Summary literature review
Aid chains and advocacy in the Global South: asset, nuisance or necessary evil?

The chain of funding for civil society aid that flows from North to South (from institutional donor(s) to international civil society organizations [CSOs] to local CSOs) comes with policy priorities and requirements. How this aid chain is organized (i.e. its institutional design) shapes the way development work is undertaken. The research project *Catalysing development: towards enabling rules for advocacy in Kenya* conceptualizes the institutional design of aid chains as consisting of interrelated 'rules' that regulate, for example, inclusion (i.e. who is in and who is out), roles and responsibilities, decision making and information sharing.

The review identifies three main themes. The first relates to roles of Northern CSOs in transnational advocacy networks, a subject that is particularly relevant in light of the debate regarding Northern CSO's added value in the aid chain and which tends to be positive in tone. The second covers the various unintended and undesirable effects of power asymmetries in the aid chain. This theme, which is highly critical towards donors/Northern CSOs, tends to be judgemental (donor=bad, local CSO=good) and presents power relations as static while victimizing local CSOs. The third theme is linked to the agency of local CSOs in aid chains. This theme can be seen as a response to the major criticism of the second theme, which tends to portray local CSOs as having no room to manoeuvre within the aid chain.

Main findings

- Northern CSOs and donors have added value compared with Southern CSOs and can play an important role as enablers in advocacy networks, bringing access to funding, resources, information, networks, audiences and governments that might otherwise not be available.
- The institutional design of the aid chain has potentially far-reaching negative consequences for the ability of local CSOs to engage in advocacy. The institutional design is derived from the policy beliefs of donors and comes with different potential 'design challenges' which work together to produce similar negative outcomes. Four such design challenges are identified:
  - **Agenda setting**: Top-down decision-making in the aid chain can lead to undermining local ownership and limiting participation of constituents, thereby weakening the legitimacy of advocacy CSOs.
  - **Funding arrangements:** Donor preference for short-term, project-based funding can result in 'mission drift' among Southern CSOs, causing them to lack long-term focus, lose credibility in the eyes of stakeholders and shift from advocacy to service delivery. These funding modalities can also undermine the long-term stability and financial integrity of CSOs.
  - **Selection criteria:** The selection criteria used by donors and Northern CSOs tends to favour more established, urban-based and professionalized CSOs while neglecting smaller, less capacitated, rural-based CSOs. While the choice for large and professional CSOs may ease donor concerns that their money is allocated wisely, the on-the-ground effect can be negative because larger, more professional CSOs often have less legitimacy and weaker connections at grassroots level.
  - **Accountability requirements:** The prevalence of upward accountability to donors at the cost of downward accountability to intended beneficiaries compels CSOs to shift their focus to bureaucratic processes to ensure their own resource stability, rather than concentrate on the needs of intended beneficiaries. Furthermore, the emphasis on quantifiable results can conflict with advocacy, which is a long-term process that is notoriously difficult to plan, control and measure, and can mean that CSOs focus on short-term goals without being afforded the flexibility to respond to either ground-level realities or space for learning and reflection.

- The institutional design of the aid chain is not static and is constantly being renegotiated and reinterpreted. It is crucial that CSOs (both Northern and Southern) and donor staff have room to manoeuvre in their relationships with each other. Northern and Southern CSOs use their agency to strategically respond to pressures within the aid chain to further their interests and to resist donor conditions that are perceived as detrimental to their organizational survival.

Policy messages

The literature review identifies two policy messages:
- Donors (e.g. the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs) should realize more explicitly that the rules embedded in the aid chain potentially have both positive and negative effects on the work of CSOs in the field of advocacy.
- The potentially negative effects of the institutional design of the advocacy aid chain cannot be mitigated by the (potentially) positive effects of the involvement of Northern CSOs and donors (i.e. their added value). Increasing the likelihood that Southern CSOs are able to perform advocacy roles requires both eliminating the potentially negative effects of the aid chain rules and maximizing the added value of Northern CSOs and donors in advocacy.

Relevant literature

Theme 1

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Theme 2

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Theme 3

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Weblink

http://includeplatform.net/new-roles-csos-inclusive-development/enabling-rules-advocacy-kenya/