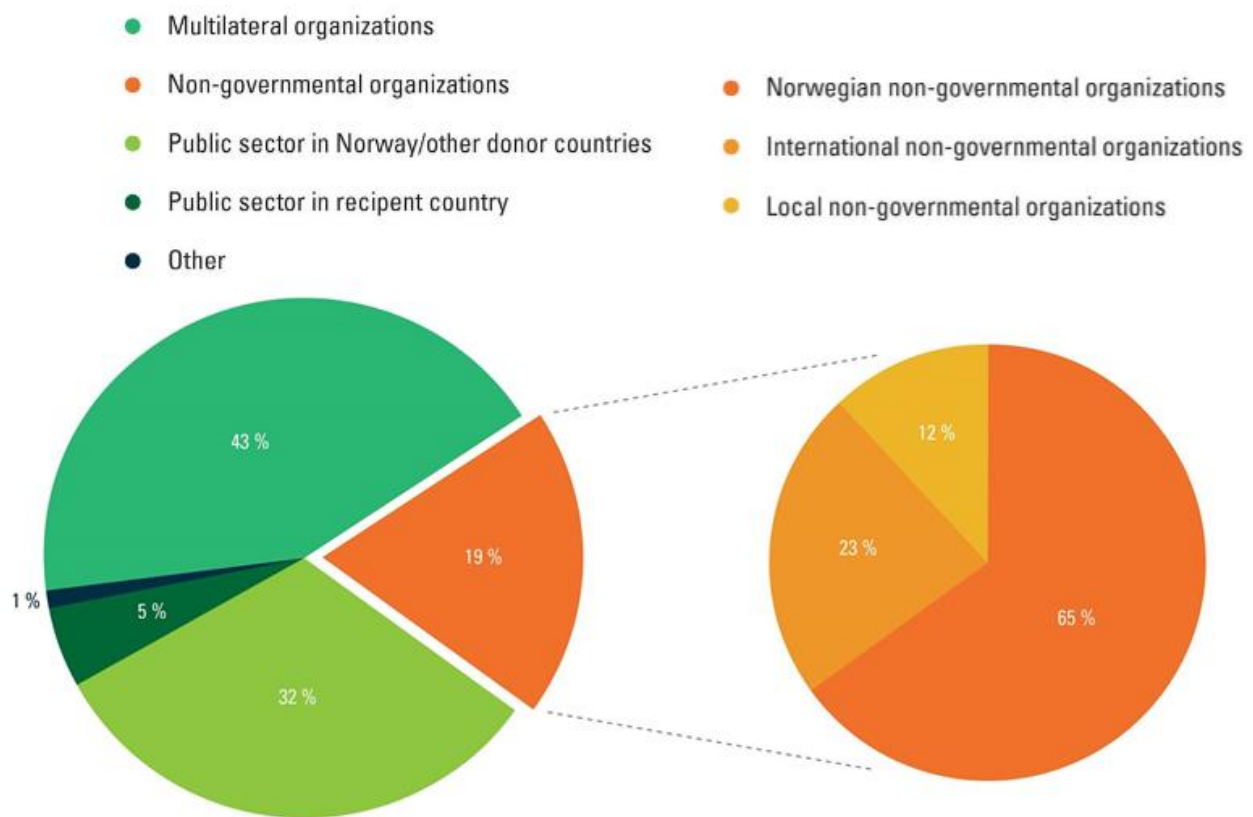


Figure 1: Channels of Norwegian aid. The right pie chart shows a further breakdown of aid channeled through NGOs. Data collected from Norad 2017c

## 5.2. The Trends of Norwegian aid

Since the 2013 elections, and the inauguration of a right-wing government, Norwegian development policy has undergone two interrelated changes. To render Norwegian aid more

<sup>7</sup> Although only 14% of aid towards civil society goes directly to Southern NGOs, it is above the OECD average of 9% (OECD Development Co-operation Directorate 2015).



effective, the new government has increasingly integrated development policy with other policy areas, and also concentrated aid towards fewer themes and countries.

Firstly, to create a more coherent development and foreign policy, the government seeks to align all matters of Norway's external policy.<sup>8</sup> This means that development policy increasingly integrates with trade, security, and environmental policy (MFA 2014a; MFA2014b; MFA 2015a). For instance, with regards to trade, the government perceives it as a way to facilitate Norwegian trade and investment to create a more competitive Norwegian economy, but also “as a means in development“ (MFA 2015a, p. 52). The process of integrating development and foreign policy is not endemic to Norway, but has been a growing trend in OECD countries since the early 2000s (Nahem and Sending 2017). This is, amongst other things, largely due to increasing concerns about violent extremism and State collapse in fragile States (Nahem and Sending 2017). As a result, western donor countries increasingly utilize development policy to achieve security objectives.

In Norway, the growing importance of security within development policy is inscribed into policy. In 2015, the Ministry of Foreign affairs stated that: “The government will to a greater degree than previously, utilize means, competence, and experience from development policy to contribute to stability and prevent radicalization, violent extremism, organized crime, digital threats, and conflict.” (MFA 2015b, p. 9). Furthermore, in a recent white paper, *Strategic Framework for Norwegian Efforts in Vulnerable States and Regions*, the government outlines the relationship between Norway's security and development policy (MFA 2017b). Amongst other things, the document states: «Coordination between civil actors and military contributions will strengthen,” but with a “clear divide between civil and military tasks and areas of responsibility” (MFA2017b, p. 27). The white paper comes in the aftermath of the geographical shift of Norwegian development towards countries in conflict; “primarily States in the geographical belt from West-Africa to Afghanistan (MFA 2017a, p. 71). Thus, security concerns have changed the functioning as well as location of Norwegian development efforts.

The shift towards Northern Africa and the Middle East is also part of the government's efforts to concentrate Norwegian aid geographically and thematically. With regards to the latter, the

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<sup>8</sup> ‘External policy’ is used as an umbrella term for all policy areas directed at other countries.

current government prioritizes education and emergency relief (Norad 2017a). The idea is that by concentrating on fewer themes and regions, Norwegian aid becomes more effective (Norad 2017a). The government is, however, ambivalent with regards to the role of Norwegian NGOs in its concentration policy. On one hand, the recent white paper outlining the future of Norway’s development efforts, explicitly exempts civil society from the concentration principle (MFA 2017a, p. 24). On the other hand, in Norad’s guiding documents, the MFA mandates it to facilitate both thematic and geographical concentration (MFA 2017c).

Although not providing any conclusive evidence, funding trends towards civil society resemble those of bilateral and non-core multilateral State aid (Fig. 2). For the latter funding group, aid towards education and emergency relief has increased by 91% and 59% respectively since 2014. Simultaneously, while all other forms of aid through Norwegian NGOs have stagnated or decreased since 2014, education and emergency relief have increased by 61% and 48% respectively. Additionally, from 2014 to 2016, the number of countries receiving bilateral aid shrunk from 113 to 86, while the number of countries where Norwegian NGOs operate in shrunk from 94 to 85 (Norad 2017a; Norad 2017c).

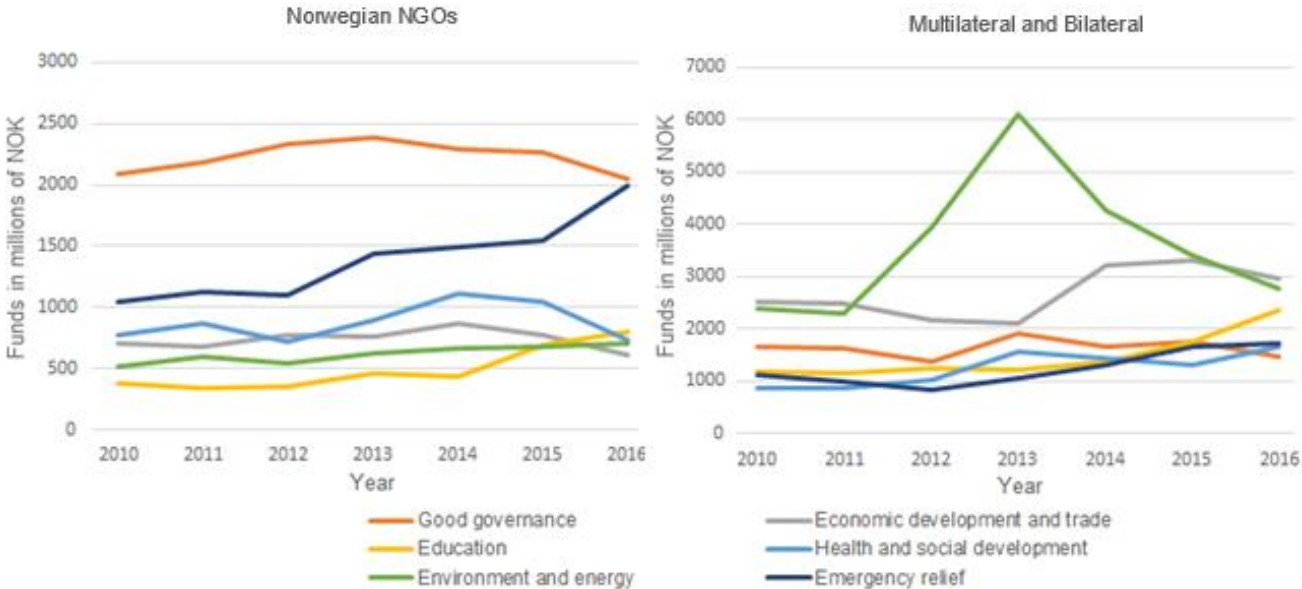


Figure 2: Comparison of Norwegian aid channeled towards developing countries through Norwegian NGOs, (left) and bilateral and multilateral channels (right). Data collected from Norad 2017c

### 5.3. Accountability mechanisms

The State holds Norwegian NGOs accountable through several administrative mechanisms including progress and financial reports, monitoring requirements, evaluations of development projects and programs, and funding applications (Norad 2015). These are the methods that Norad and the MFA employ to ensure upward accountability. However, it is the last one, writing funding applications, which is the most important administrative task for NGOs. In 2015, Norad implemented the Resource Allocation Model Light (RAM Light) as a tool to decide which Norwegian NGOs should receive funding. RAM Light was introduced for two reasons: To ensure that the organizations with the highest quality receive funding, and to make the funding process more transparent (Norad 2017d). The model consists of 14 standards divided into three categories (Table 2), and an application through RAM Light requires, amongst other things:

- A Baseline analysis describing the context of the project/program and what issue it will address.
- A result framework that articulates the intended results of the project/program, and how they will be achieved. The result framework must include indicators that are “clear, measurable, and realistic” (Norad 2017d, p. 9).
- A risk-analysis explaining the potential risks that can prevent the NGO from achieving the goals of the project/program.
- A budgetary proposal of the costs associated with the project/program. Expenditures must be justified and cost-effective.

According to the interviewees, RAM Light has made the application process more comprehensive than ever. In the words of a frustrated NGO employee: “God damn, it is so much work” (NGO 2).

Table 2: Resource Allocation Model Light criteria weighting.

Weighing of evaluation criteria	Number of standards	Weight	Main consideration
Applying organization	4	25%	What strengths and weaknesses does the applying organization have?
Program and project plans	6	35%	How good and credible are the program and project plans in the application?
Achieved Results	4	40%	How solid are the organization's previous results?
Total	14	100%	

*Note:* Data collected from Norad 2017d. A detailed description of all the standards can be found in Appendix C.

This is the system which Norwegian NGOs are embedded in. In the following chapters, I use the data collected from the interviews in conjunction with existing literature, to describe the various ways in which this system confines and empowers them, and also how they seek to change it. Each of the next chapters will address one of the three research questions.

## 6. How Does the State Influence its Relationship with Norwegian NGOs?

In this chapter, I explain how the State shapes its relationship with NGOs. To do this, it employs techniques of government based on a knowledge that emphasizes the quantitative functionalities of NGOs. By reducing their relationship to quantitative metrics, the State limits the field of possibilities for NGOs in two significant ways: By restricting the breadth of actors in developing countries that Norwegian NGOs can work with and the type of development activities available to them. Therefore, even though the system renders the State-NGO relationship increasingly transparent, it also juxtaposes the State's need for control with the needs of the poor and marginalized.

### 6.1. Increasing Demands for Upward Accountability

Due to the introduction of RAM Light and an increased focus on effectiveness, demands for upward accountability are greater than ever. In accordance with the focus on effectiveness, the

government maintains that “The effect of what we do must, to the highest degree possible, be measurable” (MFA 2014b, p. 7). Moreover, it also asserts that “Norway goes in for a set of limited number of easily communicable development goals (MFA 2014b, p.19). These are the goals that the government seeks by funding Norwegian NGOs: Measurable aid that allows the State to verify its effectiveness, which then can be easily communicated.

The focus on aid effectiveness is nothing new; the international donor community has debated it for a long time, something which culminated in the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. Here, donors agreed upon five principles to render aid more effective: donor alignment, donor harmonization, mutual accountability between donor and partner, local ownership, and a focus on measuring results (OECD 2012). However, it is the last principle, focus on measuring results, which the Norwegian aid system prioritizes at the expense of the others. Especially since the election of the 2013 government, the focus on measurement, upward accountability, and results, have become stronger than ever. Already in its political platform following its inauguration, the current government stated that it “will explore and introduce stricter requirements for efficiency and monitoring of Norwegian development aid funding” (the Conservative Party and the Progress Party, p. 71). Since then, the majority of government white papers on aid continue to emphasize the importance of results (MFA 2014a; MFA2014b; MFA 2015a; MFA2017a).<sup>9</sup>

The increased focus on results and monitoring is readily felt by Norwegian NGO workers. As one interviewee complained: “Earlier, our budgets didn't need to be so detailed, but now you need to be specific, so you need to have better planning” (NGO 4). The new application system involves demands for budgeting and fund allocation that goes into the minute details of project and program proposals: “They want to make such detailed assessments of what for instance a seminar costs in a given country, and whether this is actually cost-effective” (NGO 3). Thus, in the words of one participant: “There are absolutely greater demand of the organizations, and much more focus on results” (NGO 8). In pursuing better results of Norwegian aid, the State has sought to techniques of government in the form of stricter requirements for upward accountability that restrict the field of possibilities for NGOs in two ways: their ability to partner with weaker SNGOs, as well as their capacity to address underlying issues of inequality.

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<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.norad.no/om-bistand/norsk-utviklingspolitikk/> for a list of relevant white papers.

## 6.2. The Effects of Upward Accountability

Firstly, Norad's demands for upward accountability limit the breadth of actors Norwegian NGOs partner with. Those NGOs that partner with professionalized SNGOs did not perceive this as a problem since their staff is often well-trained in the administrative tasks required by Norad. However, the Norwegian NGOs that want to partner with less professionalized, and administratively weaker organizations find their work impeded by Norad's demands for upward accountability. When I asked one participant why his organizations had recently ended many of their partnerships, he responded:

These partners do not have the ability to meet our demands for reporting, implementation, their economic structure. There is quite a lot of money that goes through this system, so primarily, our partners are those organizations that live up to this standard. The allocation demands we need, and that Norad needs. (NGO 7)

Another NGO worker, which previously stated that her organization's biggest advantage was its ability to reach the weakest actors in civil society, regretted that: "Some of our weakest partners, we can't work directly with them anymore. They just cannot produce good enough quality when it comes to result frameworks, baseline, and that stuff" (NGO 4). The demands for upward accountability thereby reduces the diversity of civil society in developing countries. Norad acknowledges that in developing countries, "Informal organisational structures and affiliations based on place of residence, kinship, religion, common interests and culture, often play more important roles than formally registered organisations" (Norad 2017a, p. 13). Yet, the structures it imposes on Norwegian NGOs do not fully account for these informal structures.

Demands for upward accountability also limit the type of development activities available to Norwegian NGOs and their partners. Those organizations limited to technical solutions to poverty did not perceive this as a big issue: "You can measure that so and so many went to school, and let's say we have a program that deals with hygiene issues, then you can measure this pretty easily" (NGO 9). These organizations are therefore largely free in their approach to development. The problem occurs when State-funded NGOs seek to address the political economy of inequality and redistribution. Issues such as deep-rooted gender inequality, institutional exclusion of social groups, and political marginalization are extremely difficult to measure, and changing them requires a long-term commitment (Mosley 1986; Murphy et al.

2016). When asked whether it was difficult to demonstrate their advocacy work that empowers people to partake in political processes, one interviewee responded: “Yes. Absolutely. It is very difficult. It is difficult to document, and of course, completely impossible to do a causality analysis that says that we are a part of the solution, but we are” (NGO 7). Therefore, in quantifying complex socio-economic processes, Norad and the MFA represents reality in a simplified way that accentuates certain aspects while playing down others. As one frustrated NGO employee complained: “The result framework itself is such a small part of what we actually do” (NGO 4). The activities of NGOs and their partners are irreducible to numbers alone, and when this happens they feel “removed away from the grass roots. From reality” (NGO 5) This is worrisome, because NGOs work towards the State’s representation of reality instead of addressing real needs of the beneficiaries of their projects and programs:

There’s many quantitative indicators, and since we work so much with it, a lot of the focus goes towards what’s in the framework. So then, it is easy that you forget many other things that are more qualitative, it becomes really difficult to show the qualitative. (NGO 3)

Hence, the demands for upward accountability from Norad and the MFA limit the field of possibilities for NGOs by restricting their choice in partners and development activities available to them. Nonetheless, I do not want to paint a completely black picture of Norwegian aid. Many of the interviewees were capable, to a certain degree, of pursuing advocacy work and politicized development. However, this is not something that the Norwegian aid architecture promotes, but something that NGOs must fight for: “Working with advocacy is a constant up-hill battle” (NGO 2). Therefore, instead of fostering the potential strengths of NGOs in empowering the weakest, the State drives them towards quantifiable, technical solutions to poverty. This has serious implications for the beneficiaries of Norwegian aid.

As the Norwegian State requires extensive upward accountability measures, it creates a top-down development of civil society in developing countries. Here also, the State’s demands determine who gets to be an actor and what activities they can carry out. Firstly, strict requirements for upward accountability create prohibitive costs for the smaller organizations who do not have the technical capacity to fulfill them (Disch et al. 2007). Moreover, whereas Norwegian aid gives more weight to structure and professionalism, local communities often judge

their local organizations by their cause and leadership (Banks, Hulme, and Edwards 2015). Thus, the Norwegian aid architecture risks prioritizing different actors than the local population. In turn, this creates opportunistic behavior as local actors seek to align their interests with those of Norad and the MFA. When SNGOs perceive that their political and empowerment-oriented actions do not receive funding, they adopt moderate positions instead of preserving their connections with social movements (Banks, Hulme, and Edwards 2015). Therefore, the demands for upward accountability contributes to a ‘de-politicization’ of development that seeks to superimpose technical solutions to poverty upon a discriminating political system. Consequently, they fail to uproot systematic political inequality, which is often the basis of poverty and marginalization (Ferguson 1994). As a result, development becomes akin to an “‘anti-politics’ machine, which, on the model of the ‘anti-gravity’ machine of science fiction stories, seems to suspend ‘politics’ from even the most sensitive political operations at the flick of a switch (Ferguson 1994, p. 180). Therefore, instead of emerging through an ‘organic’ and politicized bottom-up process that reflects local needs, civil society in the South becomes, to a certain degree, technically engineered by Norwegian development efforts.

### **6.3. Improving Upward Accountability**

This is not an issue confined to Norad or the MFA; every donor has its own demands that limit the field of possibilities for the NGOs it supports. In fact, all the interviewees who had worked in foreign NGOs, or had agreements with other donors agreed that Norad and the MFA were among the least controlling and demanding donors, as this participant expressed: “Norad is pretty easy to deal with. [The Canadian International Development Agency] for instance, is a lot more demanding. They're like hawks, reading everything meticulously, and they can be very demanding” (NGO 8). The conflict between upward and downward accountability seems to be endemic to any State-NGO relationship. One interviewee, disappointed with the outcome of their last funding application, admitted that: “This is not something that is only a problem of RAM Light. We still struggle to work within a system with a result framework” (NGO 4). Another interviewee concluded: “I think development work has generally been exposed to too rigid demands for measuring and expectations of results” (NGO 7).

Nonetheless, NGOs must be accountable towards their State donor. The NGO sector is not free from misconduct, so transparency about their activities is important (Ebrahim 2003).



Additionally, upward accountability can facilitate learning and evaluation as it enforces the gathering and dissemination of knowledge (Agyemang et al. 2017). And indeed, all the interviewees acknowledged the importance of upward accountability; not only towards the State, but as one of them expressed: “We pretty much have an understanding that you have to have accountability towards the tax-payers” (NGO 6). Again, NGOs are not arguing against upward accountability, but rather how it emphasizes the quantitative aspects of their activities:

I think that there are good indicators that are not acknowledged within the statistics, but which tell a story that says that: ‘OK, we believe in this.’ When you are supposed to make statistics out of this, there's so many variables to consider. It becomes difficult. (NGO 7)

There is no universal solution to mend the contradiction between downward and upward accountability. Different accountability mechanisms produce different impacts on development activities, depending on the type of organizations involved, the type of their activities, and their location (Benjamin 2008). Therefore, accountability mechanisms should, to the greatest degree possible, be contextualized. Moreover, development is a complex, diverse and messy process, irreducible to positivist frameworks (Murphy et al. 2016). Thus, telling the story of how these messy procedures unfold necessitates that donors incorporate qualitative and constructivist methods that extend the analysis beyond numbers (Murphy et al. 2016). Not only will this permit NGOs to pursue hardly quantified development activities, but also promote learning as it allows them to share more cultural and social knowledge with the State (Agyemang et al. 2017). Furthermore, accountability procedures must be reflexive, and be able to retrofit according local challenges. One way to do this, is to operationalize mechanisms that allow local partners to communicate the challenges they face when their needs clash with the needs of the donor for control (Disch et al. 2007). As of now, upward accountability acts as a compliance tool, and as something the interviewees perceive as a nuisance. They are coercive instead of enabling and empowering. They measure development output—the results achieved immediately after implementing an activity—and not the wider impacts of aid. However, with these suggested changes, upward accountability could become a tool to foster learning, and contextualize development activities, and therefore contribute to downward accountability as well.

One noteworthy aspect of Norad's accountability demands is how a few of the participants reported that they also affect privately-financed projects and programs. One interviewee from an NGO with a small agreement with Norad, explained the spill-over effect like this:

We try, as best as possible, to treat as many as we can as if they received support from Norad. We have the same four-year cycle, because it's easier. If we use one method for some programs in some countries, and longer perspectives in other countries, it would be difficult to monitor them (NGO 10).

This may problematize the suggestion of a MFA-commissioned report, which states that Norwegian NGOs should finance the activist aspects of their activities with their own funds (Rattsø et al. 2006). However, it is difficult to make any confident statements about the extent of this effect; it requires more research.

#### **6.4. The Transparency of RAM Light**

As RAM Light increased the demands for upward accountability it also created a more transparent relationship between the State and civil society. RAM Light crystallized their relationship as NGOs know the exact criteria they are evaluated on, something which was appreciated by even the most critical interviewees: "I think the criteria are valuable. Earlier it was up to your case-processors, and then [the outcome of our application] could depend on the specific person assessing your application" (NGO 3). Thus, RAM Light reduced the subjectivity of the application process. Moreover, this increased transparency provides an additional way for NGOs to hold the State accountable: "We can see the areas where we did poorly, and since you know the basis for your evaluation, you can use this to argue" (NGO 2). Yet, in doing this, NGOs still argue on the terms of the State as the discussion becomes limited to the metrics set by RAM Light. As the next chapter reveals, this is a recurrent theme in the Norwegian NGO-State relationship. Moreover, even though NGOs view RAM Light as a clear-cut process, Norad states that applicants are also evaluated according to "political priorities, and the national budget and its concomitant grant to Norad" (Norad 2017d, p. 4). Thus, although a more transparent funding mechanism, RAM Light still allows for selective interpretation and a political agenda.

## **7. How Norwegian NGOs Shape Their Relationship to the State**

From the interviews emerge a picture of NGOs as far from passive organizations. In this chapter, I show how Norwegian NGOs continuously maneuver within the structures that confine them by employing a diverse set of strategies. These strategies depend on the tactics and channels of influence available to each NGO. Additionally, I find that the State is responsive to a good argument. This argument, however, must base itself on the type of knowledge deemed acceptable by the State. Yet, as development policy becomes increasingly subverted by foreign policy goals, NGOs find it more difficult to influence Norwegian politics. To make the situation worse, the smaller NGOs that are largely dependent on State support, have grown increasingly apprehensive of criticizing the government in a time where their oppositional role might be more important than ever.

### **7.1. The Tactical NGOs**

Norwegian NGOs do not only conduct advocacy work together with their partners in developing countries, but also at home. By taking on the form of political actors they attempt to shape development policy to ensure their continued funding, but also to promote development as a whole. All the interviewed NGOs, besides the smallest ones, meet with representatives from political parties across the whole spectrum, but strategically lobby towards those parties that provide the most fruitful returns. For instance, during the election, two interviewees worked closely with the parties hovering right around the election threshold, “because they have been in the media. So, it’s strategic” (NGO 3). Moreover, the interviewed NGOs involved in agriculture and food security work closely with the Center Party, commonly referred to as the ‘farmer’s party’. Similarly, the faith-based NGOs seem to work more closely with the Christian Democratic Party than the other NGOs. Therefore, some NGOs are better equipped to lobby solely due to their compatibility with the agenda of specific political parties. The largest organizations however, are generally in a much better position to influence politics. Interviewees with some of the largest organizations in the country revealed how they have their own political departments dedicated to influencing Norwegian development and foreign policy. This is in stark contrast to the smallest organizations, whose advocacy work, in the words of one interviewee, mostly consists of “collaborating with other organizations in Norway, where they guide the process, and we agree with what is published” (NGO 8).

The biggest organizations also have their own departments that work towards Norwegian media. However, as one interviewee acknowledged: “we have no control” (NGO 7). The media has their own priorities, and are most often preoccupied with what is new: “For instance for Congo, the crisis has been going on for so long that it is no longer in media, but the situation there is just as bad as it was ten or fifteen years ago.... To get the media’s attention, something [clasps hands] has to happen there, all of a sudden” (NGO 7). Interviews with the other NGOs revealed that their influence through media is mostly confined to writing feature stories in newspapers. Most interviewees were hesitant to ascribe any specific changes to development policy to their presence in media. However, some expressed that in cases where multiple NGOs coordinated their efforts, they had a greater impact: “Then there are many of us who are helping us steer towards the right direction.” (NGO 4). More research, however, is needed on how and when Norwegian NGOs coordinate their efforts in media.

Besides advocacy work, NGOs also frequently attend meetings with the MFA and Norad, and attend hearings in the Parliament to provide input to the State budget and development policy white papers. The participants deemed these processes as important arenas where they are able to exert their influence on the State: “When Norad or the MFA invite to thematic meetings, it's important to be there, important to say something, and to say something good. Those are important arenas” (NGO 9). Moreover, they often see concrete results of their input in these processes:

They are really important, the things that are said in the white papers. They decide how the bureaucracy distributes funds, and so it is important to have inputs there and to actually get it written down. And sometimes you are able to do that, while other times, it doesn't work. (NGO 2)

Important to note, these meetings with State agencies are not encounters with different branches of some homogenous, unified State. As Foucault pointed out, the State is not a coherent entity, but rather a complex result of a set of discontinuous, conflicting, and contradictory practices (Foucault 1991). NGOs can use this feature of the State to their advantage by directing themselves towards different State agencies. When one participant described how his organization had been critical towards Norad’s policy on risk-taking, he stated: “Norad was happy about us bringing this up and challenging them. Then they have more relevant academic

material so that they can challenge the MFA and the politicians” (NGO 6).<sup>10</sup> NGOs can therefore use the fragmented nature of the State to their advantage in influencing development policy. Yet, just as the State consists of fragmented entities, we cannot speak of civil society as a coherent unit:

[The government] call on civil society for hearings, and then everyone raises their hands and say exactly what you think they're going to say. We talk about [our main theme], Save the Children about children, NRC about refugees, and ATLAS-alliance about disabled people. It's a constant challenge that everyone has their own perspectives on things. And we can't really get away from that either, but we wish that we were a lot more coherent. (NGO 2)

Thus, NGOs do not only stand stronger when they overcome their fragmentation and coordinate in the media, but also in their direct interactions with the State.

Even though NGOs achieve minor victories when it comes to budgeting and their structures, their direct effect on higher-level development policy and foreign policy appears limited. When talking about the government's concentration policy, an interviewee from one of the ten largest NGOs in Norway showed frustration: “We are wondering, where does that really come from? Where is that decision taken? Where did that happen? Because we hear it all the time, but who took that decision?” (NGO 2). Another interviewee expressed confusion towards Norway's newly prioritized partner countries: “Now, instead of 12 focus countries, you are to have 20, 25 partner countries. And that is unclear, what they mean by partner country, and what its definition will be. I've heard similar confusion from many people” (NGO 8). Since NGOs do not know where these higher-level policy decisions are taken, nor what they mean, their direct influence on foreign policy appears limited.

## **7.2. Legitimate/Illegitimate Knowledge**

State officials are amenable to a good argument. However, as Foucault states: “None shall enter the order of discourse if he does not satisfy certain requirements or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so” (Foucault 1984, p.120). To be a part of the Norwegian aid discourse,

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<sup>10</sup> As Norwegian aid is increasingly shifting towards fragile States, there is a debate about how risks, i.e., misallocation of funds, are to be distributed between NGOs and the State. The debate is still ongoing, but this interviewee asserted that as of now, “[the MFA] does not want to share the costs if the money disappears” (NGO 6).

argumentation must consist of more than just criticism; NGOs must argue constructively and be able to propose new solutions. Many of the interviewees stressed how they strive to be constructive, because then, “it is easier for your criticism to be heard. Then, you are seen as a serious actor, and a debater in the discussion on how to improve aid” (NGO 7). Being constructive is a deliberate and strategic act: “It is tactical. If you want someone to do what you want them to do, it is smart to try to word yourself in a way so that they think it sounds like a good idea” (NGO 4). If an NGO wants the Norwegian State to think that a suggestion “sounds like a good idea,” two tactics seem especially effective: Referring to international institutions or demonstrating the results and effects of your previous work.

Firstly, citing International Organizations gives the argument weight. This is not surprising as the government white papers on aid frequently refers to International Organizations such as the UN, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (MFA 2014a; MFA2014b; MFA 2015a; MFA2017a).<sup>11</sup> One participant described the relationship with Norway and International Organizations like this: “Norway is really loyal to the UN for instance. More loyal than probably any other country, and we are pretty uncritical here. It is like: The UN believes in ‘that’, so we support ‘that’ no matter what” (NGO 2). Therefore, once an NGO refers to these international institutions, politicians and bureaucrats listen. One interviewee told about how her organization cited the World Bank when arguing for an increased focus on their thematic area, and therefore had “a lot of heavy-hitters with us in our argumentation. And this helps. It helps a lot” (NGO 3).

Additionally, many interviewees reported that if they can produce concrete results about the effect of their work, they stand in a much stronger position to influence the State. This is best exemplified by one interviewee whose organization had a “fantastically well” relationship with Norad and lauded them for being “very attentive to what we say.” When asked how they were able to convince the State in discussions, he responded: “It is because we can show results, we can show the effects of it” (NGO 9). Thus, when participants can point to their previous results, they do not only stand in a position to gain increased funding, but their arguments become stronger as well.

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<sup>11</sup> The current overriding guidelines for Norwegian aid cites research of the World Bank 29 times, and the International Monetary Fund 9 times (MFA 2017a). This is not only the case for this document however. <https://www.norad.no/om-bistand/norsk-utviklingspolitikk/> provides a list of relevant white papers.

Through the interviews then, the link between knowledge and power within the Norwegian Model becomes discernable. The State ascribes to mainstream development knowledge and a largely positivist ontology, and empowers those NGOs who ascribe to the same knowledge. As Foucault noted, the dominant knowledge in the system does not only decide who gets to be an actor, but what it means to be one (Foucault 1984). Being an actor within the Norwegian Model means ascribing to, and producing mainstream development knowledge. This knowledge is not somehow false, but represents reality in a specific way that renders it amenable to specific interventions (Foucault 2001b). Therefore, as the goal of the State is measurable and quantitative development, there seems to be little room for alternative knowledges which suggests that other forms of development might produce better results. Nonetheless, the interviewees do point to an important fact: The State is amenable to a good argument. As Foucault noted, the boundaries of acceptable knowledge are not just a means for control, but also to enhance the utility and productivity of those governed (1997b). Therefore, by accepting new bits of evidence about development processes put forth by NGOs, the State is therefore able to increase its development output. NGOs can use evidence to influence their field of possibilities, but it must largely consist of knowledge that can be oriented towards easily measured, communicable, and result-oriented aid.

### **7.3. When Foreign Policy Objectives Undermine Development Goals**

Since the election of a new government in 2013, the influence of NGOs on Norwegian politics has diminished as foreign policy takes precedence over development policy objectives. As earlier explained, the government has, since its inauguration, pushed for a closer integration between foreign policy and development policy. All interviewed NGOs agree: Development is more than just aid, and therefore requires a coordinated external policy. However, many participants viewed the integration of development and foreign policy as inherently problematic: “The priorities are different from development and foreign affairs. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is supposed to push Norwegian interests. And that is important, but that is a different matter (NGO 3). Hence, instead of a mutually reinforcing external policy, Norwegian NGOs perceive that development policy becomes instrumentalized towards foreign policy objectives:

Coherence is important, but that which this government has done, instead of focusing on poverty reduction and ensure that all policy areas are coherent in order to reach this goal,

they have put in development as a piece in our foreign policy. Preventing migration, fighting terrorism. That is becoming the leading factors to where aid is channeled (NGO 4)

As shown earlier, NGOs are capable of shaping development policy to a certain degree. Influencing foreign policy, however, is more challenging. Thus, as foreign policy takes precedence over development policy, the influence of NGOs is effectively diminished. As a result, many of the interviewees experience that “The emphasis on collaboration has disappeared, so it is more difficult to discuss, in a collaborative effort, ways to find good solutions” (NGO 2). Thus, as development issues have become relegated, so has the expertise and opinions of civil society.

In light of the vulnerable position of development policy, all the participants expressed a clear need for reinstating the Minister of International Development (MID) post. In line with current government’s attempt to create a more coherent external policy, it removed the MID post and gave the responsibility of Norway’s development policy to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Speed and Opseth 2013). The removal of the MID post further subordinates development goals to other policy objectives: “Development becomes undermined because it is not followed-up by a dedicated minister. It kind of becomes an appendage which is used when it fits them, and when no one asks you about it, you put it away” (NGO 5). Moreover, the MID was described as an “arena for dialogue” and a “mediator” between civil society and the government (NGO 8; NGO 10), and therefore provided NGOs with an important connection into politics. Finally, one interviewee expressed that the removal of the MID post hurt their presence in international fora. Therefore, with the reinstatement of the MID, “Norway would have a stronger position again in a couple of important international processes that seek to reduce poverty” (NGO 3). Thus, the lack of an MID affects the influence of Norwegian NGOs on many levels.

The effects of the increasingly integrated development and foreign policy of Norway remains largely unexplored. Since 2000, almost all OECD donors have adopted approaches to integrating the two policy fields (Nahem and Sending 2017). Yet, for these countries as well, its effects remain largely unknown (Nahem and Sending 2017). However, a Norad-commissioned report on the integrative civilian-military approach of Western donors in Afghanistan, points out some



potential pitfalls of integrating development policy into other policy areas (Norad 2016).<sup>12</sup> The report asserts that “Western political and military interests largely defined the nature and magnitude of aid flows. Conventional criteria for development assistance (notably absorptive capacity and credible conditionality) were, as a consequence, ignored or overruled” (Norad 2016, p.3). Partly due to this, the report concludes that while Western donors made progress in terms of output, there is little evidence for wider development outcomes (Norad 2016). Another report commissioned by the government looks deeper into Norway’s role in the reconstruction of the Afghan society since the beginning of the war in 2001. The report warns that Norway’s mechanisms for integrating civilian-military efforts are underdeveloped and create confusion (Godal et al. 2016). Moreover, in many areas, the integrated approach “did not create trust with authorities, did not weaken the resistance, and created *more* conflict (Godal et al. 2016, p. 117. Emphasis added). Lastly, the report points out an inherent contradiction within the integrative model: While military priorities can change quickly, long-term development projects are less flexible. As Norwegian development efforts shift towards countries in conflict in Northern Africa and the Middle East, the sentiments expressed by my interviewees and corroborated by these findings, are reasons for concern.

#### **7.4. Criticizing the Government**

Matters are made worse for Norwegian NGOs by the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Børge Brende, who instilled fear in the most financially dependent NGOs. As one participant noted: “Previously I’ve always thought that in Norway, you can be critical without fearing for your funding, but we have seen some examples that, if someone has been a little too outspoken, this might harm them” (NGO 3). The participant explained how a picture of the minister’s notepad circulated between Norwegian NGOs:

And in the margin, it said that the Refugee Council had been critical, and this was frowned upon, and that the government should not necessarily put all their eggs in that basket, and comments like that. And that was kind of a warning to everyone. That was kind of like: ‘Oh, ok, that’s how it works?’ (NGO 3).

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<sup>12</sup> Afghanistan is a pertinent example as it is not only the largest recipient of Norwegian aid, but since 40% of this is channeled towards civil society, Norwegian NGOs have a considerable presence there (Norad 2017a).

Another participant had heard other rumors from other Norwegian NGOs that Børge Brende did not like criticism, and that “this has led to organizations holding back” (NGO 4). However, while the NGOs wholly dependent on the State for their survival showed less willingness to criticize, the largest organizations found it unproblematic. As expressed by one of them: “We do what we must, and say what we must. Independently” (NGO 6).

Despite these recent trends, one interviewee noted that “There is always a balance with regards to what we can allow ourselves to say and not. And that is something that we always have to remember” (NGO 2). Therefore, even though Børge Brende has shifted this balance in recent times, it is always there. Nevertheless, it is worrisome for Norwegian NGOs that they find themselves in the compounding misfortune of having both their field of possibilities and their ability to influence and criticize Norway’s external policy. Additionally, these findings highlight how Norwegian development policy is susceptible to personnel changes within the government. As one interviewee stated: “The interests that [the Minister of Foreign Affairs] have does matter. They have a lot of power” (NGO 8). During the course of my research, the government appointed a new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ine Eriksen Søreide. The interests she has, and the consequences her instatement will have for Norwegian development policy remains to be seen.

## **8. What kind of Development Actors Emerge from the Norwegian State-NGO Relationship?**

As the previous two chapters examined how the State and civil society interact and transform one another, and the effects that these interactions produce, the last question can be addressed: What kind of development actors emerge from their relationship?

In this chapter, I show that NGOs do not perceive themselves to be part of some State-transcending civil society in opposition to the Norwegian government. On the contrary, most of the interviewees almost proudly described themselves as pieces in a larger ‘Norwegian development project. However, these pieces remain fragmented as the State does not attempt to coordinate Norwegian aid. In this chapter, I also compare the State-NGO relationship with the private donor-NGO relationship, and find that the latter comes with its own set of

conditionalities. Finally, I present a summary of the Norwegian Model through the concept of ‘contractual implication.’

### **8.1. The Norwegian Development Project**

Norwegian NGOs do not represent an alternative to State-led development. While State-imposed limitations troubled many of the interviewees, they denied being part of some autonomous, global or transnational civil society in opposition to the State. Therefore, agential theories fail to describe State-supported NGOs in Norway. In the words of one of the most critical interviewees: “Through official funding, we are contributing to the overriding goals of Norway's development policy. We kind of become a development actor for Norway, and I think that it is a nice thing” (NGO 4). Another interviewee asserted that with regards to the State, “We are complementing in the way that we carry out work that is within the Norwegian development policy” (NGO 3). When describing his organization’s relationship to other Norwegian NGOs, one NGO worker explained: “We think in the same way, work in the same way” (NGO 9). Thus, as Tvedt (2009) notes, the Norwegian model is characterized by a largely consensual approach to development. There is no room for glaring disagreements; the State and NGOs are part of the same ‘Norwegian development project.’

Through their close relationship, the lines between civil society/State and development policy/foreign policy/ blur, and NGOs become partly a way to bring the Norwegian development project to new arenas. In certain matters, direct intervention from Norwegian authorities is not politically feasible, and so NGOs with their ‘non-governmental’ nomenclature represent Norway:

For instance, in Latin America, it is easier for NGOs to be critical towards the governments, and we can also help the embassy in ensuring that Norway still has a critical role. So, Norway can still be an active actor on that front, but this is done through civil society organizations. (NGO 4)

Besides their non-governmental status, NGOs also help spread Norwegian development activities through their wide network of SNGOs. One NGO employee described a particular situation linked to burial of those killed by Ebola crisis in 2014:

You can't just come from Oslo and say: 'now we're going to bury people in such-and-such way.' right? So being able to be the local actor that says: 'yeah, I understand that you want to bury this person in such-and-such way, but that is dangerous. What if we do it this way?' (NGO 6)

This is not necessarily always negative; I am not making the argument that the Norwegian Model is inherently bad. What I am arguing is that civil society is, to an extent, implicated in Norway's external policy. As the MFA states with regards to Norway's role in the stabilization of Northern Africa: "Allocation of natural resources, as well as support to civil society, are areas where Norway has great experience, and *credibility* (MFA 2017b. Emphasis added). Thus, due to their credibility, NGOs extend Norway's development project to new arenas. Few participants viewed this as problematic, at least not openly. One interviewee however, showed a moment of sincere contemplation. When talking about Norway's geographical concentration towards Northern Africa, she reflected:

I understand that it's important, but yes, it's political, fragile States. It's really political in terms of migration to Norway. So that is hard to digest with this funding. What exactly is it that we are a part of now? (NGO 2)

Other NGOs might want to reflect more on the effects that their relationship with the State have. The suspicion that NGOs represent the interest of their State-donors is part of the reason why 45 developing countries, between 1993 and 2012, enacted laws that restrict the flow of foreign funds into NGOs operating within their territory (Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash 2014).<sup>13</sup> When developing countries perceive that their State-power is wrenched out of their hands by western NGOs representing the interests of their donors, resistance follows (Shivji 2006). The idea that NGOs are foreign policy tools for Western States is what spawn articles with titles such as *The Missionary Position: NGOs and Development in Africa*, and movements such as 'People against Foreign NGO Neocolonialism.'<sup>14</sup> Northern NGOs are hard pressed to defend themselves from these criticisms as their funding arrangement with States create such conspicuous ties with their

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<sup>13</sup> This is only one reason. As Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash (2014) also show, a major reason is also the fear for survival of political elites who view NGOs as a threat.

<sup>14</sup> While the former refers to Manji and O'Coill's (2002) article already mentioned on page 13, the latter refers to a former activist group in Papua New Guinea that opposed the proliferation of NGOs in their country.

donors (Jordan 2011). Norwegian NGOs therefore find themselves in a difficult situation where they must demonstrate their loyalty to the beneficiaries of their development activities. However, as shown, downward accountability is not always compatible with the needs for upward accountability.

## **8.2. The Untapped Potential of the Norwegian Model**

It must be acknowledged that although the Norwegian State imposes limitations on the field of possibilities for NGOs, the breadth and flexibility of the development activities emerging from their relationship is greater than with most donor-NGO relationships. As already mentioned, when compared to other public donors, even the most critical participants viewed Norad and the MFA as accommodating and flexible: “Both the MFA and Norad are, compared to many other donors, relatively easy to relate to administratively, and they are also flexible” (NGO 3). When talking about other NGOs in their network, another interviewee stated: “Many NGOs similar to us do not have donors willing to pay for capacity-building. So we are in a very good situation where Norad gives us money for that” (NGO 6). Additionally, Norad’s framework agreements can span up to five years. Although most interviewees agree that changes to civil society takes longer than that to materialize, they commended the length of Norad’s agreements: “We work in a field that demands long-sightedness. It takes time to establish better allocation of natural resources, adapt to climate change etc. So especially with the funding agreements with Norad, they are really good” (NGO 4). Despite its many faults that I have pointed out throughout my research, when it comes to development policy, the Norwegian State surpasses most other donors.

Yet, there is much untapped potential in their relationship. Besides providing funds, the interviewees did not perceive that the State empowers them in any significant way. Norad, for instance, could possess expertise about individual countries that assists NGOs in contextualizing their development activities:

Norad does not sit on any competence that can be useful for us with regards to the countries that we have framework agreements towards, or that we can discuss with them for instance: ‘What is the situation in Burundi right now?’ They just want to be informed whether the situation in Burundi is so bad that you cannot do anything there. (NGO 2)

Moreover, as the State monitors the activities of NGOs so closely, it could play a coordinating role to facilitate coherent and effective aid:

Sweden, they have a strategy towards every country where they have taken some choices about what areas they are supposed to work within. So, if you go into their website, you can find a country and you'll know what SIDA priorities.<sup>15</sup> Norway does not have that. So, in Nigeria or Niger for instance, are we supposed to focus on food security, food and shelter? Hygiene? you have no idea. It seems very random. (NGO 3)

Similar concerns have been voiced by Norad, which found that Norwegian support to civil society is characterized by weak coordination (Norad 2012). In a comprehensive report on Norwegian civil society support, Norad found that only a few Norwegian embassies tried to coordinate the actions between Norwegian NGOs and local organizations (Norad 2012). Moreover, Norwegian embassies and Norad follows their separate rules and regulations for funding, and therefore contribute to a high level of aid fragmentation. The report concludes that no formal attempt has been made to develop a more strategic or holistic approach to civil society funding (Norad 2012). These coordinating activities would create a major added-value effect and allowed Norwegian NGOs to pursue more effective strategies in their fight against inequality. However, as of now, the combined effort of Norwegian NGOs is “the sum of all the independent and often isolated parts” (Norad 2012, p. 67).

### **8.3. The Inescapable Conditionality of aid**

The limitations that the State imposes on the field of possibilities of Norwegian NGOs begs the question: What are the alternatives? Besides State-funding the other alternatives are non-existence and private donations. The former is not an option for these NGOs, but the second deserves some attention. Through the interviews, it became apparent that although often considered unconditional, private donations come with their own set of limiting effects on an NGO's field of possibilities. Despite their lack of knowledge about development processes, both private firms and individuals have their own criteria for who should get their money.

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<sup>15</sup> SIDA is the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. It fulfills a similar function to that of Norad.

Private firms differ in their reasoning for supporting NGOs, but they often want to see concrete results of their funding. As one interviewee described: “They have to feel that their contribution profits them” (NGO 8). Therefore, projects funded by private firms must often produce easily measured results. As another interviewee explained, private firms often wish to “point to a statistic and say ‘we’ve done this’” (NGO 3). Moreover, because of this, funding from private firm is often earmarked to highly specific projects: “Sometimes with [private funds], it is like, OK, we got money from there, so then it has to go to exactly this and that. That does not make sense” (NGO 2). However, most interviewees stressed that private firms differ in their reasoning for funding NGOs: “some are just happy about giving” (NGO 8).

Individual donors produce similar effects on an NGO’s field of possibilities. The relationship between individuals and the NGO sector exists within the individual donor market which one interviewee described as “*extremely* competitive” (NGO 10). It is not necessarily the NGO that does the most amount of good that excels in this market: “Some things are easier to sell than others. Children for instance, it’s a lot easier to sell” (NGO 2). As the private donor market becomes increasingly educated, they want quantitative evidence which proves that their donations were used effectively (Lundberg 2016). Moreover, evidence shows that private donors tend to give money to organizations where they can designate money to specific activities (Nunnenkamp and Ohler 2012). Thus, private donations are not ‘free funds’; NGOs must sell their activities to an audience with relatively little knowledge about development processes. Additionally, selling these activities to the public is expensive. Some of the NGOs interviewed for this research spend over 20% of their private donations on collecting further private funds.<sup>16</sup>

The point I am trying to prove in this section is that every donor-NGO partnership is conditional on certain criteria. While some firms and individuals are just happy to give, private donors tend to lean towards quantifiable and technical solutions to poverty. Whether the State or private donors equip NGOs with the best tools to create a better world remains unknown.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.innsamlingskontrollen.no/nb/innsamlingsregisteret/> provides funding statistics on Norwegian NGOs.

#### **8.4. Contractual Implication**

The process of governance happening through the Norwegian State-NGO relationship can be summarized through Burchell's (1996) concept of contractual implication, which is situated within the Foucauldian literature. Contractual implication involves:

‘Offering’ individuals and collectivities active involvement in action to resolve the kind of issues hitherto held to be the responsibility of authorized governmental agencies.

However, the price of this involvement is that they must assume active responsibility for these activities, both for carrying them out and, of course, for their outcomes, and in so doing they are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the appropriate (or approved) model of action. (Burchell 1996, p. 29)

Through their contractual implication, the government decides on development goals and offers civil society the possibility to work towards them. The contract between the State and civil society says that the former provides funding, while NGOs produce development. NGOs can hold the State accountable to keep their end of the deal as they can easily trace funding. Additionally, RAM Light has rendered funding processes further transparent. Development, however, is complex and difficult to measure. Therefore, the State utilizes techniques of government that narrow the field of possibilities for NGOs towards those activities that can produce numbers saying that development occurred. In doing this, the State pushes NGOs towards technical solutions to poverty and marginalization, and away from politicized action. However, while not everything is quantifiable, many activities are. Therefore, NGOs have considerable freedom in how they produce these numbers. Yet, since the election of a new government in 2013, the techniques of government has constrained NGOs further as there is an increasing focus on quantifiable results. Additionally, the new government is increasingly integrated foreign policy with development policy, further narrowing the scope of activities for NGOs. They must now help Norway achieve foreign policy objectives. Yet, the NGOs are not powerless.

Through their contract, the line between the State and civil society blurs and so the latter is drawn closer to decision-making processes where it can exert its influence and shape development policy. When NGOs subscribe to the same type of knowledge as the State, and use this to provide constructive input, they are perceived as professional actors. Moreover, this



professionalization also allows them greater influence through lobbying and the media. Thus, professionalization is a key component of the ability of Norwegian NGOs to influence development policy. Hence, similar to the findings of Gabay (2013), I find that through convergence with the State, civil society actors can push for better solutions to poverty. As Gabay notes, however, “this is predicated on the degree to which the convergent engagement in question is self-conscious and strategic” (2013, p. 136). And indeed, as I have shown here, Norwegian NGOs *are* strategic. However, as the competition for funding increases, and foreign policy undermines development policy, the influence that Norwegian NGOs have on politics appear diminished. This is worrisome, as Norwegian aid is shifting towards countries in conflict where development and security objectives meet head on. Yet, it is conceivable that as the State draws NGOs increasingly closer to the decision-making arenas of foreign policy and security policy, NGOs become empowered to further exert their influence in these policy areas.

## **9. Conclusion**

### **9.1. Further Research**

My research is only part of the methodological plurality needed to gain a better understanding of the Norwegian State-NGO relationship. And, during the course of my research, some topics emerged that were outside my study’s scope. Future research on the Norwegian State-NGO relationship can therefore direct itself towards these topics and fill their associated knowledge gaps. First, a comparative analysis between the effects that private donors and State donors have on the field of possibilities for Norwegian NGOs would help situate the State-NGO relationship within a broader context. Although I touched on this subject, much remains uncertain. Secondly, future research should be directed towards studying the specific effects that the State’s demand for upward accountability has on Southern NGOs. A case study of one or a few Norwegian NGOs and their partners in developing countries would reveal the specifics of how the Norwegian aid architecture extend to the local level. Thirdly, as I mostly interviewed NGOs receiving a significant proportion of their funds from the State (Table 1), it would be interesting to study how the more independent NGOs are able to affect Norwegian development policy and foreign policy. Finally, at the time of writing, Norad is carrying out two important studies. One on the effects that the increased focus on results has on NGOs, as well as a study on the effect of

integrating foreign policy and development policy (Norad 2017e; Norad 2017f). While I have investigated both subjects, these studies will shed further light on the Norwegian NGO-State relationship.

## **9.2. Concluding Remarks**

As the State's knowledge and techniques of government permeates the functionings of Norwegian NGOs, we cannot call them autonomous from the State. Therefore, for the Norwegian civil society, agential theories remain normative rather than descriptive; they are the ideal, rather than reality. Autonomy is something that NGOs strive for as their relationship with the State does confine their field of possibilities. In the words of one interviewee: "In a perfect world we would have just received a check, and then do whatever we wanted with it" (NGO 7). However, the world is not perfect, and NGOs must be accountable to their State donor. Yet, as Foucault and other relationalists point out: Autonomy is impossible: "There is no point where you are free from all power relations" (Foucault 1997a, p. 167). Every relationship produces specific effects on those engaged in it. Thus, without a State donor, Norwegian NGOs do not find freedom, but must sell their activities on the private donor market comprised of actors that have their own idea about what Norwegian aid should look like. No NGO is an island, and thus, "citing Tocqueville as a theorist of civil society will always be, as it is today, an act of hope" (Brinton 2010, p. 457).

Structural theories of civil society provide a better account of the Norwegian State-NGO relationship as the structures imposed on Norwegian NGOs continuously orient their activities towards State-defined goals for development. The structuralist description of the confrontation of upward and downward accountability is especially instructive. Yet, although structuralists warn that NGOs must free themselves from their State donors, it is unsure what their next course of action should be. Again, finding other sources for funding produces its own set of effects on an NGO's field of possibilities. If structuralists believe that NGOs should cease to exist entirely, they underestimate their agency and ability to effect change from within. If what development needs is an alternative to the hegemonic development approaches of the State, the mere non-existence of NGOs would not create this. On the contrary, it is possible that the best chance NGOs have to produce better solutions to poverty is through strategic convergence with different State agencies.

At the time of writing, Norad asks for the input of civil society on a draft that, when finished, will guide the relationship between Norwegian NGOs and the State. Already now, in its unfinished form, the document acknowledges many of the issues I have examined in my research. The draft states, amongst other things, that Norad's strict demands for upward accountability prioritizes professionalized actors at the expense of grassroots organizations in developing countries; that donor-set targets undermine locally defined needs; and that effectiveness in service-delivery takes precedence over advocacy work and public participation (Norad 2017g). More importantly, Norad states that it will take measures to address these issues. Whether these suggestions will materialize or not remains to be seen, but at least the draft shows that Norad are aware of the problems that Norwegian NGOs and their partners in developing countries are facing.

Fixing these issues will not be an easy process. Accounting for the diversity of actors and activities required to facilitate civil society development requires a move towards more qualitative accountability methods, feed-back mechanisms for local communities, and better evaluation and learning procedures. Addressing these issues to ensure that Norwegian development activities have a real impact will not be cheap. Therefore, among all this criticism of the State, it is important to remember that it is not some autonomous entity. Far from it, as Foucault pointed out, the State is the combination of all those power relations that account for its generation and functioning. Thus, the State is accountable to all its citizens. And Norwegians have never been more negative to aid. While 40% of the population want to reduce or completely get rid of development aid, only 30% believes it produces good results (Revolv 2013). As Norwegians grow increasingly skeptical towards aid expenditure, it will be difficult for Norad or the MFA to justify the increased administrative costs that are required to foster good development.

Nevertheless, an approach towards aid that accounts for its complexity is desperately needed. While individual measurements from donors and NGOs around the whole world are almost exclusively positive, failures are only occasionally announced (Doucouliagos and Paldam 2009). Yet, all these individual success stories are contradicted by the fact that no one can say with certainty, maybe not even with confidence, that intentional development efforts have created a better world. Can we really say that these individual measurements then measure development?

Probably not. Worryingly, the notion that development output—results immediately achieved after implementing an activity—somehow equals success, and proof that the world just improved, seems deeply rooted within the Norwegian aid system. When interviewing Norwegian NGOs about the wider and long-term effects of their activities, many of them could not even understand the concept of “looking beyond the project;” not even after having the concept explained to them (Norad 2012). As I have continuously emphasized throughout my research: Norwegian NGOs are not passive intermediaries of State-aid. They have agency. And as agents responsible for their own activities, they must look inwards as well, and assess whether what they are doing actually has an effect or not. Maybe the situation would look brighter if development actors could stop catering to their private and public donors’ needs. Most likely, but maybe not. Maybe what we need is an entirely new, alternative approach to development. One thing is certain: There is little room for such approaches within the Norwegian aid system.

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## Appendices

### A. Interview Guide Sample

1. can you briefly talk a little about how you work internationally?
2. What are the advantages/disadvantages about being as professionalized as you are?
3. How do you select your partners?
4. I saw that your emergency relief expenditure declined from 2010, but suddenly grew rapidly from 2015. What is the cause of this?
5. You are phasing out your projects in [deleted to ensure anonymity], what is the cause of this?
6. Are the thematic priorities set by the government compatible with the real needs of the people where you work?
7. Some of the things you do is more diffuse such as helping local populations lobby and do advocacy work. How is it demonstrating this towards Norad?
8. Is the money from private donations used different than those coming from Norad or the MFA?
9. What are the challenges with collecting private funds?
10. How do you work with advocacy work within Norway?
11. What would you say the positives and negatives about working so closely with the State is?
12. How do you perceive your relationship with those State agencies involved in Norway's foreign policy?
13. Can you tell me a little about the ever day/periodical contact you have with State officials? In what situations do you engage with each other?
14. In what ways can you influence Norwegian development policy?
15. What gives your argumentation weight?
16. Do you notice a difference with the new government and/or minister of foreign affairs?
17. How do you feel about the absence of a minister of development?
18. Does your close financial relationship with the State affect your ability to be critical?
19. How do you find the new RAM Light system? Did you have any influence over how it turned out?

## B. Interview request letter

Hi,

My name is Sverre Ofstad and I am a graduate student in International Development Studies at NMBU. This semester I am writing my thesis about the relationship between Norwegian NGOs and the Norwegian State. Many critics have been overly negative towards the Norwegian model for aid, while others have had a tendency to generalize on the basis of specific cases. I do not have any intention of following this literature, but want to explore the issue from both sides.

I want to do this by analyzing this relationship through a «governmentality-lens» where what is interesting is what happens through Norwegian NGOs. Therefore, I would like to know a little about the work you do, your interactions with the MFA/Norad, and their demands of you. I have three research questions:

- How can Norwegian NGOs shape their relationship with the MFA/Norad?
- How does the State shape its relationship with Norwegian NGOs?
- What kind of development actor emerges from this relationship?

I hope you have the time for what is roughly a 45-50-minute interview. If you have any further questions, you are free to call me or e-mail me.

Best regards,

Sverre Ofstad

## C. The Resources Allocation Model (RAM) Light Standards

THE APPLICANT ORGANIZATION
<p><b><u>Standard 1: The applicant's strategy</u></b> The applicant has a general, long-term and realistic plan for the development aid work. The applicant has good analysis that provide justification for geographical and thematic priorities.</p>
<p><b><u>Standard 2: Development competence and capacity</u></b></p>

The applicant possesses professional and administrative competence and capacity to implement the planned work. This includes knowledge about the country(ies) concerned and relevant technical competence.

**Standard 3: The organization's financial sustainability**

The applicant documents financial sustainability by providing an overview of all sources of revenue in addition to public funding and can provide a minimum of 10% of project costs (where required by the respective Grant Scheme Rules). The applicant also has sufficient equity to allow for some level of lack of funds over a certain period or cover possible losses (i.e. related to possible fraud).

**Standard 4: Financial management**

The applicant exercises appropriate internal financial management and adequate follow-up and monitoring of partners. Financial irregularities are prevented, disclosed and actively followed up at all levels. The applicant undertakes a background check of its partners (e.g. *due diligence*). The applicant adheres to established routines to avoid corruption.

**PROGRAMME AND PROJECT PLANS**

**Standard 5: Norwegian priorities for development policy**

The applicant's plans are relevant for the objectives and target groups as described in the National Budget (Budget Proposition 1 S, budget item 160.70) and the Storting's deliberations of the same. The plans fits with development priorities within central thematic areas.

**Standard 6: Context analysis and local needs**

The applicant's plans for the work are based on credible context analysis. The plans appear to be relevant and realistic. The plans are based on real needs among target groups and civil society in the target country, the country's own development plans and the work of other actors.

**Standard 7: Partners**

The choice of cooperating partners is well argued, and the applicant demonstrates reflection on the partnership model. The applicant documents that the legitimacy of all partners has been assessed. The applicant systematically seeks to establish or maintain equal relations with its partners. The applicant has assessed the sustainability and plans for phasing out, thus permitting the partner to continue the initiatives and/or maintain the results when the support discontinues.

**Standard 8: Results based management**

The applicant submits results-oriented plans with a solid results framework. The applicant builds upon theories of change and/or a justification of how the initiative(s) will help address the main challenges that have been identified. Emphasis is placed on the clarity and logical structure of the results framework, and the inclusion of clear, measurable and realistic development objectives at the societal level (impact), at end user level (outcome) and at the delivery level (output); relevant indicators for goal achievement; reference to baseline data; and disaggregated data. The applicant's added value which is operationalized and measurable will count as a strength in the appraisal. The applicant can document capacity and routines for risk and results management internally in the organization.

**Standard 9: Risk analysis**

The applicant systematically identifies and analyses relevant risks that may prevent achievement of the objectives. The applicant has appropriate routines for following up and managing risks.

The applicant has identified significant risk factors that may have a negative effect on the cross-cutting issues for 1) human rights, especially linked to co-determination, accountability and non-discrimination, 2) women's rights and gender equality, 3) climate and environment, and 4) anti-corruption.

In the appraisal of the risks for not achieving the objectives and cross-cutting issues, emphasis will be placed on how the applicant has 1) identified risk factors, 2) assessed their probability and consequence, and 3) planned possible measures to reduce their probability and consequence. The appraisal includes internal as well as external risk factors.

**Standard 10: Budget**

The applicant's budgeted costs appear to be relevant, necessary and realistic for the implementation of the plans in such a way that the objectives are achieved. The applicant works with the partner(s) when preparing the budget.

The plans and budgets show how the costs have been distributed among the various sections of the applicant organization and the partners. The distribution of costs seems reasonable according to type of activity and value-added at each level. The applicant demonstrates reflection on the costs, and these appear justifiable and cost-effective.

## RESULTS ACHIEVED

### **Standard 11: Changes at the outcome and societal levels**

With the partners, the applicant has helped produce positive change at the outcome level. The applicant has determined the likelihood of the efforts having helped produce change at the societal level. The applicant has documented the results achieved and critically reflects on discrepancies and experiences. The applicant's added value is appraised, and if it has been included as an objective and is measurable, this will count as a strength in the appraisal.

### **Standard 12: Strengthening of civil society organizations**

The applicant has helped produce positive changes for civil society organizations in the target country and is able to provide specific documentation of this.

### **Standard 13: Learning and adaptation**

The applicant deliberately draws on experience and relevant evaluations to adapt and renew the efforts. The applicant provides representative examples to illustrate this.

### **Standard 14: Cost efficiency and budget control**

Project accounts document that the applicant has exercised good budget control and has handled any deviations appropriately. Larger deviations between budget and accounting is explained and, where required (according to the contract), prior approval from Norad has been obtained. Achieved results are according to use of funds as specified in the accounts.



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