

Berthold Kuhn

The Politics of Development between Market and State

Opportunities and Limitations of Civil Society Organisations

(Entwicklungspolitik zwischen Markt und Staat

Möglichkeiten und Grenzen zivilgesellschaftlicher Organisationen)

The book focuses on the role of civil society organisations and their cooperation with government and private sector in promoting economic and social development. It offers a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding the role of civil society organisations, in particular social and economic development oriented Non-Governmental Organisations. The book presents case studies from different perspectives, regions and sectors covering advocacy networks and service providing NGOs in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, The Philippines, Cameroon and Ghana, but also international NGOs such as Transparency International. The conclusions focus on the innovation potential of NGOs and some of their specific strengths but also on typical weakness and strategic dilemmas of orientation.

About the author:

Dr. Berthold Kuhn is Visiting Professor at the Tsinghua University in Beijing, China and adviser to the European Commission and various donor agencies on development cooperation and civil society issues.

[» Contact for this title](#)



Rights sold to:

China

420 pages

2005

In: *Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit (E+Z)*, Juni 2006

NGOs as watchdogs and intermediaries

Berthold Kuhn:

Entwicklungspolitik zwischen Markt und Staat. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen zivilgesellschaftlicher Organisationen [Development policy between market and state. Possibilities and limitations of civil society organisations].

Frankfurt, Campus 2005, 419 pages,
€45.00, ISBN 3-5933-7742-X

Kuhn makes an in-depth analysis of the role of civil society in development affairs. He convincingly weighs its possibilities and limitations. He focuses in particular on the innovative potential non-governmental organisations have, on the logic of their activities and the typical dilemmas they experience. He supports his argument with case studies of countries, sectors and organisations in Africa and Asia.

The debate on civil society and development has so far been dominated by either extremely critical or entirely uncritical voices. Kuhn challenges those who fundamentally doubt the legitimacy and effectiveness of civil society involvement. On the other hand, he also argues against glorifying non-governmental actors. By assessing advantages and disadvantages in tangible settings, he makes a valuable contribution towards deepening the discussion. At the same time he bridges the gap between academic and political discourse.

According to Kuhn, academic research has previously failed to adequately discuss the role of civil society in the development context. He identifies specific potentials for innovation. For instance, he states that NGOs are relevant as advocacy networks and service providers. He defines civil society as the "third sector" in addition to the "state" and "market". His case studies offer interesting insights into the different realities of Bangladesh and the Democratic Republic of Congo, into civil society participation in areas such as employment promotion and social standards and the operations of local initiatives as well as internationally-active organisations (Transparency International).

Kuhn concludes that NGOs can stimulate development. In fragile states in particular, they perform a watchdog role and serve as intermediaries between the people, government and international agencies. In his opinion, civil society possesses considerable innovative potential for developing methods and providing services (concerning democratic participation or microcredit, for instance). NGOs are also the driving force behind important causes like fighting corruption or safeguarding social standards at national and international levels.

Moreover, the author discusses problems which can, at least in part, be traced back to the recent emphasis of civil society among donor agencies. Increased funding has brought about a paradigm change, he says. The pressure to become more professional has added a level of bureaucracy to formerly small, voluntary organisations. Furthermore, the boundaries between government agencies and private providers are becoming blurred. If they do not wish to put at risk their specific advantage as developmental agencies, civil society organisations should try to

find a balanced role, serving both as a force for change and as providers of services. *Felix Döhler*