

Introduction

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have had an increasing and dominating influence on development processes within countries seeking to become more advanced economically and socially, that is, within developing countries. NGOs are so closely intertwined with and involved in development that they are practically synonymous with the concept of development.¹ Not surprisingly, then, NGOs are the premier focal point for analyzing most aspects of development, from the fit between development epistemologies and praxis, or how development theories translate to organizational structures and programs, to the dynamics of the confluence of various cultural perspectives on economic, political, and social functions and behaviors.

How crucial and involved are NGOs in the lives of the people of developing nations? Most obviously, NGOs, whose operating foundation relies on voluntary and philanthropic activities, provide education, health, social services, money, and other tangible means to people excluded from existing market systems and the state. NGOs also shape and formulate local, national, and international policies. More specifically, NGOs deal with the social consequences of unemployment, which include high incidences of poverty, ill health, death, demoralization, and strained family relations, by promoting social investment in human capital through educational systems and welfare to poor people.

Yet beyond the well-intentioned work of NGOs and its contributors and workers, some consequences have been overlooked or not understood. These missing histories and perspectives of analyses not only enrich facets of the tale of a development-scape, but they are crucial to the lives of people affected by development processes. Hence, my presentation of the development-scape of Bangladesh, as seen through the lens of relevant NGOs, not only offers a historical perspective on the official, dominating stances of development, but I also include the stories of those for whom hidden aspects of their lives have been affected by NGO activity, whose societies have been inverted, and of others who have played quiet roles in affecting the course of development activities. This story begins here with an overview of theoretical perspectives regarding development.

The concept of development is of European origin (Haque 1999), as are NGOs. The term *NGO* was first coined in Article 71 of the United Nations Charter in 1945 (Chang 2005, 442) to describe agencies that would stand separately from governments and act as states' conscience by offering a moral critique of state policy and action. The classification of NGOs is difficult because they include a broad and contradictory array of diverse organizations (Leve and Karim 2001, 53). NGOs, by definition, are voluntary organizations. NGOs from a Eurocentric perspective are the nongovernmental organizations that work for and with the poor, but in North America NGOs are also known as private voluntary development organizations (PVDO). A review of Anglophone literatures on NGOs confirms that most of the studies favor a normative approach underpinned by liberal democratic assumptions (Mercer 2002). The organizations' concentration on projects and beneficiaries has resulted in an explicitly normative interpretation of NGO ideology (Goonatilake 2006, 24).

Whereas development literature tends not to distinguish between the ideology and function of NGOs at the level of developed countries from those of developing countries, such that NGOs assume a monolithic, undifferentiated façade, in this book I expose the frequent disconnect between those levels. I use the term *NGO* to define agencies that receive foreign aid and donations from Western states and international agencies. In most cases, NGOs in developing countries depend on foreign funds to carry

out poverty-centric activities. Some exceptions are traditional charity, cultural, sports organizations, and the like.

As a part of their comprehensive interventions, NGOs insinuate themselves into development discourse as influential organizational agents of change. Usually, any discussion of NGOs and voluntary organizations results in the idea and definition that all NGOs spring from same ground and similar conditions. There are two reasons for such an uncritical view of development: First, the theories on NGOs are largely framed within the experience of first world nations;² and second, the first world theories are transferred and applied uncritically to the developing countries to capture and define the NGO phenomenon.

European and North American scholars continue to debate on the origins of the NGOs. U.S. scholars think that the origin of NGOs is closely related to the progress of democracy. They refer to the role of voluntary associations in a liberal and democratic society by citing Alexis de Tocqueville's observation of this American character in his *Democracy in America* (1835). Thus, to Americans NGOs are essential ingredients of a civil and liberal society. European scholars sharply disagree in that they emphasize the historical importance of NGOs in a conservative political scenario. In their view, NGOs served the narrow conservative goals of the nineteenth century. They relate the roots of NGOs to the influential *Wichern*, Protestant Welfare Associations, which were the charity organizations and worked as the "armed daughter of the church" for combating atheism and socialism (Anheier and Seibel 1990, 8).

The coincidental origin of NGOs in the womb of Western capitalism has naturally contributed to the formation of NGO theories, which have reflected the changing nature of capitalism itself. As David C Korten observes, "[A]n organisation cannot have a meaningful development *strategy* without a development theory" (Korten 1990, 114). NGO theories began to crystallize in the beginning of 1970s, and by the end of 1990s several theories emerged. One theory is rooted in the failure of markets and governments to meet the challenges faced by the poor. American microeconomic schools emphasized a market failure theory. They viewed the third sector (e.g., NGOs) as either a combination of market and state failures within the framework of institutional

choices, or as an institutional option to reduce transaction costs (Seibel and Anheier 1990, 13). Market failure theory stresses the failure of both the market and government to meet the demand for the kinds of activities voluntary agencies provide (Smillie and Helmich 1993, 16).

Another theory centers on the voluntarism of NGOs. The origin of voluntarism is rooted in the political behavior of development agencies as all altruistic intentions in a world of conflicting interests depend on political choices (Lissner 1977). Importantly, the importance and dependency of NGOs increases with the failure of voluntary philanthropy ethos of the state personnel (Lindenmeier 2008). A weak voluntary ethic allows the state to bypass what might have been a larger nonprofit sector. Weak voluntarism in pursuit of philanthropic activities on the part of the population fails to create sufficient pressure on the state agencies to provide a safety net for people in distress. Although the state may be uninvolved where volunteerism is weak, conscientious and philanthropic persons have organized on the basis of voluntary cooperation and to nurture a positive spirit for giving efforts to promote the welfare of the people in need. The growth of voluntary organizations is the outcome of long-standing traditions in religious organizations and churches (Anheier and Seibel 1990, 11).

A third theory stresses the organizational culture in plural societies where voluntary action does or does not develop. The voluntary associations commonly act as an intermediary between their members and government in the government's decision making and policy formation (Smillie and Helmich 1993, 16). NGOs help ensure that no single interest or interest group prevails over others on a given issue. In the Scandinavian model of corporatism, voluntary organizations work together with the state to develop a consensual approach to policy and governance (*ibid.*, 17). The basis of volunteerism in plural societies originated particularly in Scandinavian countries, Austria, Germany, and France, where cooperative movements produced a well-developed system of cooperative enterprises (Seibel and Anheier 1990, 11).

A fourth theory views an NGO as an organization of voluntary groups that employ a paid staff to deliver services to those in severe social need (Billis 1989, 1). Among those using an organization analytical approach is Peter F. Drucker (1992), who focuses on internal

management dynamics based on organizational parameters such as the defined mission, ideas of leadership, access to resources, marketing strategies, goals, personnel development, decision-making processes, and the like. Alan Fowler (1997) gives the organizational theory approach a global dimension. He considers NGOs as a part of “the aid system” (Fowler 1997, 3) that operates as a program of international development assistance. More specifically, Fowler assumes that financial and expertise inputs from Northern-donor countries can accelerate and direct change in the poorer countries of the world, as in the South.

An important dimension of organizational approaches supposes an “accountability gap” (Salamon and Anheier 1999, 9), whereby NGOs, while advancing the causes of poor, had not been accountable for their activities and the consequences affecting the poor. Eventually, however, NGO accountability became an integral component of organizational approaches, in that they tried to address complex questions, such as, What roles are valid for NGOs to play?; Which responsibilities should be clearly articulated as part of these roles?; To whom should NGOs be accountable?; and Whom do NGOs represent (Jordan and Tuijl 2006)? Patrick Kilby (2011) offers another organizational aspect that categorizes NGOs based on the values they promote. In the first of his four value categories, he points out that NGOs promote a certain philosophy or worldview—a “*Weltanschauung*.” In second category, NGOs represent temporal values with immediate concerns, such as humanitarian relief, human rights, and individual autonomy. In the third category, NGOs deal with terminal values with a final aim, such as the end of and relief from poverty. The last category of NGO value measures focuses on organizational values of, for example, honesty, integrity, and accountability (Kilby 2011, 8–9).

David Korten (1990, 113–28) provides an evolutionary theory on the role of NGOs that offers a generational perspective, whereby he conceives NGO evolution as a linear process and describes it in terms of “four generations.” In its first generation, or incarnation, an NGO aims to deliver services for “relief and welfare”; in the second generation the NGOs carry out “community development” activities; in the third generation they promote “sustainable system development”; and in the fourth generation NGOs transform into “people’s movements.” The four stages of the linear

model, according to Jeffrey Avina, (1993), mark the “start-up, expansion, consolidation and close-out” phases. However, these evolutionary notions are inadequate for explaining the complex growth of NGOs in developing countries, on two grounds: first, each country has its own unique NGO history, so it is difficult to generalize and establish a common pattern; and second, NGOs exhibit different organizational characteristics and growth cycles at different phases of their development.

The ways in which NGOs aspire to grow within the Western capitalist ethos invoke a radical, Marxist theory on the rise of NGOs. NGOs are increasingly viewed as agents of neoliberalism or imperialism (Funk 2006; Kamat 2004; Hearn 2007). Marxists argue that the conditionality of capitalist funding prompted the phenomenal rise of NGOs in the wake of communist appeals for structural changes in society. Capitalist promotion of the NGO movement aimed at defusing the communists’ seductive ideological rhetoric of economic equality, and as a result NGOs were considered as the “fifth column” of imperialism by Marxists (Mokammel 1987). To them, NGOs, as agents of imperialism, transformed to produce an image of themselves as agents of apolitical organizations. Marxists view NGO objectives as a means to defuse, contain, and understand conflict as a strategy for increasing degrees of confidence in conflict management in the South by the North, as did the CIA in its sponsored Project Camelot in Latin America and as did the Asian American Institute of Free Labor in South Asia.

Marxists, like neo-corporatist functionalists, argue that NGOs offer a buffer zone between the state and society and mitigate social tensions and political conflicts inherent in capitalism. These conflicts result not only in the failure of markets and states to resolve problems, but families also recognize the incapacity and inability of these societal pillars to integrate individuals into society (Seibel and Anheier 1990, 14). The Marxist argument is that the relative loss of public welfare and governments’ incapacity to satisfy the increased demands for public goods would lead to crises of governance. Overall, NGOs were successful in initiating a process of “anti-statism,” which was the ideological transit ticket from class politics to community development, from Marxism to NGOs (Petras 1997). This transformative ability of NGOs—as long as the organizations have proper financial and ideological support from

capitalist donors—has succeeded in giving a human face to the otherwise exploitative face of capitalism. Thus, capitalism appears to be tolerable and an effective means of dissuading the rise of leftist movements in developing countries.

Apart from Marx's historical, dialectical materialism—theoretical explanations, a political economy approach explains NGO practices in terms of both its ideals and practices. In pursuit of their goals, NGOs enter into a variety of relationships with other institutional actors with diverse ideologies and operations, such as with state institutions and private businesses. These arrangements can account for the often-uneven distribution of resources and power. Furthermore, from this perspective, NGOs have been an integral component in complex, continuously evolving and ongoing processes of state formation (Fernando 2011, 22). Because NGOs have been an integral part in the building and history of some nations, the political economy perspective, while incorporating crucial aspects of NGO function, has often concealed more than it has revealed about the reality of NGOs and their impact on state formation because of NGOs' role in concentrating and legitimizing states' power (Fernando 2011, 43).

The model for development that came to dominate restructuring endeavors following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 sought to define NGOs through a lens of democratic governance with a neoliberal market philosophy. NGOs became a part of civil society and worked from a three-axes—state, market, and civil society—framework (Fowler and Malunga 2010, Fowler 1997, 21–23, Mannan 2005). In the first axis, the government, in its responsibility and dictates to manage the state and operate more efficiently, oversees policies intended to assist and regulate the competition in the market economy affecting agriculture and private producers (Fara and Coghill 2005). The second, or market axis adheres to the rules of a competitive market with the free circulation of commodities and with private entrepreneurs controlling the economic realm. In the third axis, civil society is distinguishable from the market and state and fosters a vibrant world of symbols and solidarities (Cohen and Arato 1992) and places importance on private rights and individual initiatives (Archer 1994, 7). Over the past two decades, NGOs have “relocated” within the concept of civil society (Fowler and Malunga 2010, 1). Although in this model the

boundaries of state, market, and civil society are well demarcated and properly balanced through “a sort of normative equilibrium” (Chatterjee 1998, 66), the expanding role of NGOs’ engaging with market forces in ways that link micro to macro forces in a coherent way (Edwards et.al. 2000, 4) is shifting the emphases of the model. While the expanding role of NGOs complements the business sector, it also contributes to the shrinking of focus on the public sector and the role of state (Yaziji and Doh 2009, 7–8, 15–32).

In age of globalization, NGOs became a part of the geopolitical order. NGOs exert significant influence in creating new local and transnational partnerships that are profoundly gendered. Bernal and Grewal (2014) explain that “the NGO emerged as a feminist form for representing women’s interests that were not or could not be easily contained or represented through official logics or institutional frameworks” (Bernal and Grewal 2014, 8). They state further that in the process of representing women, NGOs have not only become sites of feminist struggles, they have constructed new categories of women and their activities (Bernal and Grewal 2014, 11).

The Development-scape and Global Policy Language

A current understanding of NGOs holds that they were the outcome of a global ideological struggle between capitalism and socialism that started with the end of World War II. NGOs have experienced complicated global processes, where factors such as international ideological trends, donor policies, and NGO agendas in national, international, historical, and cultural conditions interacted in complex ways. To understand the role of NGOs in the development process, one has to go beyond the assumption that an NGO in a developing country functions as a mere reflection of donor interventions and to consider it further as an outcome of international and national development processes (Tvedt 1998, 3).

Within the global framework of development, there is a complex link of funding agencies in the West to NGOs in the South. The connection between the West and South occurs through a complex global development bureaucracy (Dar and Cooke 2008). The NGOs in the South are an extension of Western ideology and

bureaucracy. The UN System of National Accounts considers an organization that receives more than 50 percent of its income from a governmental source to be effectively a part of government. In this sense, most development NGOs in developing countries that receive funds from bilateral donors' institutions, multilateral organizations, and International NGOs should arguably not be recognized as NGOs at all, but rather as donor government's institutions (Tvedt 1998, 14). Based on its funding sources, a NGO is a composite or representative of multiple, mostly exogenous government sources, yet it operates under an almost monolithic Western mindset, much like an international corporation.

The global development bureaucracy operates primarily through four institutions: multilateral agencies (e.g., UN, World Bank), bilateral agencies (e.g., USAID, DFID), international NGOs (e.g., CARE, OECD), and private consulting firms (Nolan 2002, 36–41). In the context of global development, international NGOs in particular adopted a posture of global civil society that operates with increasing influence alongside multiple partner NGOs in the South. The partnership between the West and South forms a fluid intermediate civil society, which operates on a global scale beyond national boundaries (Mannan 2010a, 225). This global civil society has its own “scholars, consultants, activists, and policy analysts that influence policy making in national governments, international agencies, and nongovernmental organizations” (Jenkins 2002, 250). The global civil society takes shape by incorporating Western civil societies, intermediate civil society, and NGOs into its framework. International agencies, donors, and lenders have turned their attention to the idea of civil society in order to bypass the state and directly assist NGOs.

Overall, the global development bureaucracy as world employers has engendered three stereotypes of the development worker: mercenary, missionary, and misfit (Stirrat 2008). Mercenaries, also known as “development professionals,” are those who work permanently for major international development banks or for multilateral and bilateral official agencies, or are consultants hired by these and other agencies on a fixed-term basis. This stereotype further depicts these development professionals as being interested simply in the material benefits they gain from working in the aid industry. They have no commitment to eradicating poverty, but

simply work to further their own self-interest. As their designation suggests, they are motivated solely by self-interest and not by a higher morality (ibid., 407). The missionary label applies to professionals that work for the multilateral and bilateral agencies or are employed by commercial consultancy companies. The stereotype of a missionary refers to the NGO worker that has a world of commitment, enthusiasm, and verve. Their fervor, however, is not for the world of executive lounges, expensive hotels, and air-conditioned vehicles, but rather for meeting directly and identifying with the “real people.” In this sector of the development world, people are motivated not by money but by a personal moral commitment. (ibid., 411–12). The misfits are those who enter into the world of development because they are misfits in their home country and their involvement in the world of development as expatriates gives them a form of escape (Stirrat 2008, 418). These development professionals are interwoven vignettes within the development industry (Altaf 2011).

The development professionals intend to bring about social transformation and change in the developing countries. Social transformation in the age of globalization—specifically, the spurring of social, cultural, and political changes in developing countries—is articulated in terms of synthesis and interaction between a global cultural flow from the West and the local culture of developing countries. A way to conceptualize NGOs is to consider them as a part of a global cultural flow embedded in globalization. This global cultural flow has five dimensions. First, there are *ethno-scapes* produced by flows of people, including tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, and migrant workers. Second, there are *techno-scapes*, the machinery and industrial plant flows produced by multinational and national corporations and government agencies. Third, there are *finance-scapes*, produced by the rapid flow of money in the currency markets and stock exchanges around the world. Fourth, there are *media-scapes*, the repertoires of images and information, the flows that are produced and distributed by newspapers, magazines, television, and film. Fifth, there are *ideo-scapes*, linked to the flow of images that are associated with state or counterstate movement ideologies and comprised of elements of the Western Enlightenment worldview—images of democracy, freedom, welfare, rights, and the like (Appadurai 1990a).

Although disjuncture exists between these cultural flows, states, donors, multinational corporations, agencies, interest groups, and other stakeholders attempt, with varying degrees of success relative to their power resources, to manipulate and channel (close or open) the cultural boundaries of other peoples to have them conform to these flows. Appadurai's broad, yet discrete, categories of cultural flows mentioned above can be summarized for developing shared meaning within the sphere of development. Hence, I coined the term *development-scape*³ (Mannan 2010b, 23) as a framing device to signify all the concepts, energies, and ramifications encompassed in the activity of global, economic, and social development. Development-scape refers to the process of shaping the culture of Southern NGOs through the philosophies of many Western agencies and donors. These donors and agencies provide financial, as well as material resources, and agendas and theories to NGOs, which in turn, seek to translate these into practice. In this sense, development is a multistranded process that takes place in multiple sites. Tension is evident in development in that each strand may complement or contradict other strands, resulting in the production of opposing interpretations and meanings, and the hybridity may also yield conflict, cooperation, or consensus among various sites. The outcome can be a conflict of values between NGOs and wider society.

A major element that informs and transforms the development-scape is Global Policy Language (GPL), an exclusive confluence of concepts and discourse developed by a complex, collective endeavor (Arce and Fisher 2003; Mawdsley et.al 2002) that is more specifically a product of the interaction of global development bureaucracy. GPL encompasses development policies, models, and strategies; most aspects of projects, programs, formal and informal practices; the conceptual repertoire of international development and public policy that provides the architecture through which the effects of aid can be programmed and projected through scalable concepts applicable at micro or macro levels of imagination and analysis (Green 2012, 45). Under the influence of GPL, despite diverse social, cultural, political, and economic settings around the world, NGOs frequently seek to talk the same language and follow similar development agendas (Mawdsley et.al 2002, 1). GPL seeks consensus and equality in shaping its assumptions (Arce and

Fisher 2003, 74). GPL is neither value free nor is it easily transparent (Fernando 2011, 5). However, there are other discourses of development that contradict GPL's exclusivity. Reaction to GPL outside of its sphere of acceptance can produce counterdiscourses that dispute and disrupt standing points of view.

Investigating globalization and development through a "development-scape" opens two important dimensions: First, an understanding of the reality of the development-scape requires scrutiny of the familial reciprocity of varied and interconnected global agents of power that are, or pass through, the sieve of global development bureaucracy and management to encompass local culture in developing countries. The development agencies and NGOs play a critical role in translating GPL into programs and projects to be implemented among poor men and women. In the process, NGOs produce their own version of universalism or filtered narratives embedded in an idea of "negative orientalism" (Baumann 2004) to construct a "reverse reality" (Kabeer 1994) of women in relation to patriarchal men and culture. The filtered narratives as GPL are then used to develop programs and projects to ensure the participation of the poor, but which are also responsible for unintended consequences in development.

The second dimension of investigation in a development-scape examines how each strand of the multistranded processes of development complements or contradicts the others as they manifest in multiple sites and encompass multisited phenomenon (Mannan 2010b). These multiple strands manifest in sites that have been paragons of parochialism embroiled in combating change imposed by foreign forces, but the strands initiated on the development-scape glue disparate forces together by entwining, diverse ideologies (Western, Bengali, Christian, Islamic), institutions (states, donors, markets, NGOs, civil societies), and more local constituents (women, families, communities, culture, agencies). At times these forces complement and cooperate with each other, and at other times they result in contests and conflicts. Overall, however, the forces of development are transforming and create new orders through a profoundly contradictory set of processes. So, viewing development through the construct of a development-scape not only offers further understanding of the processes of change and of

the new orders created by them, but it also emphasizes a research focused on the multifaceted, interrelated, entwined dimensions of development promotion and execution and on its predicted and unforeseen impacts on target recipients.

I have thus far identified six interrelated elements of GPL. First, GPL shapes its assumptions about development as it seeks to build consensus and equality among the poor in overpopulated developing countries. Second, GPL promotes an economic gospel that assumes that economic growth benefits humankind, and that the greater the growth, the more everyone benefits (Perkins 2005, xii). Third, GPL promotes transcultural, or universal, values, such as gender and human rights, livelihoods, good governance, empowerment through microcredit and other means and these concepts contribute to shape the official discourse of NGOs, which seeks to portray them as a positive force for alleviating poverty in the third world. In GPL these values are not negotiable (Marsden 1994a, 35). Fourth, it has unintended, negative repercussions on society's most vulnerable members, such as the poor, illiterate women, and subsistence farmers. Once the development-scape construction is complete, NGOs then, through various projects, treat unintended casualties of the process—also known as “abnormalities” (Escobar 2005) because they do not fit the predicted outcome. Fifth, GPL also conceptualizes, articulates, and reflects the experiences, failures, or successes of development projects and poverty alleviation processes for further active experimentation as it revises and produces new ideas and theories (Chamber 2005; Mannan 2010b, 75–116). Finally, GPL attempts to construct the history of underprivileged poor women, who have consistently ranked low on the scale of development progress by which societies are mapped (Tucker 1999, 8). Many development pundits speculate that people in non-Western societies exist without history in diminished culture (Mannan 2010b, 360).

Hybrid Culture

Development agencies and NGOs in development-scape carve out spaces to construct sites in developing countries within which

NGOs represent the West against the society, people, culture, community. These spaces provide scope both for the expansion of Western influence over local and indigenous culture and the gradual Westernization of the developing countries. Despite the rhetoric of participation with local community, NGOs made effort to create space with GPL “to promote greater equity through development aid, done in the name of empty world morality to make the commodities of technical and industrial productions available also to the poor populations of the world” (Barth 1996, 27). In this space, the global cultural flows and processes operate through NGOs in a complex way. NGOs are entangled with international ideological trends, donor policies and NGO agendas in national, international, historical, and cultural conditions. NGOs employ GPL that evinces its philosophy of development that actually contradicts its theoretical and practical intentions at times; that is, when various global cultural flows pass through the sieve of NGOs, hybridity occurs as the filtered flows encompass local culture. This hybridity manifests clearly in the context of gender issues and visibility of women in development discourse, where counterproductive consequences arise causing identity, moral, and community crises.

The synthesis, antithesis, and synergy of two contexts that is the West and developing countries and many forms in between produce a neat result of the hybridity. For example, when projects are implemented, interactions take place between Western values of equality and Bangladeshi values of hierarchy. They interfere with the hierarchical values and the indigenous knowledge of people to produce many forms of new culture, some of which may be termed as “hybrid culture.” Hybrid culture is a “product of modern and traditional cultural practices and the many forms in between” (Escobar 1995, 52). Hybridity involves the mixing together of previously discrete cultural elements to create new meanings and identities (Barker 2004, 89). It creates a connection between two cultural realities “that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha 1994, 4). Hybrid culture results from two processes. First, when NGOs adopt global policy language, this may result in syncretism between indigenous hierarchical cultural norms and nuances and the Western ideas of equality and rights. Second, the global policy can be at odds with local understanding, so conflicts arise as intentions differ (Arce and

Fisher 2003, 74). Hybridity in the age of globalization means that the different parts of a cultural environment, and the life-worlds of people, are affected by outside influence at different speeds and to differing degrees. "Sometimes people are acutely aware of changes taking place in their immediate environment, and take measures to stop it, to enhance it or to channel it in their preferred direction. At other times, people may be unaware of these processes, even if foreign influences and cultural mixing may change their cultural environment profoundly" (Eriksen 2007, 113). Hybridity is not a single idea or a unitary concept, but it "is an association of ideas, concepts, and themes that at once reinforce and contradict each other" (Kraidy 2005, vi).

The expectations of hierarchy and equality meet to form a new hybrid culture in development. In this new context, projects speed up the erosion of hierarchical values. One may neither adhere to hierarchical values, nor become the overt bearer of new values of equality. Rather, traditionally cherished hierarchical values and ideologies are fragmented in order to allow access to sets of "ideas" about development and projects. There is tension, as the hierarchy demands acceptance and loyalty, but equality encourages debate and criticism.

NGO intervention causes change in the structure of society with deep implications for behavior. Increasingly, NGOs play the role to promote Western market and ideology through this space to have "deep structural changes made in the mode of production in the South, transforming its organization and its technology increasingly in conformity with that of the North. Both these trends have been promoted and abetted through aid and development. But the result has been that what were once cultural differences have increasingly become the differences in wealth and poverty" (Barth 1996, 28). NGOs might bring short-term economic gain, but cause social confusion, friction, tension and even conflict in the long run. The social and cultural confusion accumulates as NGOs, in general, do not assess the sensitive cultural and social problems that arise. Instead, they continuously introduce new projects upon completion of the old ones in a culturally insensitive way. Projects change the local reality and behavior of project beneficiaries, particularly that of women, without modifying the wider environment.

Bangladesh Context: BRAC and NGOs in Bangladesh

BRAC⁴ and NGOs use GPL to transform Western universal values and ideas into locally implementable programs and projects (Mannan 1996; Mosse 2005), but in doing so BRAC ignores the diversity of the social, cultural, and political settings in which they work (Mannan 2009a); that is, the GPL BRAC uses does not include a narrative to account for unintended consequences. BRAC's and NGOs' intervention features micro-informed, people-centered thinking that views social transformation in terms of participation, empowerment, and capacity building (Tembo 2003, 19); their mission is not to change broader socio-religio-political structures. BRAC's underlying assumption is that if it can improve the capabilities of the poor by improving that group's access to assets and by building up their material resources through project participation, then the poor and wider society will benefit (Chowdhury and Alam 1997; Chowdhury and Bhuiya 2004). Ferguson explains that development "is no longer a movement in history, but an activity, a social program, a war on poverty on a global scale" (Ferguson 1994, 15). As laudable as these approaches may be, they fail to capture poor's view of poverty in terms of "relationship"; that is, the poor long for familiar, trusted relationships in social networks such as kinship, neighbors and friends, and reliable patrons (Mannan 2010b, 81), which are affected by broader social and economic changes in rural communities.

BRAC has evolved from within the broader NGO movement in Bangladesh. The independence of Bangladesh and the subsequent political integration of villages into the global market have created conditions for NGOs to accelerate the process of rural change. NGOs in Bangladesh have grown from a virtual nonexistence in 1970 to a large organizational movement by 2005 (Irish and Simon 2005, 6). NGOs claim to operate in more than 90 percent of villages (Fruttero and Gauri 2005, 767), benefiting 35 percent of the population (Thornton et al. 2000). However, they have not yet effectively reached the poorest parts of the community (Gauri and Galef 2005, 2064). NGOs depict their work as success stories; mostly, a few big NGOs project this positive image. Currently, NGOs are working in more than 69,000 villages and receive 14 percent of total foreign aid. The foreign aid is received

by only about 1,300 NGOs (Ahmad 1999, 27) out of numerous NGOs working in different areas.⁵ Around thirty NGOs receive approximately 80 percent of all funds channeled through the sector, 60 percent of which goes to the eight largest NGOs (Sobhan 1997, 14).

The focus of my ethnographic research is on BRAC, the world's largest transnational NGO. A Switzerland-based magazine, *The Globe Journal*, in 2013 judged BRAC to be the best NGO in the world for its impact, innovation, and sustainability. However, a discussion of size and scale, global ranking, and statistics hardly conveys insights into the function and operation of this highly esteemed NGO. I examine the processes of social transformation initiated by BRAC to articulate how, as an active bearer of global ideology, BRAC stimulates social change. BRAC started its development journey as a small relief organization in 1972 with a few staff members. BRAC has attracted international attention for its capacity and efficiency in providing various services to 110 million poor men and women (Chowdhury and Bhuiya, 2004; Halder and Mosley 2004; Reza and Ahmmed 2009; Smillie 2009; Mair et al. 2012) and it employs more than one hundred thousand staff to carry out development activities not only in 69,000 villages in Bangladesh, but also it has also expanded its activities to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and several countries in Africa. Understanding the global importance of BRAC is crucial because it is one of the few indigenous NGOs, unlike international NGOs with origins in the West that grew from a source of poverty to scaled-up operations at global scale with a pervasive and penetrating influence in Asia and Africa. BRAC has mastered three important skills through its widespread experiences: First, BRAC successfully initiated a process of anti-statism, which prepares women and the poor with ideological transit tickets that move them from class politics to community development and from Marxism to NGOs (Mannan 2010b, 109). Second, it has experience in neutralizing radical opposition based in religious fundamentalism (Mannan 1994; Rafi and Chowdhury 2002). Finally, it has proven approaches for linking poor women to the market (Mannan 2009a). BRAC now uses these skills and experiences to stabilize violent communities in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, southern Sudan, and several African countries in favor of a neoliberal global order.

In 2012, BRAC stands for a conglomeration of organizations to which are typically attributed three complex features. The first communicates the image of a “nonprofit” nongovernmental organization. The second feature revolves around the core Economic Development Program with its strong microfinance component that retains the features of a “for-profit” nongovernmental organization. These, like social enterprises (Mair and Marti 2007), transfer profits from business to poverty alleviation programs. Finally, BRAC operates profit-oriented business enterprises.⁶ The organization has shifted to embrace the principles of the market economy. BRAC now calls its former beneficiaries “customers” and others “stakeholders” (BRAC 1994).

The uniqueness of BRAC is its ability to design most of its activities to ensure financial sustainability through a mixture of both low-income poverty market activities and non-poverty business activities. This gives BRAC a new character, which is not that of a nongovernmental organization, social enterprise, or a business concern, but a new form of organization termed as “poverty enterprise” (Mannan 2009b). This poverty enterprise pulls together various actors and agencies, from donors, government, civil society, and the business world into a complex poverty-production⁷-market framework. The poverty enterprise continuously conceptualizes and designs its repertoire of development programs against the poverty canvas (Abed and Matin 2007, 4).

Smillie (2009, 1997) describes BRAC as an organization with a positive and stable work environment. BRAC operates in Bangladesh as an organization for putting development policies into practice. BRAC has two goals: poverty alleviation and the empowerment of the poor. Poverty alleviation is focused on credit and savings schemes to promote capitalist growth. Empowerment is justified by mixing the “conscientisation theory”⁸ of Paulo Freire (1972) with the Marxist rhetoric of class struggle (DKA 1990). Martha Chen (1986) writes about the interaction between BRAC and its beneficiaries, observing that its engagement with women is causing “a quiet revolution” in women’s lives. BRAC has had no written “theory of development” (Lovell 1992, 24), but, to achieve its goals, has adopted Myrdal’s concept (1968) of institution building (DKA 1990). David Korten has presented BRAC as a “learning organization,” one that develops a capacity to respond positively,

learns from previous errors, and plans with the people, thus linking knowledge building with action (Korten 1980, 498). Lovell (1992) describes BRAC as a flat organization, which has decentralized its decision-making process into small units: “BRAC’s structure is very flat, with few intermediate levels between top management and field implementation” (Lovell 1992, 123). Feldman held an opposite view, arguing that BRAC is an organization that illustrates the process of hierarchical institutionalization—the professionalism of staff, a growing dependence on a rank structure, and a division of labor and specialization able to sustain a technically proficient skill base to meet client and donor demand (Feldman 2003, 17).

The structure of BRAC is based on connectivity between the organization and the rural poor. Its head office is located in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. The head office controls several regional offices, which in turn control multiple branch offices. Each branch office organizes several village organizations (VOs). Each VO is comprised of female and male group members. The structure of BRAC is represented in Diagram 1.1.

Modern Bangladesh and Social Transformation in Broader Context

Bangladesh became independent from Pakistan in 1971 (Saikia 2011; Lewis 2011), but its political boundaries were decided by the British colonial authorities in 1947. Bangladesh is located on a large delta facing the Bay of Bengal to the south. The open plains of India are located to the West and Northwest, and a rim of mountain ranges surrounds it at a distance from the Himalayan Mountains in the north to the disconnected hill systems of Assam and Myanmar in the south. The delta represents the most complex river system of the South Asian subcontinent, with three major rivers—the Padma (Ganges), the Jamuna (Brahmaputra) and the Meghna.

NGOs and BRAC operate in a country that is historically known as a land of puzzle. Since time immemorial, paradoxes and contradictions have characterized the cultural, social, and political lives of its inhabitants. Bangladesh is a land of contrasts. Ibn Battuta, a thirteenth-century Moroccan traveler, described Bangladesh as “a hell full of good things” (Gibb 2002, 267). It is variously

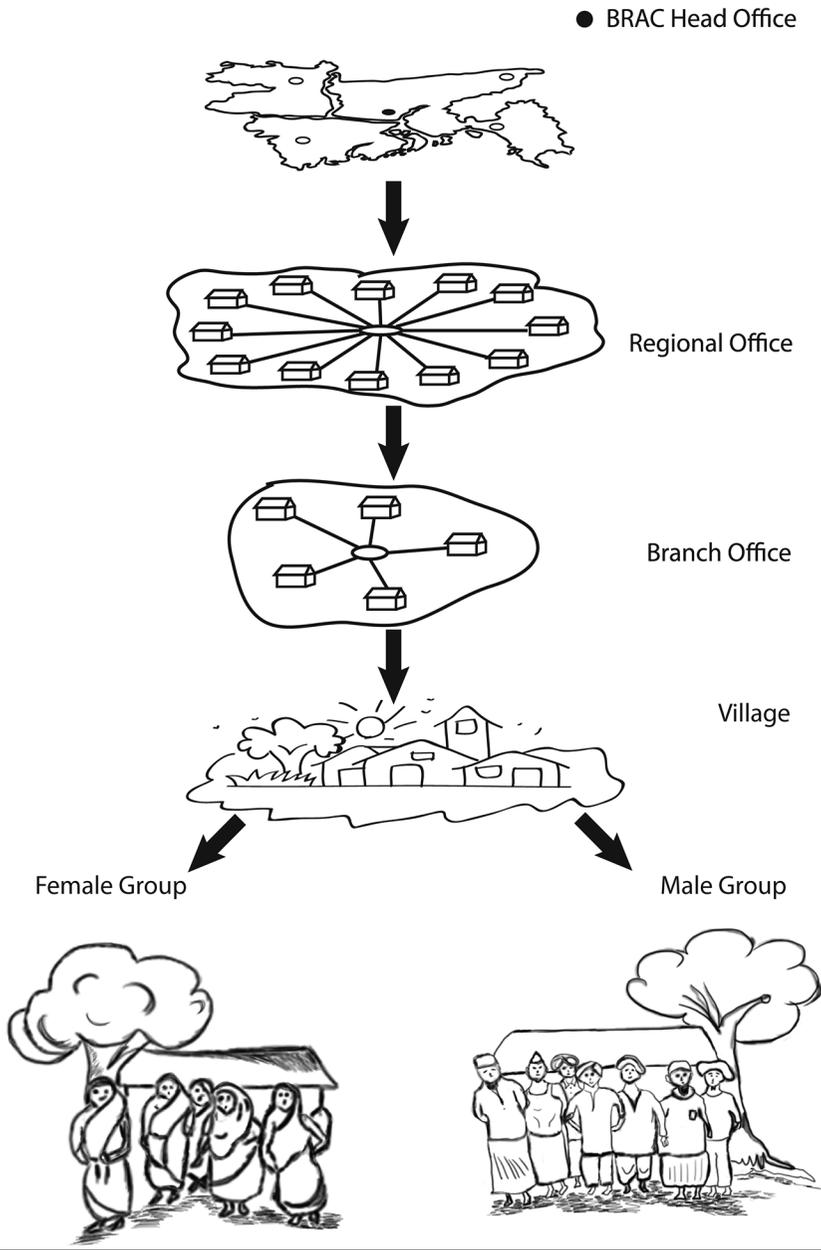


Diagram 1.1. Structure of BRAC
 Illustrated by Maliha Moyeed