Rethinking Civil Society in Development: Scales and Situated Hegemonies

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Abstract

The new development agenda formulated through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is rich with issues such as women empowerment, inclusive society, environment, and decent work that have been high on the agenda of civil society actors. However, civil society itself gets only a scant attention among other implementing bodies. We argue for nuanced investigation of civil society in the context of SDGs, and its rethinking in the arena of development research, and propose an approach that pays attention to situated hegemonies at different scales, and engages with empirical complexities in a non-normative tone. We illustrate the proposed agenda by reviewing literature on local organizing, established organizations, and networks and alliances especially in the contexts of South Africa and Tanzania. In conclusion we suggest that paying attention to situated hegemonies at different scales provides a fruitful framework for discussing civil society in both development research and practice in the threshold of new global development era.

Keywords: civil society, development NGOs, social movements, situated hegemony, scalar politics, Tanzania, South Africa

Introduction

In 2015, global leaders agreed upon the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will guide much of the policies, strategies and interventions within international development. These will also shape the power and role of civil society from the global to the local level. To keep up with these developments, in this article we argue for a need to reconsider civil society in development research from the perspectives of scale and situated hegemonies. Scalar politics refer to the multiscalar complexities that characterise global development, which inform how civil society mobilize and organize at different spatialities. With situated hegemonies we mean a variety of taken-for-granted ideas that reproduce inequalities in terms of economic, social, and cultural relationships within and between those spaces.

Civil society has been a key topic in development research. However, its significance has decreased after the heydays following the 'associational revolution' (Salamon, 1994) of late 1980s and the 1990s. Furthermore, the SDGs seem to pay relatively little attention to civil society, and ideas of citizens' mobilization and social movements as agents for development are even more absent. This is surprising when traditional key civil society issues such as women empowerment, inclusive society, environment and decent work are central in the SDGs, and civil society representatives globally have actively participated in their

formulation. In the *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* civil society is mentioned in the section on global partnerships as one of the key means to implement the targets. Civil society actors themselves have assumed, for example, the role of 'localizers' of the SDGs (ACSC, 2016), or those using SDGs as a 'tool for civil society to hold governments and the international community to account' of their implementation (Practical Action, 2016).

The elusive position ascribed to civil society in SDGs can suggest that its role in international development has been mainstreamed and taken for granted. However, in order to be able to think of civil society as an implementer, localizer, or watchdog for SDGs, we have to further explore what civil society contains in different contexts (Glasius et al., 2004), and what kinds of organizing and mobilizing processes take place in the politics of development in a variety of arenas. Civil society actors operate within and across a field of international development that has become increasingly complex. Ideas, policies and strategies travel globally, actors work across local, national, regional and global scales, and national and even local discourses, ideas and practices may reproduce, mediate or contest global hegemonic ideas and development agendas. A revised research agenda on civil society in development research should take seriously the multiscalar politics of civil society organizing, and scrutinize on how these organizing processes reproduce, contest or construct situated hegemonies.

Our need to rethink civil society research emerged from conversations based on our research experiences from South Africa and Tanzania. YYYY (2008) had focused on local social movement activism and community organising, and how these struggles were embedded in processes and relations at the urban, national and global scale. For XXX (2007), civil society referred to the messy world of organizations and their complex relationships with the international aid industry. Yet, in the everyday life of development initiatives, and of organizing and activism, we saw similar realities. People formed groups, advocated for different issues, and employed a variety of livelihood strategies, with or without access to international resources. We observed how social movements and local initiatives evolved into formal organizations often labelled as NGOs, opening up new engagements and alliances while also bringing new tensions and contestations. These commonalities in the everyday experiences were at odds with the persistent division in civil society research between, on the one hand, formal organizations – NGOs – involved in development, and, on the other hand, a focus on more informal actors, networks and movements struggling for social justice (Mitlin

et al., 2007). This divide seemed to constrain our understanding of the multiplicity of formal and informal network and relations within civil society.

In our work in Tanzania and South Africa, we had both engaged, and sought to challenge this dichotomy and explore the complexities and dynamics of civil society organizing. To simplify somewhat, one could say that while civil society research in aid-dependent Tanzania has been biased towards an interest in NGOs and development, the bias in South African civil society research has leaned towards an emphasis on social movement politics and grassroots activism. This, of course, reflects the countries' different historical trajectories and role of civil society in post-colonial and post-apartheid developments. Yet, we contend that these narratives – in themselves perhaps hegemonic - conceal more than they reveal in terms of the actual workings of civil society in both countries

This article is our first step in rethinking a civil society agenda through combining organization and social movement terminologies (Davis et al., 2005; Brown, 2014). As researchers working within these two fields (XXX with organisation theory and YYYY with social movement theories), we think that the relatively limited dialogue between these strands of theory and literature has strengthened the tendencies of treating NGOs, social movements and grassroots organizing as separate, if related entities, rather than exploring their complex, multiscalar and situated dynamics. Innovative combination of the vocabularies in these fields addresses, in a novel way, the social change processes mediated though complex and intertwined processes of organizing and mobilizing (McAdam and Scott 2005, 14). Consequently, we define civil society as a relational space where multiple identities and interests inform organizing and mobilizing around functions such as service delivery and local improvements, as well as contentious politics over issues and grievances that can be local and non-local in scale. Thus, a scalar politics of civil society contains a diversity of actors such as informal groups, established organizations, social movement and networks, involved in multiple struggles over hegemonies.

Literature reviews have criticized civil society's ability to fulfil its promises of social transformation and global solidarity (Banks et al., 2015). In addition, some argue that the ideas of civil society need more contextualisation, and that civil society should not equal NGOs (Obadare, 2014). Different theoretical backgrounds and policy-orientations easily lead to prescriptions of what a real civil society should be, or ideal models of authentic NGOs as representatives of civil society. Rethinking civil society research in connection with the SDGs requires contextualized conceptions of civil society at different scales that avoid such

normative tones. We also need a more nuanced analysis of hegemonic struggles in regard to civil society. At the turn of the Millennium, the hegemony of global neo-liberalism in NGOization, and the counter-hegemonic struggles of alter-globalization movements gained much attention (Carroll and Jarvis, 2015; Gabay, 2011; Mati, 2014). Too often, analyses reduced these dynamics to those between neo-liberal hegemony and a radical counter-hegemonic resistance, paying less attention to how, for instance, neo-liberal ideas are transferred, mediated, re-constructed and contested in multiple ways. The latter requires a more nuanced account of power and spatiality in development (Hart, 2004). Drawing upon the Gramscian notion of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971; Mitlin et al., 2007, Ekers et al., 2013) and scholarship on scalar politics (MacCinnon, 2010; Lawhon and Patel, 2013; Moore, 2008) we suggest an approach that pays attention to politics defined as situated struggles over hegemonies in a multi-scalar context. While the critique of neoliberalism continues to be vital, more detailed contextualised ethnographies on civil society (Mercer, 2002a;b; Igoe and Kelsall, 2005; Hillhorst, 2003) motivate us to delve with the politics of situated hegemonies.

Against this backdrop, it is as important as ever to keep civil society a key subject for development research. Our aim is to suggest a research agenda that explores the heterogeneity of theoretical and practical spheres of civil society organizing and action in the context of and contributions to the SDGs. The remaining article is structured as follows: First, we revisit selected debates on civil society in development in order to locate our agenda, and to point out factors we consider relevant. We then discuss the notions of hegemony and scalar politics in order to position our understanding of power drawing from the Gramscian legacy, especially in methodological terms, and to propose the notion of scale in order to keep the relations between local, national, regional, and global on the agenda. After that, we illustrate the potential substance of the agenda of scales and situated hegemonies in the context of Africa from the point of view of local organizing, established organizations, and networks and alliances. While we focus on Tanzania and South Africa, similar contextualised agenda could be applied in other contexts as well, including the hitherto Northern hemisphere. We conclude with considerations of the implications for development research and practice.

Civil society in development research

Civil society, NGOs and development has been extensively debated in development scholarship over last three decades (for recent reviews see Banks et al., 2015; Schuller and Lewis, 2014; Watkins et al., 2012; Obadare, 2014). We embed our contribution in four key

debates that we consider important to our agenda: the conception of civil society, normativity in civil society research, contextualization of civil society, and analysis of power.

First, the use of the concept of civil society in the development discourse is ambiguous, and therefore, perceiving 'civil society' as 'a means' to implement SDGs is problematic. In the aftermath of East European transformations and the crisis of the developmentalist states in the 1990s, civil society turned from a 'contested concept' of political science to a 'consensual hurrah word' of development policy (Chandhoke, 2007, p. 608). The concept was embraced by both the neoliberal mainstream and alternative agendas, notwithstanding their almost opposite stands toward agency and market economy (Howell and Pearce, 2002). Civil society fitted well with the broader neo-liberal critique of the state, pushed forward through the good governance development agenda (Lazar, 2012). However, the civil society agenda remained technocratic and depoliticized, and subscribed to neo-tocquevillean notions of civil society as a mediating associational field rather than, for example, neo-gramscian idea of civil society as a space for counter-hegemony (Edwards 2004). Later, the applicability of any version of the civil society rooted in certain historical contexts was questioned (Lewis, 2002). We argue that, while it is necessary to pay attention to the heterogeneity of theoretical definitions of civil society, its idea should be captured from the 'actual experiences embedded in diverse realities' (Glasius et al.,2004, p.9).

Second, in investigating the roles of civil society in implementing and monitoring SDGs, we need to move away from considering it as a taken-for-granted positive alternative (see Mercer, 2002a), or from beginning with normative prescriptions about the right forms of civil society. The early research often sketched an idealistic future for civil society (Korten, 1990), or emphasized the positive change brought along with it (Edwards, 1999; Edwards and Sen, 2000). Prescriptions were given on the best possible arrangements of issues such as NGO-state relations, accountability, and volunteerism (Edwards and Hulme, 1995; Hulme and Edwards, 1997; Lewis and Wallace, 2000). In regard to African civil societies, there was a tendency to distinguish between 'noble, authentic and good NGOs' aligned with a 'virtuous model', from the 'bad, opportunistic, self-serving NGOs' more conversant with the 'functional model' of civil society (Opuku-Mensah, 2007, p. 13; Pinkney, 2009, pp. 51-55). Moreover, accounts on how to turn aid relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs embedded in paternalism, power, and dependency into ideal partnerships emerged (Lister, 2000; Fowler, 1998; Contu and Girei, 2014). As a response, calls for non-normative civil society research were articulated (Chandhoke, 2007, p 613; Tvedt, 1998; 2007), and undertaken by the wealth of ethnographies on civil society (Hillhorst, 2003; Schuller and

Lewis, 2014; Ebrahim, 2003). In our view, these contributions showed a favourable way forward in civil society research.

Third, in assuming different roles to civil society in contributing to SDGs, particular attention should be put on different forms of organizing. The key trends in development agendas have contributed to the so-called NGOization of civil society (Choudry and Kapoor, 2013). Especially in development research on civil society in Africa, with noticeable exceptions such as the focus on social movements in South Africa, NGOs have been the main focus (Obadare, 2014). NGOs are important actors operating in civil society, but they provide an insufficient picture of its actual workings. They can provide informative entry points to broader issues being both instruments and sites for resistance within the global trends (Lewis, 2007, p. 375), or to the actual features of civil society in African contexts (Obadare, 2014, p. 2; Fowler, 2012). Despite the visibility of NGOs in formulating and implementing the SDGs, failure to recognise the complex dynamics of civil society may limit the ability to follow up on these agendas. Thus, we suggest a conceptualization of civil society that embraces not only structured NGOs, but also grassroots-organizing, community-based organization, and social movements, and formal as well as informal relations (Obadare, 2014; Tostensen et al., 2001).

Fourth, civil society both speaks to and exercises power, the concept of which has been at the core of development research on civil society. It has discussed, for example, the ways civil society addresses prevalent power relations for either reformist or radical change (Mitlin et al., 2007, p. 1701), or the mechanisms by which civil society organizations reproduce existing power hierarchies by servicing middle-class elites (Chandhoke, 2007). Additionally, power of international aid industry resulting into institutional isomorphism at organizational level (Tvedt, 1998), and de-politicizing effects of discourse/power formations in a Foucauldian sense (Ferguson, 1994; Igoe, 2005) have been pointed out. We suggest further unpacking of how power works in and through state-society relations and across local, urban, national, regional and global scales, by focusing on constructions of substantial legitimacy, or, what Gramsci saw as hegemony (Ballard, 2015). Next, we propose notions of situated hegemony and scale in order to undertake this task.

Hegemony and scale for civil society research

According to Gramsci (1971, p. 57), hegemony as a form of power emerges, not only from economic relationships, but also through 'intellectual and moral leadership' of certain social

group in its efforts to maintain power. It is based more on consent that coercion (ibid., pp. 12-13), and works through language, ideologies, and taken-for-granted ideas circulating in a society. For Gramsci, civil society as a sphere of associations, education and mass media, plays a crucial role in both reproducing existing hegemony and providing space for its contestation. One of the strategies of maintaining hegemony is the gradual recruitment and absorption of leaders of critical groups in order for them to adapt to hegemonic interests (Gramsci, 1971), which is also relevant in contemporary societies. For example, much has been written about the co-optation of antiapartheid leaders and activists into the post-apartheid state after 1994 (Ballard et al., 2006), and on how the disciplinary forces of neoliberal hegemony worked upon the ANC once in government (Peet, 2002). Additionally, Gramsci (1978, pp. 441-462) argued that a key strategy of counter-hegemony was to build alliances between different subaltern groups in order to create a view coherent and strong enough to challenge hegemony. Through mobilization and leadership by so-called organic intellectuals coming from the subaltern groups themselves, it was considered possible to address the fractured *common sense* that often took hegemonic ideas for granted, and develop it into a more coherent perspective able to identify and transform those (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 15-16).

We make a case for the notion of 'situated hegemonies'. This is inspired by Gramsci's methodology of discussing theoretical ideas always in conjunction with certain historical moments and geographical locations, and his understanding of the dynamic and 'spatialized' identities of 'social groups' (Ekers and Loftus, 2013, pp. 17-18; Hall, 1996; Featherstone, 2013, p. 67; Igoe, 2005). Situated hegemonies refer to contextualized, spatio-temporal and multiscalar hegemonies (Kipfer, 2013, p. 87) where groups are consenting to a number of taken-for granted ideas. Despite Gramsci being largely a class theorists (Thomas, 2009), his notions have inspired a wide range of analysis of hegemonies in relation to gender, race, ethnicity and postcolonial relationships (eg. Guha and Spivak, 1988; McNally and Schwarzmantel, 2009; Green, 2011). Such multiple hegemonies have also gained attention in development research on civil society. For instance, Mitlin et al. (2007) analysed how NGOs might reproduce the hegemony of development and economic discourses in contrast of being able to provide alternatives. Igoe (2005) argued that Gramsci's contextualized conceptualization of coercion and consent may provide better understanding of African civil society compared with the neotocquevillean ideas usually held by international donors. Girei (2016) provided a detailed case study on hegemony of global managerialism in Ugandan

NGOs. Drawing on this literature, we suggest examination of multiple hegemonies from the micro-level processes of organizing in their relations to other scales.

Our conceptualisation of scale builds upon two premises. Firstly, scale is not naturally given and static, but a social construct. Yet, although scales such as the local, urban, regional, global are not inherently given, once produced they are material spaces that actors engage with to achieve particular aims. Secondly, scale is a relational concept, meaning that what happens within and across spatial scales is embedded in and related to processes, institutions and actors elsewhere. Multiscalar politics are concerned with how power works in and through the multitude of relations and networks, shaping and reshaping ideas, institutions and practices. Scale is a 'relational, power-laden and contested construction that actors strategically engage with, in order to legitimize or challenge existing power relations' (Leitner et al., 2008, p. 159).

While much attention has been put on multiscalar analyses of governance in development, we argue that we need to explore more explicitly the multiscalar relations and scalar practices within civil society (Moore, 2008). Focus on scalar politics is an attempt to explore how one can transcend classical dilemmas and tensions in collective action such as those between the particular and universal, local and global, and acknowledge the multiple political subject positions that are present in organizing (Haarstad, 2007, p. 70). For instance, one can ask whether the multiplicity of social identities and interests, and the relations between grassroots and NGO actors within networks, is a productive tension (Haarstad, 2007) that allows for diversity and difference, or whether it functions as internal regulation and control that creates new boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (Roy, 2009).

Seeing scalar politics as practices means that we are concerned with 'what people do with scale categories, how they utilize them to construct space and social relations for specific political aims' (Moore, 2008, p. 217). Civil society actors can also perceive of scale as particular spatial imaginary (McFarlane, 2009), and use scale strategically. For instance, the South African Homeless People's Federation engaged with national government around housing policy while, at the same time, it was part of land invasions and other forms of direct action within local communities (YYYY et al., 2003). Lindell (2009) shows how global linkages among informal workers are used strategically by local organizers, also shaping urban governance in Maputo. More recently, researchers have explored how rescaling processes like regionalisation shape civil society organising and action, and how this relates to national and local struggles, as well as global development issues such as human rights and gender (Fioramonti et al., 2014; Godsäter, 2013).

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Situated hegemonies and scales in African civil societies

In this section we illustrate the potential substance of rethinking civil society research through scale and situated hegemonies through examples from Tanzania and South Africa. We pay attention to how civil society emerges as a relational space and a process of organizing shaped by imaginaries and material elements, and both reproducing and contesting a variety of hegemonies. We have structured our discussion in three aspects: local organizing, established organizations, and networks and alliances. These three focus areas reflect, in different ways, the relational and multiscalar nature of civil society politics and organizing; i) how the local and global are imbricated, ii) where and how informal and formal modes of organising across scale interact, and iii) how these multiscalar relations and interactions of informal and formal movements and organizations may enter into networks and alliances across places, spaces and scales. These aspects also illustrate key ways through which power as hegemony works, and is mediated across spatial scales, constructing what we see as situated hegemonies that need to be better understood if we are to unpack the workings of civil society.

Local organizing: the privileged scale of development

Although the international development field has become increasingly complex, local communities inhabited by 'local people' in possession of 'local knowledge' (Green, 2012) have long been the main scale of development institutions' aspired engagement, considered by definition more participatory and democratic than other scales (Brown and Purcell, 2005). 'Local ownership' has long been one of the main legitimacy strategies for development interventions (Mac Ginty, 2015, p. 840), especially for those implemented by civil society organizations. However, the understandings of 'local' in development policy and practice are often based on romanticized dichotomies (Paffenholtz, 2015), theoretical backgrounds (Hughes et al. 2015, p. 818), or policies privileging the local (Lawhon and Patel, 2013, p. 1051).

In parallel with the notion of civil society, the focus on 'local' has served both neoliberal and radical agendas, and thus, has been constructed either as a source of social capital and local liberal democracy, or space for radical democracy and resistance to hegemony (Mohan and Stokke, 2000; Hughes et al., 2015). For interventions, 'local' can be

seen both as a source of effectiveness based on local ownership, or means of emancipation by enabling 'voices from the below' to be heard (Leonarsson and Rudd, 2015, p. 833). In development practice, local often equals with 'community' which can serve as a taken-for-granted myth about locus of authentic development (Guijt and Shah, 1998), to be facilitated by community participation, mobilization, and empowerment by civil society organizations. Various actors mobilise the notion of community for different purposes. in South Africa, for instance a notion of 'community' is both a disciplinary instrument of governance that structure access to services and participation, but also evoked in grassroots mobilization and organizing (Jensen, 2008; Miraftab and Willis, 2005). More generally, for NGO practitioners, community is a category to have a professional relation with (Brown and Green, 2015), often in terms of facilitation or mobilization. Despite their politically correct rhetoric, international organizations often see local as static and traditional sphere, waiting to be developed (Mac Ginty, 2015, p. 841). The discursive perception of 'community' by the NGO staff can entail tensions between community knowledge as appreciated, but at the same time, in need of change through intervention (XXX, 2016).

However, in addition to focusing on theoretical, ideological, and practical construction of 'local' by those intending to intervene in it, we propose understanding the local as a space of everyday practice that is in continuous interaction with other scales (cf. Roberts, 2011). Everyday practice can entail small-scale mobilisation and informal critical capacity without a need for explicit outsider intervention, but nevertheless, within complex relationships and power-resistance circulations between scales (Mac Ginty and Richmont, 2013, p. 720). This understanding guides attention to local agency and its manifestations in different processes of organizing and mobilizing. It also enables analyses of the variety of understandings of 'local' from the actors' perspectives, where the 'local' can materialize in governmental entities such as villages, municipalities, towns, districts, with more or less clear geographical borders, structures, and budgets, or as more informal household, neighbourhood, ethnic group or kinship relations across the country (Kalhström, 1999).

Thus, unpacking the 'local' and community' as both object of and agent for SDG implementation requires a closer look into situated hegemonies. In that effort, rather than thinking in normative dichotomies of 'bad' global hegemony evoking 'good' local resistance, we should explore ideologies, ideas and policies as mediated in and through multiscalar networks, and as imbricated with local social identities. As scale is both imaginary and material, and hegemony both cultural and economic, there are multiple situated hegemonies at stake, simultaneously reproduced and challenged by local politics (Mohan and Stokke,

2000, p. 249; Mercer, 2000b). From a Gramscian point of view, localities might host *common sense*, the uncritical worldview that consents to hegemonies based not only on economic relationships in modern capitalist sense as suggested by the original concept, but also on age, gender, ethnicity, kin, religion, as well as clientelist and neo-patrimonial relations (Hydén, 2013; Igoe, 2003). Consequently, the counterhegemonic action might take place in everyday resistance to multiple hegemonies combining gradual economic and political organising (King, 2015), rather than mobilizing for radical transformation.

Additionally, local organizing can simultaneously address certain hegemonies while reproducing others. In Tanzania, for example, establishing women's groups in Mount Kilimanjaro changed the hegemonies related to gender relations, but reproduced those of class, ethnic groups and levels of income through exclusion of certain groups of women (Mercer, 2002b). The patron-client relations, on their part, reproduce hegemonies in relation to social hierarchies, but at the same time, provide counter-hegemonic platforms vis-á-vis more coercive autocratic state structures or multinational companies (Kahlström, 1999). Similar contestations around the reproduction of unequal gender relations within social movements and women's spaces for insurgent practices have been highlighted in South Africa (cf Pointer, 2004; Miraftab, 2006; Meth, 2010).

Furthermore, local organizing and mobilizing can take place within civil society understood as citizenry. An example from rural village in Mbulu District, Northern Tanzania, illustrates how the international donor discourse translated, without presence of any civil society organizations, into local mobilizing, reclaiming participation in public sphere and challenging the state in Gramscian spirit by local parents who, instead of passively waiting for delivery, started in a novel way, to demand a school from the local authorities basis on the ideas they had learned from good governance programmes implemented by international donor (Snyder 2008).

Organizing processes: establishing structures around shared ideas

If the local emerged as the privileged scale for development interventions, established organizational entities such as NGOs have been prioritized as main recipients of civil society development aid. However, *organizing* is relevant not only to professional NGO sector engaged in service delivery and political advocacy, but also to more fluid modes of social movement organizing and grassroots struggles. We understand these not as separate but rather different forms or moments in the processes of social organizing, ranging from the

micro-processes of forming structured entities to the historical experiences of political mobilizing. For example in Tanzania, the flourishing of social mobilizing in the times of independence struggles was later co-opted by the state and party structures until the introduction of multi-party democracy in mid-1990s, when the civil society sector formation was much influenced by international development (Pinkney, 2009, p. 29; Gibbon, 2001). In contrast, in South Africa, a strong tradition of social organizing in anti-apartheid movement with international proliferation provided quite different terrain and models for social mobilizing after 1994. The 'new' wave of grassroots organizing in the early 2000s was also quickly linked, and interpreted to be embedded within, the struggle against global hegemony of neoliberalism (Ballard et al., 2006). Such historical trajectories affect the forms and types of organizations established at different scales.

First, establishing organizations in the 'modern' sense entail definition of shared rules the members are expected to follow (Blau and Scott, 1962; Shafritz and Ott, 2001, p.208). Parallel to formal organization there is always an informal one, influenced by external factors such as organizational environments and personal background of the members (ibid.). Thus, one can expect a continuum between established organization and the surrounding social architecture embedded in existing hegemonies. For example, NGO leadership can be occupied by local elites who distribute organizational resources along their neo-patrimonial lines (Igoe, 2003), or use organization to strengthen their privileged status in society (Mercer, 2002b). The positions can be distributed exclusively among a single family, ethnic group or elite, and NGOs can function merely as a livelihood strategy for the founder members with consent from the social environment. At the same time, such educated and resourceful individuals might play a significant role in making spaces, mediating and mobilizing among those with less-privileged positions. Social movements, on their part, can be established around a charismatic leader, at times well-positioned in the social architecture, and entail struggles over internal legitimacy and of inclusion and exclusion (Esteves, 2008).

Second, building a formal organization often results into its registration. In order to achieve required structures and rules, groups seek advice from existing models in their environments. In Tanzania in the 1990s, the models for organizational structures in newly established 'NGOs' reflected the hitherto legal entities such as societies, trustees, companies, and sports associations. Thus, the positions such as 'founding members' for life, members, secretary, or treasurer were practices familiar already in the colonial era (Bissell, 1999), later used in co-operatives (Peter, 2009), and party-affiliated local women's groups (Mercer, 2002b). These historically situated formal models affect the internal hegemonies shown in so-

called 'founder-member syndrome' and lack of internal democracy, consented by the wider membership (Peter, 2009, pp.315-316). Similar grievances are evident in South Africa, where community activists and networks clashed over the level of institutionalization – for instance whether they should register as a non-profit organisation in order to access local state support - and the role of NGOs in supporting and mediating voices of the urban poor (YYYY, 2008, Dawson and Sinwell, 2012). Thus, the ways the historically contextualised organizational forms contribute to situated hegemonies should be part of the research agenda.

Third, hegemonies affect the ways in which organizations gain legitimacy in their environments at different scales (Scott, 2008). A formal legitimacy is mostly gained vis-á-vis the state through registration. In South Africa, registering as a non-profit organization is a challenging and contested process for community-based organizations, even if the local state increasingly refuses to accept their legitimacy if not registered (YYYY, 2008). Beneficiaries, often equal to members, are an additional significant source of legitimacy for civil society organizations. The members easily perceive too little benefit, or the beneficiaries conceive their needs not addressed by organizations (Igoe, 2003; Mercer, 2002b). An additional important arena for legitimacy of development organizations is the international organizational field (Powell and DiMaggio, 1983). This field provides both imaginary and materialised scale to gain legitimacy as 'real development NGOs' and get access to its funding channels. Legitimacy towards this field requires consenting to the hegemonic practices and vocabularies (Tvedt, 1998), focusing on the globally defined themes. The legitimacy through consenting to hegemonic institutionalised forms might lead to conceptual 'mimicking' of the donors by NGOs (Mutua, 2009, p. 24), or social movements' eagerness to benefit from the global institutions while simultaneously being critical of them (Melber, 2014, p. 1089).

The situated hegemonies related to autonomy and access to external resources, and struggles over legitimacy are at the core of dynamics of civil society support. The potential access to external funding might trigger 'strategies of extraversion' of elites (Bayart, 1993; Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p. 22) and, thus consolidating local hegemonies. Moreover, the practices tied to these resources, such as the models of project management, monitoring and evaluation required by the Northern collaborators are, on their part, main means to reproduce donor hegemonies (Igoe, 2003; Dar, 2014; Girei, 2016; Mueller-Hirth, 2012; Claeyé and Jackson, 2012). Simultaneously, they might offer pockets of counter-hegemonic transformation (cf. Mayo, 2003, p. 43). This might happen where donor demands organizations to pay attention to grassroots democracy in parallel with neo-patrionalism

(Igoe, 2003, p. 867), exercise democratic principles in organizational decision-making (Robinson and Friedman, 2007), or use their relative strength to challenge authoritarian states (Pinkney, 2009). Hegemonies related to legitimacy become extremely relevant in the processes of building alliances and networks.

Networks and alliances

There are tendencies to assume, a priori, a tension between a hegemonic and top-down position of NGOs while grassroots and social movements are counter hegemonic struggles against these powerful forces. To challenge this simple binary, we need to pay attention to how scalar politics of civil society shape situated hegemonies and contestations. In scalar politics of civil society, the question of alliance-building in a multiscalar register is essential. We need to examine the workings and agency of civil society actors in order to understand both drivers and barriers to multiscalar politics for societal change.

Class, race, gender and other identities shape multiple grievances and modes of organising. Building alliances between professional NGOs and movements of the urban poor, for instance, may be difficult to the extent that NGOs are perceived to represent middle class perspectives and interests (Thompson and Tapscott, 2010; Dawson and Sinwell, 2012). What role does NGOs play in such efforts given different regulatory regimes, levels of formalization, professionalization, capacity and power? NGOs are often better placed at working within and across different spatial scales; many have the capacity to address national, regional and global issues. Grassroots struggles, in contrast, may well be seen as resistance against neo-liberal globalisation, linking the local and the global, but nevertheless struggle to scale up their struggles to urban, national and even global scales. In some cases, they depend upon formal and professional NGOs to be able to engage with struggles elsewhere. In other cases, informal networks might link local groups and struggles in more subtle but important ways that perhaps escape the attention of researchers of civil society organizations.

In South Africa, a key challenge has been the asymmetrical power relations between community organising and social movements, and the middle-class NGO sector and academics sympathetic to the struggles of the urban and the rural poor (Dawson and Sinwell, 2012). For NGOs, it is not sufficient to be more inclusive, engaging or participatory; it is also a question of changing mind-sets and cultures of NGOs in these relations, in order for them to be legitimate, accountable and representative. At the same time, such transformations might

be difficult when NGOs are enmeshed in a regulatory aid regime - itself multiscalar - where they remain more accountable to their donors than those whom they are supposedly working with and for. The difficulties to build and sustain broader networks reflect that alliances and networks across different types of organizing are challenging since they often relate very differently to the deeper social structures of state and capitalism (Godsäter, 2013). For instance, Lawhon and Patel (2013) argue that the turn to the local as a privileged scalar frame may lead to a displaced action delinked from the broader structures that must be targeted if sustainability is to be realized.

Bebbington et al (2010) observe that social movements do not often mobilize around poverty per se, but rather focus on injustice and inequality issues. NGOs might also see their work as part of similar struggles, but regulated by donor funding for poverty interventions or other agendas that regulate financial support. However, as they (ibid.) also argue, analytically it is difficult to reduce NGOs merely as sympathizers of movements; even in movements of the poor. Similarly, social movements always involve multiple actors, identities and different interests that are necessarily negotiated (Leitner et al., 2008). There are examples of alliances, such as the global movement Slum dwellers International (SDI) that have managed to negotiate some of these tensions. However, such alliance building raise challenging questions of legitimacy, voice, representation and participation in organizing across binaries of informal-formal, grassroots-professional and challenges with gender, race, class and other identities that shape organizing dynamics (cf McFarlane, 2009; Roy, 2009). These are key dimensions in the complex and messy ways through which hegemonic and counter hegemonic powers play out across spatial scales.

Conclusion

The task of this article was to rearticulate the need for research on civil society in the era of SDGs. Notwithstanding its relative absence in the SDGs, civil society consisting of organising and mobilising continues to be important in their implementation, localization and follow-up, and thus, invites rethinking of civil society in the field of development research as well. While positioning our agenda within previous development research, we suggested four main principles for researching civil society in the contemporary development era. First, whilst it is important to delve in theoretical debates of the concept itself, it is even more relevant to search for contextualised and lived experiences of civil societies at different scales. Second, as development research tends to have normative agendas on how different

social phenomena, such as civil society, should be arranged, an investigation of civil society's roles, and absences, in regard to SDGs, needs an analytical rather than normative agenda. Third, while there is a tendency to quite firmly distinguish between established NGOs and more fluid grassroots and social movement mobilizing, we suggest embracing both literatures in an attempt to capture the dynamics of social organizing in its different moments and locations. Fourth, conceiving the global challenges articulated in the SDGs as political rather than technical, we argue that multiscalar politics and struggles over hegemonies should be at the core of the research agenda.

To build further research on the four above-mentioned principles, we suggested use of the notions of scale and hegemony, and sketched an agenda of multiscalar analysis of situated hegemonies. We elaborated our idea through discussing scalar politics from three perspectives: local community organizing, established NGOs and movements, and networks and alliances. Based on literature and our own research on civil society in Tanzania and South Africa, we illustrated how a wide variety of situated economic and social hegemonies intertwine within and across scales, how organizing and mobilizing can simultaneously reproduce some hegemonies while countering others, and how they can provide spaces for transformation of some while consolidating other taken-for-granted hierarchies.

While our own empirical investigation on the basis of this agenda is yet to be realized, we draw conclusions relevant for research agendas and development practice. First, we suggest that more profound work needs to be done in combining the traditions of organization and social movement studies in the context of development research. In quite dichotomizing terms, some NGOs are often attached to reproduction of hegemony, and civil society mobilizing is by definition action that challenges it. Second, our methodological conclusion argues for a contextualised research which needs close engagement with everyday organizing processes. This resonates with Roberts' (2011) notion of 'everyday' understood as those everyday acts individuals take in an effort to lead their life within continuous encounters. It also implies readiness to identify, and be surprised by, multiple hegemonies rather than being theoretically anchored in a ready-made conceptualization of certain power constellations, be it global neo-liberalism, international development discourse, neopatrionalism, or local gender inequality. All in all, a more careful contextual consideration of how different organizational bodies across scales take stand towards a variety of issues, and of the ways organization processes might be counter-hegemonic in one aspect, while simultaneously reproduce hegemony in others, is required. In order to avoid romanticizing the 'local' (Mohan and Stokke, 2000, p. 249) or assuming homogenous 'collective values' (Green, 2000.

p. 81) in designing development interventions, sensitivity to situated hegemonies is crucial. In the development field, the main focus of researchers and practitioners tends to be on how civil society actors can participate in governance, but less on the changing dynamics and power relations within those actors, as proposed in this article.

The implementation, localization, and monitoring of SDGs requires, without doubt, civil society activities. However, we need nuanced and contextualised understanding of civil societies. Even if we here focused on Tanzania and South Africa, a similar agenda can be used in other parts of the world as well, including global civil society networks, and civil societies in global North. The prevalent situated hegemonies might be different in other contexts, but the relevance of their identification remains. In the same line, we should also explore hegemonies related to the SDGs themselves, now consented largely by international community, and, as academics, allow the empirical realities and theorizing in different parts of the world challenge the international goals as well as the very concept of civil society.

Acknowledgments

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