Conceptualizing NGO-State Relations in Karnataka: Conflict and Collaboration amidst Organizational Diversity

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Across post-independence India, including Karnataka, NGOs rose to prominence in the early 1980s. Since then, much of the NGO literature, regardless of which end of the political spectrum it comes from, legitimizes (or attacks) NGO activity on two axes: the economic and the political. Claims are made (or countered) of NGO effectiveness and efficiency at providing relief and social services compared to the state or the market, and of their ability to initiate and support positive political and social change through their value-driven, community-based practice. Relatedly, NGO practices—particularly those rooted in organizing communities—are read as either shaping opposition in this current era of globalization, or as eliciting support for state and elite led models of development.

The debates on the role and effectiveness of NGOs continue, even as several commentators have pointed out that the sector, though large, is still small compared to the Indian state in terms of the amount of funding and support it brings to addressing development issues. Equally important is the fact that the majority of Indian NGOs tend to be small, with annual budgets that are below Rs. 500,000 per year. For many observers, the quality of NGO impacts in the face of pervasive poverty are captured in Sheldon Annis’ (1988: 209-218) frequently quoted comments on how small-scale can be synonymous with insignificance, low-cost can simply mean underfunded and of low-quality, and political independence can signify powerlessness. Despite these reservations, observers seem to be in agreement that the growing NGO sector does have an impact and is becoming increasingly diverse. This diversity reflects not just regional differences and variation between State governments but also the influence of donors and the need for NGOs to demonstrate success.

This paper maps the organizational diversity of the NGO sector in Karnataka, a “middle order state” (Vyasulu, 1995), and demonstrates that conceptualizing NGO actions vis-à-vis the state dichotomously—either as a close collaboration or as a conflictual, oppositional force—is problematic. The federalist structure of the Indian state provides numerous points of contact for NGOs. Bring that together with the interests of a diverse group of organizations, and we find that NGO relations with the state are best characterized as marked by uneasiness. Individual organizations are often simultaneously involved in collaborative and conflictual relations with the state and walk a thin line between establishing pragmatic partnerships even as they acknowledge the need to keep some critical distance from the state. The ability of NGOs to influence development outcomes then turns on how effectively they can negotiate this uneasiness while keeping their commitments and remaining accountable to the communities they work with.

A brief description of how we conceptualize NGO-state relations follows this introduction. The state’s positions as regulator, funder and political force at multiple levels, provides various points of contact that allow several possibilities for conflict and collaboration with NGOs. The second section of the paper maps the NGO sector in Karnataka, which closely follows all-India patterns with some significant differences. One important difference being the

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Over the years several people have provided useful comments and criticism on this work; most recently I would like to thank James Manor, D.Rajasekhar, and Kripa AnathPur for their comments at the Bangalore conference.

1 Rajesh Tandon estimated the financial outlay for the entire voluntary sector (NGOs are a subset) as being Rs.160 billion for the year 1999-2000. Direct funding and support received through bilateral and multilateral donors is left out of this calculation (Planning Commission, 2002: 40-41)
active involvement of the state in the initiation of a range of NGOs along with the support of external donors and corporate entities. This section also describes NGO-state contact in some cases to illustrate the coexistence of collaborative and conflictual relations.\(^2\) The paper concludes by making the point that capturing the organizational diversity of the NGO sector, and understanding the uneasy, complicated nature of NGO-state relations are key to understanding the possibilities that exist for a pragmatic, progressive NGO politics.

**Situating NGOs and the State**

The NGOs this paper is concerned with work on development issues that in some manner, reduce poverty and have an impact on the livelihoods of those who are poor and marginalized.\(^3\) It is estimated that there are between 20,000-30,000 such NGOs in India: some of these are voluntary in nature, others are membership-based, but most have employed staff. NGO actions are best understood through an organizational typology that includes *issue/sector base* and *modes of practice* where the issues may include poverty reduction, literacy, empowerment, infrastructure, health, child labor, land rights, or housing, and modes of practice span the range from service delivery, conscientization and awareness building, to support and advocacy work. These issues are articulated in the context of the needs of particular *target groups*—communities demarcated by various parameters including income, gender, age, occupation and caste—and often within *spatial boundaries* as defined by the issues with which the NGOs engage (watershed development, forest management or resettlement for example) or by the scale of the place where they work (a village, district, region, or State). Figure 1 lays out this typology. It is important to emphasize that many NGOs work across sectors, simultaneously engage in different modes of practice, and work with target groups in different spatial boundaries, even as many change sectoral emphasis and modes of practice over time in the interest of organizational survival and/or effectiveness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 1: NGO Typology</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Target Group</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Spatial Boundaries</strong></td>
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</table>

As mentioned earlier NGO activity is legitimized and critiqued on its claims of efficiency and effectiveness in both the economic and political spheres. The growing body of literature reveals a complicated, messy picture of organizations adjacent to, between and intersected by state, donor, market and civil society actors, with complex networks and relationships that span boundaries. Studies have shown that NGO claims to economic efficiency need to be tempered: they are not as cost-efficient or innovative, lack broadness of reach, rarely target as deeply as presumed or claimed, and tend not to locate in areas of highest poverty.\(^4\) Political claims of supporting social justice and democratization are as difficult to pin down. In organizations that

\(^2\) The word “State” refers to an administrative unit, 27 of which make the Indian Union, while “state” refers to the abstract concept of a governing entity for any territory.

\(^3\) Definitions and categorization have been a preoccupation of the NGO literature, see Vakil (1997).

achieve some measure of success—however defined—a complex picture emerges of participatory management and organizational practices in the context of progressive legislation and a strong engaged state. As important are issues of NGO capability, representativeness, and accountability and how these in turn, shape an organization’s ability to effectively reach and work with people, in particular, those who are marginalized.

In contrast to theorizing on NGOs, which is still in its early phases, the Indian state, towering as it does over society, has been theorized and understood in many ways. To most NGOs the “monolithic, rent-seeking, turf-maximizing” (Lele, 1992) developmentalist state would seem to be a multi-headed, multi-armed giant that asserts authority even as it often loses track of what its various entities are doing. As important is the simultaneous movement of the post-liberalization Indian state towards the market and political decentralization. Understanding the nature of the state, however, is crucial to NGO effectiveness. It is important to grasp three aspects of state actions on NGOs: as a regulator the state seeks to control NGOs and make them accountable to it by imposing registration, monitoring, and financial reporting requirements; as a funder the state seeks to selectively support and collaborate with groups that can elicit people’s participation and make government programs more efficient and effective. For the state as political entity however, a strong community-based NGO is a potential threat to the local power structure and it can expect to have a contentious relationship with both a cadre-based political party and other state functionaries. These aspects of state action take place at multiple levels.

Figure 2: Operationalizing the state

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Actions on NGOs</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regulator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taluk/Village</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Yet, for many NGOs their relations with the state are best characterized through their relationships with individual state functionaries, the “officials” who stand as proxies for the state. Reflecting this widely held view, Aloysius Fernandes (2004: 26-31) categorized three levels of state officials. Level A officials are senior representatives of government, administrators from the IAS, the IFS, and the State Administrative cadres, who head programs and projects, and are often “entrepreneurial, willing to listen and learn and to function in a situation that is continuously evolving … where such officials lead the government department, the synergy grows between Government and NGOs.” Level B officers are drawn from the various line departments who visit the field rarely but maintain supervisory powers over projects and programs. “The willingness and often the ability of officers at level B to take risks, decisions, and to manage staff diminish sharply … by and large officials at this level are uncomfortable with NGOs; this results in lack of mutual trust.” Level C officials are those who are the interface between citizens and the state. They “normally relate well with NGO staff” one reason being that NGOs provide these officials “with some degree of support in terms of transport, stay and

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achieving targets given to them under different government programs. Staff at this level, however, have little opportunity to upgrade their skills; besides there is no space for them to even consider innovative strategies” (Fernandes, 2004: 29-31).

Clearly, NGOs negotiate a crowded, complex arena of actors and institutions with particular interests and ideologies. While regulatory functions imposed through registration and reporting requirements tend to be concentrated at the Central level, the state as funder and political entity exists at all levels from the Center down, particularly in States such as Karnataka where Panchayati Raj has (arguably) been in place for almost two decades. As important is the variability of NGO-state interactions not only because state-society relations are in flux but also because state officials, especially at level A, are regularly moved.

While the burdens imposed by the regulatory framework, particularly on small, community-based rural groups, are seen as inimical to good NGO-state relations, another important factor in NGO-state relations in post-liberalization India is the expanding role of the state as funder. This expansion is best illustrated by the growth in the Central Government initiated and funded trust, Council for Advancement of People’s Action and Rural Technology’s (CAPART) funding portfolio from over Rs. 545 million for about 4,000 NGOs in 1993-94, to about Rs. 3 billion to fund over 10,000 rural development NGOs working across a range of issues and with various target groups in 2002-2003. Karnataka NGOs follow all-India trends in accessing state support. Table 1 summarizes the numbers of state (Central Government)-funded NGOs across various sectors in Karnataka and India.

Even as the state seeks to control NGOs through its regulatory and funding regimes, NGO-state relations are mediated through the ideological optic of the political party in power both at the Central and the State levels. The early alliance between Gandhian NGOs and the Congress fractured as the crisis of deinstitutionalization grew, and many NGOs allied instead with the Janata Party, hoping however, to articulate a non-party based opposition politics. Soon after the Congress returned to power and legislation was passed that enforced the separation between NGOs and party politics; by law registered NGOs may not be actively involved in party politics or have any of its members stand for election. Newer, professional, and avowedly apolitical NGOs began to occupy the public eye, and with the Constitutional Amendment of 1993 that brought back Panchayati Raj (PR), the relationship of NGOs to the state and to political spaces at the local level once again changed. Many NGOs support their members’ attempts to contest local elections, just as they use funds from state and foreign donors to conduct training programs in PR procedures, rules and responsibilities, for the communities they work with, and for elected representatives, particularly women who hold 33 percent of all seats as a result of state-imposed quotas.

A NGO typology that takes into account sector, modes of action, target groups and spatial focus of the organization, as well as operationalizing the state as regulator, funder and political entity at multiple levels allows us to grasp the complexity of NGO-state relations more fully. The next section starts by mapping the evolution and organizational diversity of the Karnataka NGO sector, following which it explores the NGO-state relation briefly, through some examples (not necessarily exemplars of trends or organizational types).

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6 A number of reports have explored problems created by government regulations, most recently see Mohanty and Singh (2001).
Mapping the NGO Sector in Karnataka

Karnataka, like most Indian States, has considerable inter-district variations. The two extremes within which all other districts fall, are Bidar which can be compared to Rajashthan, and Dakshina Kannada, which is closer to Kerala in terms of developmental indicators. Karnataka also suffers from an inadequate and unevenly distributed infrastructure that impacts unfavorably on economic development: there are chronic power shortages, and the railway and road network, while improving, is barely able to link the various districts. The State is dominated by its capital, Bangalore, a city that is five times larger than any other in Karnataka, and often described as the capital of India’s rapidly expanding electronics, software, and biotechnology industries, as well as—using the measure of foreign funding—the NGO sector (Table 2B).

Karnataka’s pluralist politics, where no one political party or mass movement has had a sustained influence, marks it as different from adjoining States. It also has smaller rural inequities (in part due to post-independence land reforms), as well as a tradition of a strong civil service, and R&D inputs into agriculture (from Mysore state). Most importantly, under the Janata Party, Karnataka was the first State to reinstitute a three tier Panchayati Raj system. Karnataka’s pluralist politics, its administrative traditions, and its distance from political and economic extremes make it a particularly interesting regional case.

Organizational Diversity

Karnataka has a fairly active and heterogeneous voluntary sector, though exact numbers of organizations are hard to locate. The Planning Commission’s NGO database indicates that the Central government funds 725 organizations (4.4 percent of all Central Government funded NGOs) in the State, with a larger than average clustering of NGOs that work in the areas of social justice and empowerment (Table 1). The majority of development NGOs surveyed a decade ago tended to be district based, and varied in size from MYRADA (Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency) working across several States, with an annual estimated budget of over Rs.200 million and a staff (permanent and temporary) of more than 400 to small action groups with no more than a couple of staff scattered across villages within a district. NGO location across districts is, however, uneven. Over 60 percent of all Central government funded NGOs are in five districts: Bangalore Urban (26%), Kolar (19.6%), Tumkur (6.3%), Chitradurga (5.7%) and Dharwad (3.9%), all of which, except for Bangalore Urban, are middle range districts. In contrast, the five poorest districts have less than ten percent of all Central government funded NGOs (Planning Commission, NGO Database, August 2004).

A survey of 102 social action groups and 215 activists by George Joseph (1995) provides a finer-grained picture of the NGO sector across Karnataka. Almost two-thirds of the groups had started work in the 1980s, following all-India trends closely. Three-fourth of the groups were registered as Societies, and only 15 had no registration with the Home Ministry and received no foreign funds. The majority of organizations (75%) claimed to have not shifted their work emphasis on community development (54%), research and training (12%), and health care (8%).

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8 An important group of development organizations based in the voluntary sector are those linked to various Lingayat and Brahmin mathas, whose long standing and growing influence on civil society begs serious attention.

9 George Joseph’s (1995) study also indicated that a third of the groups were small and worked in up to 25 villages, 23% were mid-sized and worked in 26-50 villages, another 25% worked in 51-100 villages and only 11% were really large and worked in more than a hundred villages. Only 17 of the 102 groups worked in more than one district. This data is difficult to compare with data available on state-funded NGOs that are categorized by the size of their budgetary allocations.
The number of development NGOs receiving foreign funds is also hard to pin down, though Government of India FCRA figures indicate that for the year 2001-2002, as many as 1,192 Karnataka based organizations (about 8 percent of all organizations receiving funds, and about half of which are organizations with stated religious affiliations) received Rs. 53.4 million from foreign funding agencies (AccountAid, 2002; Benjamin, 2004). As indicated in Tables 2A&B, Karnataka is the fourth largest recipient state for foreign funds, with organizations located in Bangalore receiving about 70 percent of the funds. This clustering of foreign funded NGOs in Bangalore requires more investigation, though the numbers of faith-based associations (not necessarily involved in development activities as defined here) and the fact that several NGOs and networks have headquarters in the city may be part of the explanation.

The clustering of both state and foreign funded NGOs in Bangalore is also due, in part, to the location of support NGOs. Many urban NGOs provide training and managerial services to smaller NGOs and community-based groups in rural areas. Their activities, often targeted at particular sectors, help create informal networks of NGOs. Support NGOs range from well established groups like SEARCH or the Bangalore affiliate of Delhi-Based Indian Social Institute (ISI), each with their own training center and campus, to smaller organizations that operate somewhat informally and support individual organizers like the Mangalore based NGO, DEEDS.

Karnataka is also fairly well known for its NGO networks. Dense informal networks exist in the NGO sector at all levels; line staff seem to move between NGOs (on a sub-regional basis) and several people in leadership positions know each other. However, Karnataka also has strong formal networks and federations of NGOs involved in rural development, and increasingly in the urban areas as well. The best known amongst these has been the State level Federation of Voluntary Organisations for Rural Development in Karnataka (FEVORD-K), which has been active at points in its long history (Ramaswamy and Prasad, 1990). District level networks also exist, as do several examples of issue specific networks such as TANK—the Tank Awareness Network in Karnataka—consisting of NGOs that work around Kolar’s 4790 tanks or the Campaign against Child Labour which has brought together various groups that work on the issue of child labor in urban and rural Karnataka. A study of these formal networks indicated that NGOs saw various advantages in networks: it was a good platform to express solidarity, share experiences and expertise, and identify developmental problems (Rajasekhar and Nair, 1995). However, it was the areas of solving procedural problems and interacting with the government that were seen as crucial. Networks also provided support to new members in obtaining funds and preparing grant proposals. While the majority of formal networks seem to be donor or state-initiated, there are some that are initiated and supported by their members, such as the Tribal Joint Action Committee (TJA), which played a crucial role in bringing the situation of tribal communities in southern Karnataka to the attention of the state (Kudva, 2001).

The 1990s saw a rapid expansion of urban groups and initiatives that draw support from a middle-and upper-class membership pool, and illustrate the growing importance of NGOs in infrastructure-short, rapidly growing cities across Karnataka. Urban NGOs have emerged in response to specific problems, which include the lack of urban citizen engagement, the ignorance of the crucial role of media, deteriorating or non-existent urban services, the lack of innovative educational materials for children, or the problems of low-income settlements and migrant communities. One of the first examples of a citizen led urban initiative was CIVIC in Bangalore,

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10 FCRA regulations do not consider direct funds from UN agencies, m/b, or non resident Indians (NRIs) as “foreign funds.”
which started in 1992 as a loose group of interested citizens who came together with the initial support of the Max Mueller Bhavan in Bangalore to create public awareness of Bangalore’s rapidly decaying urban structure; to make accountable and pressurize the concerned authorities; and, to proactively participate in the improvement of Bangalore’s urban environment. It was registered as a Trust in 1996, and has stayed small. More recently, there are other examples of urban-based groups that use different strategies but are driven by a similar agenda of improving urban services and governance. These include Swaabhimana, a NGO that focuses on organizing communities for effective waste collection, the Public Affairs Center that initiated the innovative idea of “holding the state to account through citizen report cards” (Paul, 2004) and Janaagraha, an organization that does not use the NGO label, but seeks to promote citizen participation and participatory planning through a number of different programs focused on service provision and infrastructure at the ward level, and demands for public agencies to publish accounts of their operations and finances.\(^\text{11}\) What distinguishes some of these NGOs from an earlier generation of purely awareness-oriented or service delivery groups is their explicit focus on scaling-up their impact through selective collaborations and by influencing policy making networks.

Selective collaboration between NGOs and the state for effective implementation of government programs is not new in Karnataka or in India, and continued through the decades when NGO-state relations were perceived as conflictual. Collaboration dates as far back as 1968 when MYRADA worked with the Government of Karnataka to resettle Tibetan refugees in three districts. The Government of Karnataka like most other State governments, has also always had a welfare component to its programs, and funded organizations directly to establish and run hostels, schools, short-stay homes, maternal and child health programs and so on. Karnataka NGOs are also known to have pioneered collaborations that involved the state, a bilateral or multilateral agency (m/b) and NGOs; MYRADA being the first organization in India to implement a watershed development project near Gulbarga in collaboration with a bilateral donor and the state. Since then many NGOs have become partners in such collaborative projects, though several problems remain, including not being given sufficient autonomy to design or implement projects, and not being treated as an equal partner with the state and the m/b (Fernandes, 2004: 35-42).

The Government of Karnataka also has considerable experience in setting up NGOs starting in the mid 1980s.\(^\text{12}\) The prominence in terms of size, spread and resource availability of these organizations has created additional cleavages in the sector, deepening the division between nationally and globally linked NGOs of (mostly urban) Karnataka, especially those in the larger cities like Bangalore or Mysore, and the smaller NGOs of the districts. It also feeds the shift from the service and awareness focus and inclined-to-be-oppositional organizational culture

\(^\text{11}\) For more information on the Public Affairs Center, go to [www.pacindia.org](http://www.pacindia.org) (accessed April, 2005); on Janaagraha, go to [www.janaagraha.org](http://www.janaagraha.org) (accessed April, 2005)

\(^\text{12}\) As a Level A bureaucrat said to me in 1995, “We are creating NGOs, and encouraging formation of groups in villages...” There are a number of GONGO (Government Organized NGOs) in India. CAPART based in New Delhi, with regional offices across the country is perhaps the best known, though it only funds and does not implement rural development programs. Another well-known GONGO is Mahila Samakhya, set up as a separate Trust headed by the Secretary of the Ministry of Education, and more recently, the Akshara Foundation in Bangalore, which was launched according to its Chairperson by the State government when it “saw the efficacy of the work done by Pratham [another GONGO] in the slums of Mumbai.” Akshara brings in considerable corporate support ([http://www.indianngos.com/issue/education/interviews/rohininilekani/fullinterview.htm](http://www.indianngos.com/issue/education/interviews/rohininilekani/fullinterview.htm) Accessed, May 2005).
of the 1970s and 1980s, to the “competence culture” of the newer, directed and more managerially focused NGOs of the 1990s and beyond.

Another notable recent development in the Karnataka NGO sector is the increasing visibility of corporate funded donor NGOs and trusts, and public private partnerships like the Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF) for supporting urban development and good governance. BATF, a consortium of public agencies and elite citizens, was led by a prominent IT executive and gained a lot of attention before the current Chief Minister withdrew his support. Ian Scoones (2003: 7) describes the BATF as offering a “private sector led alternative to what is perceived as a poorly functioning urban authority, although many feel that as an unaccountable body it should not be the basis for providing public services in the city.” Initiatives like BATF, and the policy changing agendas of the larger NGOs dominate donor attention and the public eye. But as the contours of the sector shift, a number of observers are voicing concern for the growing real and imagined distance of NGOs from the ground realities of the lives of the people they hope to support.

To summarize, Karnataka’s diverse NGO sector is seeing new cleavages created by the simultaneous movement of the state towards the market and political decentralization. As the numbers of organizations grow and agendas diversify, some organizations have grown larger, and more established. With this, norms of efficiency and measures of effectiveness are being professionalized and disseminated. Large NGOs are becoming adept at establishing and maintaining partnerships with a range of state and non-state based donors and people’s groups. The situation for mid-sized and smaller groups remains more difficult. What interests us here, however, is the ways in which NGO-state relations are impacted by these changes.

**Conflict and Collaboration, Uneasy NGO-State Relations**

The complexity of the federalist governmental system can be seen optimistically, as providing “many points of access and many sources of remedy” (Christensen, 1999:19); it can also be seen as providing as many sources of possible conflict. Take the case of NGOs A and B, two mid-sized organizations that work with four different tribal (girijana) communities in two taluks of Mysore district. By the late-1990s NGO-A had established active programs in 31 of the 35 girijana haadis of the taluk where it worked. It had also built one-room schoolhouses in 17 haadis; the teachers that ran the nonformal education programs were paid directly by the state but helped support meetings of NGO-initiated haadi level groups. Some of the schoolhouses had small herb and medicinal plant gardens, a program started with funds from a donor and the state. At the time of my interviews in the late 1990s, over a third of the organization’s budget came from the Central Social Welfare Board, and the rest from a single foreign donor. In 15 years of operation in the area, NGO-A had taken various forms of support from the state including discounted land from the district administration to build a small campus, obtaining land for the girijana community from the Revenue Department, as well as funding from various programs associated with education, health, micro-credit, obtaining livestock, building housing, setting up sericulture units and so on from the Central and State governments, the Forest Department, and the ITDP program in the area. It also partnered closely with a GONGO that focussed on women’s empowerment and awareness building in the district. Accessing state-promised

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entitlements was an important part of NGO-A’s developmental strategy and they had positioned themselves well: they were one of the organizations in the taluk who were qualified to ratify documents that allowed girijana to claim scheduled tribe status. They also focused on organizing and supporting haadi level groups that federated into a taluk level organization and a larger district and state level apex organization.

NGO-B, which had spun off from NGO-A, but worked in an adjoining taluk, was twice as large by the late 1990s, and had seen regular expansion and contraction in tune with donor funding priorities and pull-outs. It was also one of three field sites of a Bangalore-based NGO. Like NGO-A gaining access to state entitlements was an important organizational agenda, and like NGO-A, it met these priorities through educating the community about its rights, and through various service delivery functions—identifying beneficiaries for state programs of immunization, free lunches for children, widow benefits programs, housing, land, or giveaways of saplings, livestock and other inputs. Both NGO-A and B closely monitored various state programs that helped fund girijana communities and worked to actively access them (at my count, they were interacting with a minimum of 6 different departments as well as the taluk and district administration) though managing the various relationships often proved to be a strain on their limited resources. Supporting girijana leaders’ entry into panchayat politics and helping train elected girijana and women representatives was also part of both NGOs’ strategy to gain access to the state. Being active members of a 11-15 member NGO Network (membership varied), which they along with two larger organizations had been instrumental in initiating, helped them in these tasks.

The Network’s regular quarterly meetings were important ground for sharing information on funding and other developmental practices that involved collaboration with the state. It also helped focus the NGOs’ oppositional activities. It was under the banner of the Network and the Girijana People’s group (the apex body of the NGO supported taluk level groups) that the NGOs became actively involved in supporting the struggle for reclaiming forests and the struggle for self-rule.

The National Front for Adivasi Self-Rule had been launched in response to the political space created by the deliberations and report of the government-established Bhuria Committee that advocated sub-state status and self-rule for tribal majority areas in the wake of the reinstitution of Panchayati Raj. Despite the intense debates and politics within the Karnataka NGO Network around the struggle for self-rule (which is beyond the scope of this paper) some NGOs became active supporters. The physical manifestations of the struggle at the local level, particularly the bamboo barricaded and posteried girijana haadis demanding self-rule, and the organized processions into the forests provided a striking counterpoint to the collaborative stance of the NGOs vis-à-vis the state. These were accompanied by meetings and sit-ins in Mysore (the district headquarters), and in Bangalore outside the Vidhan Soudha. In all this time, the NGOs continued to access state support for their various programs. Over time, a combination of factors including the very small numbers of girijana in Karnataka, muted the struggle for self rule. The Network, however, barely survived the internal debates where it became clear that not all NGOs, and especially not the larger groups, were willing to negotiate this collaborative yet conflictual relation to the state.

The experiences of NGOs A and B are not unusual in Karnataka. A NGO that works with women for instance could interact with the Central and State Social Welfare Boards, with the Ministries for Rural Development, Health, and Education, with various Departments and Programs specifically interested in particular programs ranging from watershed development,
maternal health to voter education, as well as development corporations like KARMANI, specifically set up to support women’s economic development programs. They could also be involved in agitating against government operated arrack shops in their villages at the same time. By the 1990s, several smaller regional NGOs that supported oppositional movements on an issue or at one moment in time (the agitation against Cogentrix in Mangalore for instance, or the earlier well known movement to save the Western Ghats) often continued to interact with other state agents/agencies in their deliberate attempts to access and expand state entitlements. Understanding this simultaneous collaborative/conflictual stance opens up the possibilities for a pragmatic progressive politics built around ideals of equity and social justice. It also underscores a difference in the actions of larger and smaller groups—where smaller groups seem to escape the scrutiny to which larger groups are subject, even as they struggle more than larger groups to manage NGO-state relations and survive. Larger groups also seem to focus more on professionalization and reach, trends that tend to negatively impact the possibility of NGO-state relations being simultaneously collaborative and conflictual.

Conclusions

This paper began by arguing that the complex nature of NGO-state relations is key to understanding the possibilities that exist for Indian NGOs to play a meaningful role in development. The conceptualization is of an uneasy partnership between NGOs and the state, in which NGOs collaborate selectively with the state, even as they work to hold the state accountable to its poorest and most marginalized citizens is crucial in the overwhelmingly poor, yet diverse and vibrant “noisy polity” that is India. NGOs—under certain conditions—can have an impact, even if that impact is most likely to be limited and rarely as effective or possessing the reach of a strong progressive state. What is important, however, is for NGOs and their donors to understand the possibility of simultaneous conflict and collaboration. This is not to say that organizations do not (or should not) stake out particular positions, either of opposition or of partnership with the state. But it does suggest that a conceptualization of NGO-state relations based on the location and scale of the NGO and the state in physical and political space and as including a range of fluid and intersecting relationships from closely collaborative to openly conflictual and hostile, provides a more robust explanation (and vision for NGO actions) than the stark, antagonistic categories currently proposed.
### Table 1

State Funded NGO Distribution by Sector, Karnataka & India, February 2004 - June 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Karnataka February 2004</th>
<th>India February 2004</th>
<th>Karnataka June 2005</th>
<th>India June 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>6,467</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>6,541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Total</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>39</td>
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</table>

#### Notes:

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

Table 2 A
Foreign Funded Associations from FCRA Reports
Karnataka and India, 1999-2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>India</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Associations</td>
<td>13,986</td>
<td>14,518</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>15,618</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of Funding in Crores (INR)</td>
<td>3924.6</td>
<td>4535.5</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>4871.9</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Karnataka</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Associations</td>
<td>1154</td>
<td>no data</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1192</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of Funding in Crores (INR)</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AccountAid, 2002; Benjamin, 2004

Table 2B
Top Foreign Funding Recipients by State and City, 2001-2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Amount of Funding in Crores (INR)</th>
<th>Percentage of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>States</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>794.4</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamilnadu</td>
<td>695.5</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>559.6</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>534.0</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All India</td>
<td>4871.9</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangalore</td>
<td>362.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chennai</td>
<td>313.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>298.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AccountAid, 2002; Benjamin, 2004
Works Cited


