

The book succeeds in making clear that globalization will change the way public finance is conducted.

Karel Jansen

Institute of Social Studies, PO Box 29776, 2502 LT The Hague, The Netherlands.

Lisa Jordan and Peter van Tuijl (eds), *NGO Accountability: Politics, Principles and Innovations*. London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2006. xii + 257 pp. £19.99 paperback.

With the rising importance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as key actors in national and international politics these organizations have come under criticism for what they claim to achieve and for their role in civil society. Since the early 1990s, especially after Edwards and Hulme's *NGOs Performance and Accountability* (1995), the question of NGO accountability has been a recurring issue of debate, basically for three reasons.

The first is that NGOs have no natural membership or constituency — they generally have a self-appointed leadership and therefore need to find other ways to legitimize their actions. The second reason is that NGOs are more inclined to be (upwardly) accountable to their donors, rather than to those they are supposed to benefit or support. This creates a fundamental problem about who allocates, who sets priorities — in other words, who controls and owns NGO development interventions? The third reason for debate has surfaced in the last few years: the (lack of) NGO credibility.

Due to the more prominent role of NGOs in world politics, national governments as well as global institutions (such as the World Bank) demand better regulation and certification of NGOs via legislation, codes of conduct, and other instruments. It has become apparent that some NGOs are not making enough effort to really put into practice what they are preaching. Since cracks in the reputation of some NGOs are affecting the entire sector, regulating this sector has become a key target in recent years. This is not just a demand in response to 9/11 — it was after the WTO meeting in Seattle in the late 1990s when NGO-led coalitions successfully lobbied against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) that regulation became an issue.

The book *NGO Accountability: Politics, Principles and Innovations* elaborates on this third element in particular. The editors Lisa Jordan and Peter van Tuijl explore the importance of NGO accountability from a political perspective. They thus avoid the more technical angle of certification, self-regulation and other accountability mechanisms currently flourishing in the NGO literature (especially in regard to relationships between NGOs and donor agencies). Instead, the editors claim to treat NGO accountability 'as an issue of plurality based on the need to apply common principles and universal rights in different contexts, as opposed to being an issue of common standards, tool-box techniques or mechanisms that can be applied universally' (p. 4). The underlying idea of the authors is to contribute to a more coherent discourse on accountability for NGOs that takes rights and responsibilities into account. This certainly is an ambitious endeavour; to what extent did the authors succeed in this task?

The book starts with an introduction by the editors, followed by two additional framework papers, and ten chapters by authors from different regions, focusing on the more traditional accountability approaches as well as innovations coming from the field. The introductory chapters by the editors and Charnovitz do not offer the hoped for coherent framework for understanding and analysing the new discourse on NGO accountability. The idea of democratic accountability is not really worked out; nor is the link between rights and accountability very well elaborated. Fortunately this is compensated for by the Peruzzotti chapter, which provides a good overview of the current debate. Peruzzotti argues convincingly that NGO representation is not the central issue, rather it is the question of giving legitimacy to NGOs and not so much about their relationships with their constituencies.

The chapters on the traditional methods for NGO accountability relate to donor accountability, self-regulation and certification systems such as those promoted by the Philippine Council

for NGO Certification. These systems are treated separately but not analysed in a common framework, which makes the reader wonder why these particular ones were chosen and not others. The chapters on innovative practices are rather diverse but do offer new perspectives. In particular the chapters by Okwaare and Chapman on the Accountability, Learning and Planning System (ALPS) experience of ActionAid and the chapter by Kovach on the challenges faced by international NGOs document the challenges and limitations of what was coined 'downward accountability' by Uphoff and others already in the early 1990s. The danger of NGOs adapting their accountability mechanisms to donors (the 'upward' fashion of accountability) still exists and has yet to be overcome.

Overall, the authors identify the particular context in which NGOs operate as a key variable in establishing their accountability. It is therefore a pity that only a few of these contexts (notably in Asia) are analysed, without really drawing conclusions about the key aspects of the context variables that might facilitate or obstruct improved NGO accountability. Another missing element in the book is a look at the way in which NGOs are being held accountable by broader social movements at the national and (particularly) global levels. Here we are witnessing the evolution of a whole new pattern of networks and groups that requires a more thorough analysis of the way in which they relate to their constituencies. This would definitely constitute a valuable follow-up to the current volume of case studies, of which several are already a few years old.

This book is an important contribution to the ongoing debate on NGO accountability, even though it misses the empirical strength of Fox and Brown's *The Struggle for Accountability* (1998) and the sharpness and coherence of Ebrahim's *NGOs and Organizational Change* (2003). The book would probably have benefited from a less defensive attitude and, instead, would have gained in strength by drawing the various ideas together into a final concluding chapter that would have defined the key questions and challenges of NGO accountability for the years to come, just as was done by Edwards and Hulme's seminal volume of a dozen years ago.

References

- Ebrahim, A. (2003) *NGOs and Organizational Change: Discourse, Reporting, and Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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Kees Biekart

Institute of Social Studies, PO Box 29776, 2502 LT The Hague, The Netherlands.

Christopher Cramer, *Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing: Accounting for Violence in Developing Countries*. London: Hurst & Company, 2006. xiii + 329 pp. £40.00 hardback, £16.95 paperback.

A political economy approach to war (civil or otherwise, but in this case mostly the former) is not an easy thing. It is hard to balance the politics of battle with the economics of gain — the two elements of the oft used 'guns and butter' dichotomy. Struggles for ideas of justice, competition for territory, and conflict over identity (the 'grievance' aspect) are only a few of the 'political' causes of and reasons for the continuation of war, but they are often enough to stop analysis in its tracks. There are also plenty of economic dimensions of bloody strife (the 'greed' aspect of the dichotomy). It would be easy to go no further than 'poverty' and/or 'inequality' as explanations. The propensities of warlord thugs to turn the promise of (relatively) plentiful resources into a curse and to use the favourable 'opportunity costs' of unemployed and unmoored young males to their advantage give economists all the more reason to make their statistical claims — and then to counsel a 'freer market' to encourage the calming effects of legitimate commerce on those too willing to turn access to state and other means of coercion to illicit gain. Many studies