Are NGO’s tools for empowering the poor or social agents for empowering the state?

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What is an NGO?
Non Governmental Organization
- Not officially registered as part of the government
- Doesn’t work for profit
- Works within the legal framework, either locally, nationally and internationally

If the definition of NGO’s is expanded to that of a Civil Society Organization, NGO’s can be considered part of the sphere of social interaction between the household and the State characterized by:
   a. Community cooperation
   b. Structures of voluntary association
   c. Networks of public communication

Why do we have NGO’s?
To solve problems and address issues not being covered/ inadequately covered by governments

Types of NGO’s
Social (Humanitarian)
Political (Peace keeping)
Economic (Microfinance)
Cultural (Cultural groups)
Environmental (Reforestation)

What is the mandate of an NGO?
The mandate of an NGO may be based on
1. Needs of the people it is working with
2. Personal Interests of its members
3. Interests of its funding agents (and related conditionality). These agents can be:
   - National Government
   - Foreign Government
   - National Agency
   - International Agency
   - Corporate Organization
   - Private Donations
   - Self-funded from previous projects

4. According to its mandate, the relationship of an NGO with the State may be
   - Complementary
   - Supplementary
   - Antagonistic
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Empower/ Enable/ Raise Consciousness among communities</td>
<td>Empower/ Enable a community at the expense of another community.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Represent people or give under-represented people a voice</td>
<td>Claim to represent communities but actually advance their own agenda</td>
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<td>Dis-empower people by speaking for them and therefore denying them the dignity of speaking for themselves</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Work towards improving lives by addressing community issues</td>
<td>Force communities to work with solutions based on external values</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Foster international solidarity through sharing economic resources, exchange of ideas, transfer of skills &amp; knowledge</td>
<td>Create dependency on external resources</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Encourage social harmony &amp; tolerance through sharing common goals and concerns</td>
<td>Polarize communities and create conflict over allocations of funds &amp; resources</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Provide initial resources to start development</td>
<td>Create false expectations at the start due to non-sustainable work</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Not elected by dominant majority so can independently carry out work especially for neglected groups</td>
<td>Not accountable to the community which can lead to corruption, exploitation and lack of commitment</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Effectively work with communities &amp; organizations to meet goals/ targets in accordance with expectations</td>
<td>Produce short-term results as all goals/ targets are time-bound according to the “Project” mode of operation</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Contribute to beneficial and lasting improvements in the lives of disadvantaged individuals</td>
<td>Superficial understanding of problems leads to limited effectiveness of projects i.e. improvement in fewer people’s lives</td>
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<td>Inadequate/ Lack of planning resulting in disproportionate benefits among a community</td>
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Operational boundaries between the State and NGO’s may be blurred especially when an NGO starts taking over the “traditional” functions of the government in a region, especially with regards to issues like:

- poverty alleviation
- infrastructure development (eg. water & sanitation)
- housing
- public health
- literacy & education
- environment management & conservation
- disaster rehabilitation
- in some cases, law & order.

Questions for debate:
1. Can NGO’s empower the poor AND simultaneously empower the State?
2. Are there NGO’s that act as social agents but empower a State other than their own?

Case Study – INDIA

NGO that empowers poor - SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) - www.sewa.org

- SEWA is a trade union registered in 1972. It is an organisation of poor, self-employed women workers who earn a living through their own labour or small businesses in the unorganised sector.
- SEWA’s main goals are to organise women workers for full employment whereby workers obtain work security, income security, food security and social security (at least health care, child care and shelter).
- By improving employment & poverty alleviation, this NGO’s work is taking over the government’s role and so, reducing the role of the State in society.

NGO that empowers State - WASMO (Water & Sanitation Management Organisation) - www.wasmo.org

- WASMO is an autonomous organisation established by the Government of Gujarat in 2002 responsible for coordination and monitoring of the Swajaldhara Water Supply programme.
- WASMO’s main goal is to coordinate a rural Water supply programme that is expected to ensure the level of service that the public desires by making the public pay “part of the capital cost and full operation and maintenance cost.” It is assumed that communities will pay because they (a) own the assets, (b) have themselves planned and installed systems and been actively involved in the process, (c) have been trained to do simple repairs, (d) know the Government will not maintain assets, (e) have sufficient funds for maintenance, (f) have to pay for operation and maintenance of the systems.
- Though autonomous, WASMO clearly works with the State to control & monitor public water-supply projects while reducing State responsibility and expenditure for supplying or maintaining basic infrastructure. It has also been promoting the State’s canal-based drinking water programme associated with the Narmada Dam.

NGO that empowers Poor and State – CACL (Campaign Against Child Labour) - www.childrensrightsindia.org

- CACL is a nationwide network of about 700 organisations that is committed to the eradication of child labour in all sectors.
- CACL’s main goal is the immediate eradication of child labour (consistent with Constitution of India Article 24 and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). The objectives of CACL are to create awareness on Child labour, investigate and bring to justice specific and sectoral violations against child labourers, review policies and legislation on child labour and to promote effective strategies and alternatives for the rehabilitation of working children.
- By investigating and fighting child labour, CACL empowers poor children who are being exploited while helping the State (law & order system) catch criminals involved in human rights violations. CACL promotes the enforcement of free, quality elementary education for all children below 14 as a pre-requisite for the eradication of child labour. This gives children a chance for a better life and strengthens State literacy programmes.