

Summary

The debate on governance issues has put significant emphasis on the role of institutions in the development process. Few attempts, however, have been made to systematically analyse specific potentials and comparative advantages of different types of institutions. This book opts for a triangle sphere model »state actors – market actors – civil society actors« for understanding the role of different types of actors in the development process. The model is based on a distinction between different logics of functioning of organisations: hierarchy and the rule of procedures in the case of state actors, competition, transactions and contract culture in the case of market actors, and solidarity, relation-based interaction, interest articulation and activism in the case of civil society organisations. This work focuses on the contributions of civil society organisations to development, particularly on the role of so called »Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)« as advocacy networks and service providers.

Following theoretical reflections on the terms »innovation«, »development«, »civil society«, and »NGOs«, this book offers four different empirical approaches. First, it analyses NGOs and their contributions to development and change in two different countries (Bangladesh and the Republic of Congo). Second, it looks at the role of NGOs in two different sectors (employment generation in Ghana and improvement of social and labour standards in South Asia). The third empirical study examines the evolution of two individual organisations, one transnational NGO with focus on advocacy work (Transparency International) and one local NGO with focus on service delivery activities (Sadguru Water and Development Foundation). The fourth empirical study focuses on the role of NGOs in different types of development projects: building micro-infrastructure in Cameroon, providing of health care services in the Philippines, combating child labour in India and Nepal and promoting alternative employment generation in Ghana.

The different empirical perspectives present ample evidence that it is possible and relevant to develop a theory of typical strengths and weaknesses, potentials and problems of civil society organisations and their partnerships with other organisations, especially donor agencies. This contradicts the conclusions of those within the research community who consider the concept of civil society too vague to arrive at

meaningful general explanations on the performance of such organisations in development policy making and programme management.

The empirical studies underscore the significant potential of NGOs for promoting innovation and development. The strength of NGOs lies primarily in their ability to reach out to politically and economically marginalized sections of society and to put development issues on the global development and governance agenda. However, in the process of so-called »professionalisation« many organisations are tempted to either develop into bureaucracies governed by heavy rules and procedures or profit-oriented commercial outfits when they grow in age and size. Thus, they tend to lose such typical comparative advantages of NGOs such as access and intensive relations with marginalized groups of society, mobilising of voluntary work, flexibility, experimental approaches and freedom in agenda setting, including shaming activities and performing a critical watch-dog role on abuses of state and market power. A good legislative framework that defines the parameters of public benefit versus commercial activities may prevent that NGOs turn away from their original mission and social priorities. However, deficits in law making on NGOs are not only obvious in developing countries, as the case of Bangladesh shows, but also in many developed countries, as for example the case of the economically powerful NGO Allgemeiner Deutscher Automobilclub (ADAC) in Germany illustrates.

NGOs may themselves contribute to halting trends of bureaucratisation or commercialisation as the cases of Transparency International and Sadguru Water and Development Foundation demonstrate. Both managed to strike a conscious balance between professionalism and voluntarism and/or transaction-based orientation (»contract culture«) and relation-based orientation (»solidarity culture«) with a sufficient number of diverse public and private donors.

While drawing conclusions on typical innovation potentials, comparative advantages, dilemmas of orientation and dysfunctionalities of civil society organisations, this book also aimed to contribute to the theoretical debate on how to best operationalise the term civil society for the implementation of development policies.