

Get Money Get Involved? NGO's Reactions to Donor Funding and Their Potential Involvement in the Public Policy Processes

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Abstract This article investigates how NGOs' reactions to donors may suggest their potential involvement in the policy process. Without pretending to abridge a multifaceted complicated situation in any singular factor or to make claims for causality and generalizability, the experiences of three NGOs in Lebanon are compared. The analysis reveals that a variation in NGOs' relationship with the same donor might reflect on different level of involvement in the policy process and interactions with government. Constructing strong, yet balanced, ties with the donor contributes to active involvement in the policy process and cooperation with government. Otherwise, the NGO's role is marginalized. Abandoning donor funding furthers change in the nature of NGO work, leaning more towards activism and generating confrontation with the government. Donor funding, therefore, is neither a necessary condition for nor a universal effect on NGOs' potential engagement in public policy processes.

Résumé Cet article explore les relations entre, d'une part la réaction des ONG au financement par les bailleurs de fonds, et d'autre part leur implication dans les politiques publiques ainsi que le type de leurs interactions avec le gouvernement. Les expériences de trois ONG au Liban sont ici comparées sans prétendre résumer à une unique variable une situation compliquée et aux multiples facettes, et sans introduire de lien de causalité ni généraliser. L'analyse révèle qu'un changement de relation des ONG avec un même bailleur de fonds peut avoir des conséquences à différents niveaux en termes d'interaction avec le gouvernement et d'implication dans les processus politiques. L'établissement de liens forts mais équilibrés avec le bailleur de fonds favorise l'implication dans les processus politiques et la coopération avec le gouvernement. Sans cela, le rôle des ONG est marginalisé. En

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abandonnant le financement par les bailleurs de fonds, le travail des ONG change de nature; il se rapproche alors davantage de la défense d'intérêts et génère des confrontations avec le gouvernement. Par conséquent, le financement par les bailleurs de fonds n'est pas une condition nécessaire et n'a pas d'effet universel sur l'implication des ONG quant aux politiques publiques.

Zusammenfassung In diesem Beitrag wird die Beziehung zwischen der Handhabung der Finanzierung durch Spender seitens nicht-staatlicher Organisationen einerseits und ihrer Beteiligung an den Prozessen der öffentlichen Politik und die Art ihrer Interaktionen mit der Regierung andererseits untersucht. Ohne eine vielfältige komplizierte Situation einzelner Umstände vereinfachen oder Anspruch auf eine Kausalität und Verallgemeinerbarkeit erheben zu wollen, werden die Erfahrungen von drei nicht-staatlichen Organisationen im Libanon miteinander verglichen. Die Untersuchung zeigt, dass unterschiedliche Beziehungen der nicht-staatlichen Organisationen mit dem gleichen Spender ein unterschiedliches Maß an Beteiligung am politischen Prozess und unterschiedlich ausgeprägte Interaktionen mit der Regierung widerspiegeln können. Der Aufbau starker, jedoch ausgeglichener Beziehungen zum Spender fördert eine aktive Beteiligung am politischen Prozess und die Zusammenarbeit mit der Regierung. Ansonsten wird die Rolle der nicht-staatlichen Organisation marginalisiert. Der Verzicht auf eine Finanzierung durch Spender führt zu einer Änderung im Wesen der Arbeit der nicht-staatlichen Organisation, wodurch die Organisation dann eher zu einer Interessenvertretung wird und Konfrontationen mit der Regierung entstehen. Eine Finanzierung durch Spender stellt folglich weder eine notwendige Voraussetzung für die Beteiligung an politischen Prozessen seitens der nicht-staatlichen Organisationen dar noch wirkt sie sich allgemein auf ihre Beteiligung an diesen Prozessen aus.

Resumen El presente artículo investiga la relación entre las reacciones de las ONG ante la financiación de donantes, por un lado, y su implicación en los procesos de la política pública y el tipo de interacciones que tienen con el gobierno, por otro lado. Sin pretender resumir una situación complicada con múltiples facetas en un factor singular o argumentar causalidad y generalizabilidad, se comparan las experiencias de tres ONG en el Líbano. El análisis revela que una variación en la relación de las ONG con el mismo donante puede reflejarse en un nivel diferente de implicación en el proceso de la política y en las interacciones con el gobierno. Construir lazos fuertes, pero equilibrados, con el donante contribuye a una implicación activa en el proceso de la política y en la cooperación con el gobierno. De lo contrario, el papel de las ONG es marginado. Abandonar la financiación de donantes fomenta el cambio en la naturaleza del trabajo de la ONG, volcándose más hacia la defensa y generando confrontación con el gobierno. Por consiguiente, la financiación de donantes no es una condición necesaria ni tiene un efecto universal sobre el compromiso de la ONG en los procesos de política pública.

Keywords NGOs · Donors · Public policy · NGO–government relationships

Introduction

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become a main anchor of development in many developing countries, including Lebanon; consequently, these organizations sometimes attempt to be involved in the public policy process and cultivate their relationships with national governments. The debate on whether donors—mainly bilateral—help these organizations with this endeavor is ongoing. This article contributes to this debate, exploring the experiences of three Lebanese NGOs and their potential involvement in the policy process and interaction with government. Without claiming causality and generalizability, these experiences are compared based on the relationships the NGOs have with the same donor.

Donors are key players in aid recipient countries. Donors shape national policies by negotiating priorities with governments and channeling, conditioning, and controlling aid (Easterly 2007). Donors also establish direct and strong relations with local actors, specifically NGOs (Bebbington 2004; Stiles 2002). Donors favor these organizations as suitable agents of inspired change (Edwards and Hulme 1996; Mitlin et al. 2007); however, it is an oversimplification to consider donor–NGO relationships as the cause of NGOs’ impact on public policy, since NGOs’ practices are shaped not only by relationships but also by “interests and cultures of specific organizational settings” (Mosse 2005, p. 230).

Moreover, the donor–NGO relationship is volatile. Frequent fluctuations in funding priorities engender uncertainty in the NGOs’ surrounding environment and lead to additional confusion among these organizations (Brouwer 2000; Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen 2003; Doornbos 2003). AbouAssi (2013) explored NGO behavior at moments of funding fluctuations by examining NGO response to shifts in donor funding. Building on Hirschman’s (1970) exit–voice–loyalty typology, some NGOs suspend their relationships with donors at that time, while others use voice to maintain the relations. Still other NGOs automatically follow donors’ interests or voluntarily adapt to the situation (AbouAssi 2013).

This article focuses on a particular dimension of complex and multifaceted NGO–donor relationships, namely on how a variation in NGOs’ responses to shifts in donor funding might reflect on the course of their involvement in the policy process and interaction with government. We acknowledge that the article is based solely on evidence from the NGOs’ perspective and there are definitely opportunities for research on this same topic from the side of the donors. However, the potential contribution of this analysis for practitioners and scholars is that the article presents an engaging account of the relationship of three different NGOs working in the environmental sector in Lebanon with a single donor and with the Lebanese Ministry of Environment which allows to assess NGOs’ attitudes and behavior towards power figures (donors, government) in order to reflect on the NGOs’ expectations of influencing (or not) the policy process. The article thus aims to add to the literature on NGO management, which tends to focus on the donor–NGO relationships through a broader lens.

Before proceeding, NGOs are defined as the formally registered indigenous organizations, which exclude grassroots community-based groups as well as local chapters of international and transnational NGOs. The analysis focuses on one

bilateral donor the three NGOs have been receiving funding from; this excludes multilateral donors and international philanthropic foundations and organizations.

NGOs, Donors, Governments, and Public Policy

This article aims to better understand NGOs' potential involvement in the public policy processes and interactions with government. Recognizing that other factors do influence and determine such involvement, the focus herein is on NGOs' attitudes and behaviors towards a donor, as a power figure and source of funding, to apprehend their expectations of engaging in the policy process. These attitudes and behaviors are one dimension of already complex and multifaceted NGO–donor relationships, which exist in a broader context that the following discussion try to shed some light on.

The role of donors—mainly bilateral—in development and their assistance to developing countries are subject to unsettled ideological debates. Some scholars (Sachs 2005) consider aid assistance a moral obligation of richer countries to support the less-fortunate countries to develop their economies and enhance their people's well being. Other critics accuse those actors of pursuing self-interest under the coat of doing good (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2006; Easterly 2007). “Aid agencies are rewarded for setting goals rather than reaching them, since goals are observable for the rich-country public while results are not” (Easterly 2007, p. 185). Aid assistance then aim to impose donors' vision for improvement upon others, even if well-intended (Dichter 2003). Achievement of social equity or eliminating poverty may then be lost; the unintended result is an increase in dependence and reinforcement and expansion of the exercise of bureaucratic state power (Dos Santos 1971; Ferguson 1994; Prebisch 1959).

Donors shape national policies, whether directly or indirectly, through negotiating priorities, controlling aid to recipient countries, and setting explicit funding criteria—such as targeted beneficiaries and areas (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2006; Bryant and Kappaz 2005). Donors have recognized the need to make aid more effective and responsive to the needs of developing countries. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) are two milestones focused on adhering to and applying the principles of local ownership, national priorities and development strategies, harmonization of donor practices, mutual accountability, and results management. However, these efforts are met with skepticism.

At a macro-level, Peters (2012) and Cassarino (2012) refer to a gap between rhetoric and practice in donor policy especially in the Middle East. The unequal relations of power and the top-down approaches in the aid industry that Fisher (1997) and Mosse (2005) talk about continue to persist especially after the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Donors' vested interests in security and stability overshadowed principles of good governance and democracy. Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff (2010) and Bryant and Kappaz (2005) refer to the intertwining of social and economic services with geopolitical priorities of peace, stability, and counterterrorism.

At the operational level, donors continue to establish direct or indirect partnerships and networks with local actors which lead, in some cases, to the introduction of programs and strategies at odds with the local environment and, in other cases, to the reinforcement of existing social and economic inequality (Bebbington 2004; Easterly 2007; Mosse 2005). These donors' networks strengthen and equip local organizations but can transform organizational identity, monopolize development, and lead to a disconnection from the local surrounding as these networks capture the voices of the beneficiaries (Edwards 2008; Mosse 2005; Stiles 2002). AbouAssi and Trent (2012) convey a common perception among NGO managers in Lebanon that donors develop their strategies through consultations with local partners that share their own agendas; when these consultations expand to reach others, they are perceived as "a procedural requirement more than a conviction of the importance and benefits of NGO participation and involvement" (p. 17). Such perception echoes Ferguson's (1994) much earlier statement "these agencies seem hungry for good advice and ready to act on it. [...] they seek only the kind of advice they can take" (p. 284).

Furthermore, donors develop policies and priorities and revise them at an ever-increasing pace (Doornbos 2003). Easterly (2007) explains that interest groups competitively lobby for different issues pushing the donor agenda to continuously change; consequently, the set of goals that foreign assistance tries to achieve expands and fluctuates over a short period of time. For example, some donors change their funding strategies to Lebanon every 3–5 years (AbouAssi 2013). NGOs lag behind trying to figure out how to react to these developments that are faster than the life of a program (Brouwer 2000; Doornbos 2003; Mosse 2005).

AbouAssi (2013) explores these reactions building on Hirschman's (1970) typology of exit, voice, and loyalty. The typology elaborates on consumers' reaction to organizational decline in service or product provision; the consumer might consider declining the service and shopping elsewhere (exit); attempt to repair or improve the situation (voice); or continue purchasing the service being attached to a product, hoping things will improve (Hirschman 1970). Under a modified typology, AbouAssi (2013) suggests a fourth mode of reaction arguing that an NGO can respond to shifts in donor funding in four different ways:

1. Exit, when an NGO decides to no longer seek funding from a particular donor and therefore suspends the relationship.
2. Voice, when an NGO relates its feedback and concern to the donor with the intention of influencing the donor's decisions and sustaining the relationship through reaching common ground that balances the donor's objectives and the organization's interests.
3. Loyalty, when an NGO automatically and unconsciously complies with the donor—which best describes the reaction of the so-called donor-organized NGOs (Fisher 1997; Loung and Weinthal 1999; Vakil 1997).
4. Adjustment, when an NGO practices agency and voluntarily and deliberately decides to adjust its activities to favorably cope with the donor's new objectives in order to secure funding.

While exit and voice are distinctive categories, loyalty and adjustment are related but should be considered separate (AbouAssi 2013). Loyalty is an unconscious response characterized by a lack of agency and attachment to the donor. Adjustment, on the other hand, is a very conscious and deliberate decision through which the NGO practices agency in determining its response as a result of its attachment to the benefit the relationship is generating, i.e., funding.

This article relies on the preceding classification of NGO reactions to understand the NGO's potential involvement in the public policy process and relationships with government. To do so, Najam's (2000) Four-C's framework will be used to guide the discussion on NGO–government relations. The point of departure, here, is that tension always exists between governments and NGOs, which are part of civil society (Edwards 2004). This is due to that “much of NGO action and aspiration can be boiled down to NGOs doing, or wanting the government to do, things that the government either refuses to do, does not do enough of, is incapable of doing, or is unable to do” (Najam 2000, p. 380). Consequently, changes in the degree of tension in NGO–government relations determine the nature of relationship. Cooperation, confrontation, complementarity, and co-optation are the options for NGO–government relations (Najam 2000). These options are contingent on similarities in the ends determined by the two sides as well as on the means they use.

First, cooperation characterizes a relationship where government and NGOs agree on similar goals and share similar strategies of implementation. The two sides work hand-in-hand to achieve the set goals (Najam 2000). A cooperative relationship is a clear reflection of the market failure model discussed in nonprofit theory (Steinberg 2006). In principle, the market is the right mechanism for provision of goods, individually consumed and liberally priced. However, when the market fails to deliver these goods, NGOs can do the job bringing additional resources and reducing costs (Bryce 2006; Smith and Gronbjerg 2006). An example here is the cooperation between government and social service organizations to provide services at a lower cost and with support from other sources. Such cooperation could become a contracting relationship due to the power asymmetry between governments and NGOs (Brinkerhoff 2002). However, focusing primarily on the congruence of goals and means (Najam 2000) and creating mutual interdependence through shared responsibilities and preserved organizational identity and reputation (Brinkerhoff 2002; Van Slyke 2007) reinstates the cooperative nature of government–NGOs relationships. Both sides become partners (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002).

Second, when government and NGO diverge on both preferred means and goals and do not see eye-to-eye on an issue at stake and ways to address it, the relationship moves into confrontation. Each side has a different assessment of the impact of the work being done. In many cases, the government and NGOs stand as opposites (Young 2006). Driven by the vision of ‘what should be’ and not ‘what is’, NGOs work on highlighting critical issues that are ignored by government and that fall under the overarching theme of human rights through organized efforts towards a just society (Brown and Kalegaonkar 2002; Clemens 2006; Cohen et al. 2001). Government tries to control and dominate (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002). NGOs fiercely oppose the state apparatus (Najam 2000), “to change the power

relationships between these institutions and people affected by their decisions, thereby changing the institutions themselves” (Cohen et al. 2001, p. 8). This form of organized efforts towards major changes in policy outcomes is what Cohen et al. (2001) define as advocacy.

Third, convergence of goals and divergence of means lead to a complementary relationship between government and NGOs. Goals can be the same, but each side prefers a different strategy. “Complementarity as a function of ends, that is, goals [...] where the goals of government and NGOs are similar, they are likely to gravitate toward an arrangement—either independently or contractually—in which they complement each other in the achievement of a shared end, even through dissimilar means” (Najam 2000, p. 387). Young (2000, 2006) makes a minute distinction between complementary and supplementary relationships based on the flow of resources from the government. In a supplementary relationship, NGOs jump to remedy a situation caused by constraints the government cannot work around, while in a complementary relationship, the government channel certain resources—material or non-material—to the NGOs to work towards the common goal (Weisbrod 1988; Young 2000, 2006).

Finally, co-optation takes place when government and NGOs are interested in using the same means or strategies to reach different goals (Najam 2000). Here, the boundaries between the two are not clear since each side tries to manipulate or convince the other its own goals are better in order to fully benefit from available means they agree on. According to Brinkerhoff (2002), co-optation is a gradual process whereby “an organization is convinced that it is in its interest to follow the more dominant organization’s lead” (p. 26). This makes co-optation a transitional form of relationship between government and NGOs (Najam 2000). In application, in their research on Lebanon, Egypt, and Turkey, Altan-Olcay and Icduygu (2012) conclude that the indeterminate boundaries between states and civil society organizations in these countries are problematic since these organizations are interested in social transformation but they use the same methods and cannot function away from the state.

The nature of government–NGO relationships as captured in Najam’s (2000) Four-C’s framework can determine NGOs involvement in the public policy process as Fig. 1 roughly depicts. The policy process ranges from “influencing the formulation of public policy [...] to implementing or producing a public purpose, product, or service” (Bryce 2006, p. 313). The most common form of NGO involvement along this range is service delivery where NGOs can fill a gap left public agencies (AbouAssi 2006; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002; Lillehammer 2003). As the two sides are working towards similar goals, this form of involvement in the policy process reflects both cooperation and complementarity, pending the concurrence of means of implementation (Najam 2000). The NGOs might work directly with government through cooperative agreements to carry out certain activities. Alternatively, these organizations can deliver services in parallel to or without the support of government agencies (Fowler 1997).

Complementarity can also be reflected in the involvement of NGOs in the policy process as intermediary and information disseminator (Brinkerhoff 1999). NGOs might share the same goals with the government (conservation of a certain natural

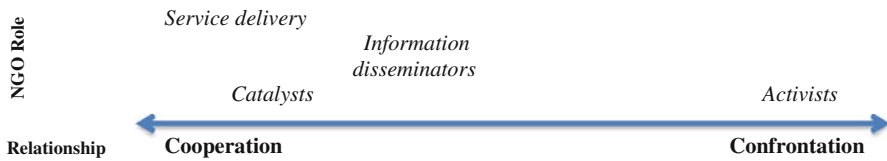


Fig. 1 Relationship with government and NGO involvement in policy process relationship

site for example). NGOs might serve as a link between government and other local community group conveying interests and needs or work independently—without direct engagement with or support from the government—to educate the public, disseminate information, and raise awareness.

A more active involvement in the public policy process is through engagement in formulating policies. This is when cooperation takes places as NGOs and government share common goals and agree on the same means towards these goals (Najam 2000). In this scenario, government is facilitator or partner-state (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002) and NGOs are ‘catalysts’ or ‘reformers’ who recognize institutional and policy constraints and try to gain access and voice in the decision-making process (Korten 1990; Lewis and Kanji 2009; Lillehammer 2003). This active involvement is pursued by fewer NGOs that want to represent the interests of the people they work with and ensure policies are adequate. These organizations usually have adequate organizational capacity and dense networks with other local organizations (Brinkerhoff 1999; Fowler 1997; Lillehammer 2003).

Korten (1990) and Lewis and Kanji (2009) talk about another form of involvement in public policy where NGOs are ‘activists’. The NGOs notice the government’s inadequate vision and start to oppose government policies and decisions. The concern here is for broader impact beyond the low-key operational level. NGOs do not share the same goals with government; they want to hold the government accountable for what it does (Lillehammer 2003). These actors are interested more in ‘what should be’ and not in preserving the status quo at the policy level (Cohen et al. 2001). This form of involvement here is through lobbying and exerting pressure on public institutions from outside and not through cooperating with government (Bratton 1990; Brinkerhoff 1999; Fowler 1997; Lillehammer 2003).

It should be clear that this article does not aim to assess donor or NGO impact on public policy. Other scholars have mixed assessments. Rondinelli and Montgomery (2005) address the noticeable donor impact in post-conflict states while Hamid (2010) points out the failure of Western assistance to enhance democracy in the Middle East. Likewise, Bieber (2002) considers the negative impact of foreign funding on peace building in Bosnia–Herzegovina. The funding channeled through local NGOs led to contesting the autonomy and legitimacy of these organizations and undermining their role and performance. On the other hand, Bratton (1990) studies African NGOs’ policy advocacy and finds it to be effective under the conditions of homogeneous membership, decentralized structure, informal political ties, and domestic funding base. However, a more recent study by Suleiman (2013) casts major doubt on the ability of African NGOs to impact public policies.

Recognizing Bratton's (1990) study of organizational capacity, this article proceeds to juxtapose the relationships of three Lebanese NGOs with government—namely Ministry of Environment—and their potential involvement in the public policy process in light of their interactions with the same donor. Background information and research methodology are discussed first.

The Case Background

Lebanon is a small country that maintains a fragile democracy and a developing economy. The country's struggling economy increases reliance on external sources of revenues (including foreign assistance, loans, and treasury bonds); some of the foreign assistance is channeled through Lebanese NGOs (AbouAssi 2010).

Lebanon has a vibrant and dynamic NGO sector. The country's sociopolitical milieu allows a wide space for NGOs to be active in public life and contribute to public discourse and policy development (AbouAssi 2013). NGOs are involved in all domains of public life; their degree of involvement become more critical during crises—such as the country's 1975–1990 civil war and Summer 2006 war with Israel (AbouAssi 2006).

Two main features distinguish Lebanese NGOs from their counterparts in the Middle East. First, these organizations operate in an environment characterized by a relative degree of political freedom, economic and social liberties, and human rights (El-Haraka 2004). This has reflected in a certain degree of autonomy among NGOs, especially vis-à-vis the government (AbouAssi 2006). NGOs' relationships with the Lebanese government are unclear or unstable. In general, the nature of these relationships is characterized by limited dialogue, considerable distrust, and a lack of collaboration, although some government agencies provide some financial support to NGOs (AbouAssi 2006; El-Haraka 2004). This weak relationship is reflected in a lack of clarity among NGO of the role of government in development (AbouAssi 2010) on one hand, and in a form of competition and exclusion on another hand, where NGOs tend to consider themselves as primary actors and monopolize development (AbouAssi and Trent 2012).

Second, Lebanese NGOs secure funding from various sources, and in particular from international donors without any interference or control from the central government. NGOs are only required to submit annual budgets that can be brief and do not specify funding sources. With outdated laws on tax exemptions for philanthropy (AbouAssi 2006), the major sources of funding for Lebanese NGOs are membership fees and international donors (AbouAssi 2006; Helou 2004). While accurate and recent data is not readily available, estimates indicate that international donors contribute around 22 % of the revenues of the NGO sector in Lebanon (AbouAssi 2013). International donors prefer to work with NGOs rather than the government, “which is often thought to be a drain on funds” (AbouAssi 2006, p. 50); consequently, many local organizations try to tap different donors for funding, but at expense of other potential sources of funding including internally generated revenues (Helou 2004). Therefore, there is a considerable degree of dependence on donor agencies among Lebanese NGOs (AbouAssi 2013).

Data Collection and Analysis

This research is exploratory in its nature. Three Lebanese NGOs were purposively selected as multiple case studies. The three organizations are environmental, of the same size (medium-size budget), and headquartered in the same geographical area; this purposeful selection was based on homogeneous sampling to reduce variation and simplify analysis (Patton 2001). More important, these environmental NGOs were purposively selected to be receiving funding from the same donor prior to the date of the research. The cases were selected on the diversity of their reactions to donor funding at that point in time. This purposeful selection allows both a longitudinal study of NGO–donor relationships, as well as, comparability across the cases since the conditions are beyond the researchers' control, making this research an observational study (DiNardo 2008).

The qualitative data is derived from interviews with members of three environmental NGOs. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with NGO members in 2010 and early 2011. To ensure validity of the data, at least two members from each organization were interviewed. To ensure compatibility of information quality across organizations, one interviewee of each NGO was an executive director. In addition, two experts on the NGO sector in Lebanon were consulted to verify information and provide additional feedback and insight.

Semi-structured interviews provided a longitudinal window on the work of the NGOs and their relationship with the donor, as well as the interviewees' perception of their organizations' relationship with government and involvement in the policy process. Interviewees were invited to discuss the background, work, and management of their organizations and the relationships with the donor and the phases of these relationships. Interviewees were also asked to discuss their assessment of the relationship with the donor as well as the government—Ministry of Environment and other agencies, and their understanding of the involvement of their organizations in the public policy process. These interviews help capture the perspectives of this diversified group of practitioners and allow a better understanding of the semantic context (Blee and Taylor 2002; Rubin and Rubin 2005; Yin 2003).

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, archival research was conducted on the history of relationships between the three NGOs and donor agencies and the work of the NGOs at the policy level. Archival research is a non-interactive form of data collection that allows accessing non-current information as well as verifying personal discourses (Johnson et al. 2008; Thies 2006; Trachtenberg 2006). Archives include documents produced by the organizations (annual and financial reports, minutes of meetings, decisions) and other actors (media clippings, NGOs' registration documents).

The collected data was transcribed, translated from Arabic to English, then back translated, and then entered into the Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis program for coding and analysis. We followed Campbell's (1966) pattern matching for an abductive analysis. An abductive approach allows for a continuous, iterative comparison of emergent findings to existing concepts and frameworks. Pattern matching is an analytical tool used to link the theoretical pattern with the observed

or operational pattern. Here, the theoretical pattern is supplied by Hirschman's modified typology (AbouAssi 2013), Najam's (2000) Four-C's framework, and forms of involvement in public policy process; the operational pattern is supplied by the perceptions of the representatives of the three environmental NGOs and supplemented by the feedback and insight provided by the NGO experts.

We acknowledge that the sample is small and not necessarily representative. We also recognize that Lebanon is fairly atypical for its sociopolitical, economic, and religious composition, which makes it harder for qualitative research to draw any generalization. However, as an exploratory study, this research observes and reports on the experiences of these organizations with funding from the same donor and how that might be contributing to their involvement in the policy process and relationships with government, without claiming causality or generalizability of results. We also believe that Lebanon's diversity and sectarian propensity might be mirrored in other contexts as well, and hope that sharing observations and lessons across borders can be useful for scholars and practitioners.

Funding, Relationships, and Roles

This section reports on three NGOs working in the environment sector in Lebanon, before proceeding to further discussion and analysis. The three organizations specifically state they are environmental organizations in their mission statements. These mission statements are general and primarily focused on the overarching themes of protecting the environment and natural resources. Table 1 below categorizes the different characteristics of these NGOs and provides a quick snapshot for comparison while maintaining confidentiality.

NGO1: Exit–Activist–Confrontation

The first organization (NGO1) works on environmental sustainability. The NGO calls for the protection of natural resources, innovative production technologies, and environmental capacity building. According to an interviewed NGO representative, the organization "believes in and its work is based on engaging local communities and using various democratic means to express opinions and demands." NGO1 has diversified sources of funding that are critically and cautiously selected based on complicated criteria the members of the organization came to agree on. NGO1 continuously evaluates its relations to ensure autonomy. The relationship with the donor is based on mutual benefit and exchange of ideas.

As interviewed members and external observers jointly agree, NGO1 maintains a reputation of being the NGO of "no". The organization does not usually concede to external demands. NGO1 was working on an environmental project with funding from the donor. When the donor shifted the focus of funding, NGO1 deliberately decided no longer to seek funding. The shift entailed a new objective of social services that did not align with the organization's mission and line of work. The executive director explained, "we are not interested in modifying our activities, let alone abandoning our identity, for the sake of a grant."

Table 1 Summary of profiles of three environmental NGOs

	NGO1	NGO2	NGO3
Mission	Sustainable environment	Conservation of natural resources	Protection of environment
Number of active members	100	50	60
Membership conditions	Open	Open	Open
Executive committee	7 members	5 members	7 members
Educational level of leadership	Graduate	Graduate	Graduate
Internal governance	High leadership turnover/clear division of authorities	High leadership turnover/clear division of authorities	Low leadership turnover/clear division of authorities
Number of paid staff	3	8	1
Number of volunteers	325	112	20
Annual budget	\$300,000	\$400,000	\$150,000–\$200,000
Internal revenue sources	Membership fees/donations	Membership fees/income generating projects	Membership fees
Percentage from total annual budget	21	17	6
Number of external donors	8	9	3
Reliance on donor	Low	Low	Medium

This tendency to suspend the relationship with the donor under such circumstances leads NGO1 to devolve most activities down to the community level and mobilize the base. The organization has a handful of full-time paid staff to manage funded projects; however, to sustain some of the project activities with reduced donor funding, members and volunteers are called on to partake in the implementation. NGO1's director succinctly reported on the situation: "The more we said no to a donor, the more we found ourselves going back to our grassroots. Instead of looking for funding to implement a project, we looked for volunteers to support our mission and carry out the work."

The NGO's perception of the donor's role in the public policy process in Lebanon falls along the same line. According to interviewed members, the donor does not necessarily help NGOs contribute to public policies; NGOs are in the driver's seat. NGO1 representatives provided two justifications for such perception. First, the donor has political interests that are better served by short-term priorities; public policies are not short-term endeavors. "Many donor-funded initiatives stop at the short-term immediate results in terms of changes in lives (employment) or attitude (campaigns). There is no sustainability or broader impact". Second, NGO1 has to rely on itself to conduct activities targeting public policies. "We have to use our own resources and mobilize grassroots support. The donor is reluctant to fund lobbying and advocacy work; such work might lead to confrontations with government, politicians, and even international organizations."

Amidst these circumstances, NGO1 has become more involved in confrontational relationships with government, politicians, and the private sector. There are numerous cases of NGO1 going after the private sector for its abuse of the environment and politicians for their political games and interest in narrow gain. The NGO critically condemns the government for its complacency; the Ministry of Environment is criticized for its inability to act and other ministries, such as agriculture, interior, energy and water, and public works, are accused of aggravating problems and endorsing violations. The executive director portrayed the general picture: "Unlike other NGOs, it is the essence of the role of NGO1 to raise its voice. If there is a problem, you don't just talk about the problem but also about who causes the problem or hinders the solution. If you have the ability to find a solution and to influence your surrounding towards making a change, then you should be proactive. We point out the problem and the responsibilities regardless of who, what, and where."

NGO2: Voice–Catalyst–Cooperation

The mission of NGO2 is the protection of natural resources through conservation and reforestation and effective environmental management and engagement. According to an interviewed representative, "the work evolved over time; it was demand-driven. People were following our progress and satisfied with it." The organization established a strong legitimacy among constituents.

At the same time, the organization benefited from the personal connections of its members with the donor. Such a strategy places NGO2 in a unique position vis-à-vis its donor. "We worked hard to build trust with the donor and we continue to value

this ongoing relationship. The donor has objectives; we do too, but always try to bring the two sets of objectives together. Although sometimes the donor's prerequisites and requirements change, we are always able to work things out with them and to make sure our work is not dramatically influenced by these changes," said the executive director. For example, the organization was implementing an environmental conservation project funded by the donor. With the shift to social services, NGO2 was able to sustain funding for an environment-based income-generating project that satisfies both the donor's objective and the organization's interest.

This increased and sustained financial support from the donor helped the organization expand its operations and resources. One result has been an enhanced credibility—at least as perceived by the organization. "By delivering on what we promise and by being open, transparent, and professional while dealing with our donor, who becomes our partner. This is why NGO2 is perceived as a reference in the field" according to an interviewed NGO2 member.

NGO2 benefits from its close relationships with the donor. This benefit is reflected in the perception of the donor's role in the public policy process. NGO2 executive director said, "Bilateral donors in specific have their own interests and agenda to influence the public policy in Lebanon and encourage the government to make changes. Instead of doing it directly, by funding governmental projects or pressuring the government, donors go the indirect way and work with and through NGOs." In one specific case, NGO2 approached the donor when there was speculations that the donor intended to cut its funding for the environment sector. The organization was able to convince the donor to work together on a specific project and secured the donor's financial support and technical expertise. "The donor found itself heavily involved; its financial and technical support reflected a great deal of commitment. Our efforts and the donor's support yielded very positive political response and resulted in governmental action and policy change."

NGO2's well-established connections with the donor community in Lebanon mean the organization has a prominent voice on environmental issues, according to the interviewed NGO experts. Interviewed NGO representatives say the organization's credibility generates confidence in achieving results and impact. NGO2 enjoys a healthy relationship with the government, with whom it is engaged in continuous dialogue. NGO2 is invited to ministerial meetings and parliamentary discussions. The organization utilizes its networks with local communities and international organizations on these occasions to push for issues of interest. The organization works closely with the Ministry of Environment on drafting and proposing legislations; NGO2 also supports the Ministry in preparing certain national plans, procedures, and standards. The organization has also been collaborating with other public agencies, including ministries of agriculture, energy and water, and interior, to provide technical feedback and support. One interviewed expert was critical of such involvement. Citing a specific initiative, the demarcation line between the authority and responsibility of NGO2 versus the government ministries has become fuzzy, at least in the eyes of the public.

NGO3: Adjustment–Disseminator–Complementarity

The third organization focuses on protection of the environment through, basic conservation, promoting green spaces, and raising awareness. The organization has been struggling since its genesis, especially with financial resources. Sources of funding are limited. Members' donations barely cover operational costs. To implement any project, NGO3 has to rely on external funding, which it seeks only from foreign donors—including bilateral—and international organizations. NGO3 finds itself in a very uncomfortable position.

NGO3's executive director elaborated on the position. "If I want to implement a project, I need to focus more on the donor's objectives than on my own project idea. We work according to the criteria. You cannot change or amend or discuss. It is like you are dealing with a bank and taking a private loan, except that we have to get just any loan." The organization finds itself looking for funding wherever and whenever it is available. When the donor funding was channeled to social services, NGO3 decided to launch a project to provide services to the elderly. Such a project did not serve the organizational mission and did not relate to the environment, although interviewed members of the organization tried to argue that they were serving the community, "and you cannot separate environment from other types of needed services if you are really committed to the community you serve," commented an interviewed member.

The focus of the organization is therefore diffuse. Instead of focusing on its mission, NGO3 has been more concerned with securing funding for its survival. When funding is available, the organization is active, but it does not have considerable impact or direct relation to environmental development. NGO3 reconnects with its environmental mission from time to time. The organization conducts some basic awareness activities, sporadically organizes lectures on environmental issues, and selectively disseminates available public information on the environment.

NGO3 is skeptical of the donor's role in and influence of the public policy process. One reason for this skepticism is the nature of the relationship with the donor. The executive director of the organization argued: "I cannot judge the donor. The donor might have a broader plan that my project is just a part of. But to make an impact, you need to align your work in a systematic and coherent way. I do not see the donor doing that and we do not have much chance—or resources—to do that either." The other reason is more strategic. According to an interviewed member, the donor in Lebanon prefers to deal with NGOs, but small local organizations are unable to achieve the critical mass needed to achieve major change.

That is why NGO3 affirms that excluding government from the process leads to less sustainability of development efforts. NGO3 executive director added, "the work of the NGO is important but should not take over the responsibility of the government. We created parallel or substitute agencies during the civil war; this should be over now. NGOs have other responsibilities including supporting government and being the liaison between the people and the state." Thus, NGO3 prefers to take the backseat in its relationship with the government. On one hand, NGO3 does not have any direct cooperation with government agencies. On the other

hand, the organization does not perceive the government as adversary and has not been engaged in any confrontation with government.

Same Donor but Different Relations and Involvement

The analysis indicates a divergence in the goals and interests of NGO1 and the donor. The organization is dissatisfied with changes in donor funding. The dissatisfaction often leads the organization to exit or suspend its relationships with the donor (AbouAssi 2013). The NGO resists changing the nature of its activities and prefers to stick to the same line of work. The NGO has to find a substitute for the funding it has dropped. The substitute is reliance on volunteers. The reliance on volunteers requires the organization to design project activities to keep these volunteers mobilized. Such a strategy has taken the organization in a specific direction.

With limited funding, the NGO could only implement one or two projects at a time in order not to stretch its operational capacity and resources too thin. The nature of activities has become more oriented toward activism. According to interview and archival data, NGO1 has started to organize sit-ins and petition signing to protect certain natural sites. The organization has also started gathering facts about claims of violations and prepared reports condemning government decisions—or lack of thereof (Cohen et al. 2001). These activities reflect grassroots work and the voice and involvement of volunteers. After all, these are the type of activities that can be implemented even without any funding, as NGO1 members noted. The preference to focus less on low-key operational-level activities drives NGO1 to work more on mobilizing the public to exert pressure towards broader, non-specific change (Bratton 1990; Brinkerhoff 1999; Fowler 1997; Korten 1990; Lewis and Kanji 2009).

The result is also confrontational relationship with the government. NGO1 is promoting citizen voice empowerment in its interactions with the government (Brown and Kalegaonkar 2002; Clemens 2006). The organization is very skeptical of the impact and value of any government decision or action (Lillehammer 2003). The government questions the motivations of the organization's viewpoints. The two sides stand at opposite ends in their preferred goals and means to achieve these goals (Najam 2000) as well as in their assessment of each other's impact (Young 2006).

In the case of NGO2, the relationship with the donor is based on outcomes and common desire for societal change. There is a convergence in goals and means (Najam 2000), allowing some form of balanced interaction and cooperation. As Brinkerhoff (2002) would describe it, there is a degree of mutual interdependence in an arrangement that respects and maximizes organizational identity. The organization has developed strong relationship with the donor and floats inside the donor network of local partners (Stiles 2002). At the same time, the NGO uses its credibility and local network to have a strong voice. This voice allows expressing opinion, pushing for its agenda, and sustaining a favorable relationship with the donor (AbouAssi 2013, Barman 2002). Such an arrangement allows the NGO to

express voice and to share its concerns when the donor decides to alter its funding criteria. More than likely, the donor will respond positively to the concern in order to sustain the partnership (AbouAssi 2013).

NGO2's strong voice extends into its relationship with government. NGO2 utilizes its relations and voice to engage in continuous dialogue with government and be involved in formulating public policies and plans in partnership with public agencies. NGO2's organizational capabilities are leveraged here. These capacities are technical and professional expertise, established local support and legitimacy, and sufficient financial resources through donor support. The organization capacities form what Barman (2002) labels as a differentiation strategy making NGO2 very attractive in the eyes of the government. The two sides share the same goals on policy issues and consider the same means to achieve these goals (Najam 2000). NGO2 is a supplementary actor (Young 2000, 2006), providing the technical and financial resources when the government fails to do the job (Weisbrod 1988) or lacks resources or flexibility to act (Smith and Gronbjerg 2006; Steinberg 2006).

Thus, there is a mutual benefit for the two sides to cooperate. The effective way for NGO2 to serve its organizational mission of protecting natural resources is through working with the government. The cooperation with the government takes various forms. One form is to engage in dialogue with government (Brinkerhoff 1999; Fowler 1997; Cohen et al. 2001). NGO2 brings its network of community and local organizations to promote and lead dialogue with government on environmental needs and interests (Lillehammer 2003). Another form of cooperation, and probably a logical result of the first, is collaboration on policy formulation. NGO2 is a pioneer at this front. Various ministries, especially the Ministry of Environment, are keen to collaborate with NGO2. NGO2 has the organizational readiness and capacities and can benefit from its relationship with the donor to bring funding to pursue such a role (Barman 2002; Bratton 1990; Brinkerhoff 1999; Lillehammer 2003).

In the third case, the third NGO is characterized by its favorable responses to shifts in donor funding; it adjusts its activities to satisfy revised donor objectives (AbouAssi 2013). Borrowing from Brinkerhoff (2002) and Najam (2000), there is a gradual absorption or a certain degree of co-optation. The donor and the NGO are interested in different goals; however, the means are similar (Najam 2000). The means here are projects and funding. The donor manipulates the NGO3 through funding and benefits from NGO3's local infrastructure to implement its policies. The organization is convinced that its interest lies in adhering to donor objectives. Consequently, NGO3 adjusts its activities to fit donor criteria and secure funding (AbouAssi 2013). As NGO3's executive director admitted, securing funding has become similar to a private loan application, based on quantitative outputs (number of projects or beneficiaries or participants). This NGO is likely witnessing substantial transformation in its organizational identity. Activities are scattered and not necessarily linked to the mission. More attention is given to resource allocation than to results or impact achievement, as the NGO is more attentive to and accountable upwards to the source of funding (Edwards and Hulme 1996).

The tendency of NGO3 to adjust its activities in accordance with donor funding has caused a distortion in its public image as a serious environmental organization. The NGO tries to remedy this situation through 'low-hanging fruits' activities.

Recurring activities on NGO3's calendar are: an annual exhibit with environment as the main theme, a lecture on the environment, and reproducing main decisions issued by the Ministry of Environment and disseminating the information through an awareness campaign limited in scope and target. These activities are easy to implement with no or low budget that NGO3 can afford (Brinkerhoff 1999; Fowler 1997). The involvement of the NGO in the public policy process is tangential. The informative role the organization is capable of assuming has its limits. This means local communities are likely to prefer other organizations to channel their interests and demands to government.

This situation shapes NGO3's relationship with government. NGO3 does not cooperate with the government nor see it as adversary. As mentioned in the interviews, NGO3 is an advocate of a central role for the government and a more complementary role for NGOs. NGO3 shares the same goals with government and values the work it is doing (Najam 2000). The organization has independently decided to educate the public on government policies, plans, and decisions through awareness and information campaigns and activities. While NGO2 has taken an active approach in supporting the government and working towards a shared goal through direct cooperation and partnership, NGO3's approach is more passive, working separate from the government and using different means than those available to or preferred by government (Najam 2000).

Table 2 compares the NGOs' reactions to shifts in donor funding. It then compares relations these NGOs have built with government and the form of involvement in the public policy process. The table guides the discussion below.

In brief, reactions to donor funding drives NGO1 into more grassroots work. The public is mobilizing to perform activities that do not necessarily require external funding, which is suitable for NGO1. These activities lead NGO1 into confrontation with government and other institutions. NGO2's voice strengthens its relationship with the government and further equips the organization with resources, expertise, and connections to be a reference in the environmental sector. The government is therefore interested in cooperating with NGO2, inviting it to sit at the policy-formulation table where it can actively impact public policy from inside the institutional process. And, finally, NGO3 prefers adjusting its activities to sustain donor funding. NGO3 can still conduct awareness and educational activities on environmental issues that do not incur much cost. These activities complement and support the work of the government without NGO3 being actively involved in any cooperative relationship.

Table 2 Comparing reactions, relations, and involvement

Reaction to shifts in funding	Relation with government	Involvement in public policy process
Exit	Confrontation	Activist
Voice	Cooperation	Catalysts (policy formulation)
Adjustment	Limited complementarity (supplementary)	Information dissemination

There is no simple or consistent story here, but rather three different stories that this article wants to showcase. First, the NGO sector is heterogeneous, even after we limit our analysis to one subsector, i.e., the environment (Fisher 1997; Najam 2000). Organizational features—such as the membership base, structure, program design (Bratton 1990), expertise and specialization (Lillehammer 2003), ideology (Fisher 1997), and leadership (e.g., leadership style, educational, cultural, and political background, and personal ties)—and inter-organizational characteristics—such as trust and legitimacy, coordination (Lillehammer 2003), funding sources, and informal relationships (Bratton 1990)—distinguish organizations and make it difficult to generalize about the potential role of NGOs in the public policy arena and the patterns of relationships they have with government. This article adds another distinguishing factor: the variation in NGOs' reactions towards the donor. Second, as these reactions change over time (AbouAssi 2013), we also do not expect NGO–government relationship to be static; it is also subject to change. More research is needed to examine this change over time.

Finally, government is also a heterogeneous entity, composed of agencies with different scopes and agendas (Fisher 1997; Najam 2000). In principle, we should not oversimplify NGO's relationship with government and categorize it under one of Najam's (2000) 4-C's. However, we observe that NGOs 1 and 2's relationships with government are similar across agencies, adversary and cooperative, respectively. Interviewed members and experts perceive NGO1 to be the NGO of "no" going head-to-head with different government agencies, and NGO2 to be a reference, partnering not just with the Ministry of Environment, but other ministries on various collaborative projects. While these perceptions cannot be confirmed by government agencies, we can argue that reputation plays a major factor here. Van Slyke (2007) explains that organizations build their reputation through past performance and meeting goals. NGOs favored by public agencies they are working with secure additional access to funding opportunities and, more important, become visible; they are invited to attend public events, participate in policy forums, or provide feedback. Other public agencies start to notice these organizations and become interested to work with them. Consequently, interactions are forged or terminated. Therefore, it is possible for the same type of relationship to be replicated or shared across agencies. This subject requires further analysis.

Conclusion

This article studies how NGOs' behavior vis-à-vis the same donor may suggest potential involvement in public policy process and form of interaction with government. Three cases of NGOs working in the environmental sector in Lebanon have been compared. The analysis indicates that one NGO suspends its relations with the donor upon dissatisfaction. The organization relies on voluntary efforts and focuses on mobilizing the public. Most of its work is activism leading to confrontations with government. Another NGO has been actively cooperating with the government to introduce policy changes and enact new legislation. This particular NGO has also developed strong relations with the donor; it has a strong

voice that allows it to express its voice and concerns to the donor. The third NGO is tangentially involved in the public policy process and in supporting government. This NGO is characterized by its favorable responses to shifts in donor funding by adjusting its activities to satisfy revised objectives.

The article does not make the argument for causality or generalizability of the findings. Besides the fact that the NGO sector and government are complex and heterogeneous actors, other factors besides funding are critical for NGO relationships with government and involvement in the public policy processes, as abovementioned. In addition, the article presented one side of the story; what is missing is how donors react to different attitudes among NGOs which calls for additional research on this same topic from the side of the donors.

However, the experiences of the three NGOs that differ in their reactions vis-à-vis a single donor draw insights on how these reactions might contribute to NGO's relationships with government and involvement in the policy process without necessarily being a prerequisite to that role. Constructing strong ties with the donor might generate positive effects at the policy level and on the relationship with government, as long as the NGO does not chase the funding and become concerned with operational success. NGOs should be strategic in navigating their reactions to shifting donor tides while they steer their relations with government to induce change and make a difference.

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