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**Partnership and cooperation in Haiti:
Clashes of reality and construction**

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Abstract

This paper analyses existent and perceived rules and restrictions of the global development dispositif working to maintain inequalities in interactions of International NGOs (INGOs) and Haitian organisations. It does so by exploring constructions of partnership and their clashing realities. Development organisations and agencies have influenced the fabric of Haitian society and politics not only by their mere presence but also by the rules they impose. The paper approaches this by identifying positions of power and decision-making, thereby drawing on Foucauldian tools of discourse analysis. The work draws on empirical fieldwork in Haiti between 2012 and 2014. It identifies a narrative of trickle-down pressures that INGOs draw upon to position themselves as intermediaries in the larger development system. By questioning these narratives, the paper provides the starting point for the development of alternatives that enable international NGOs to assume a role that supports rather than weakens.

Keywords: partnership; power; discourse; development dispositif; Haiti

Partnership and cooperation in Haiti:

Clashes of reality and construction

1. Partnership and cooperation in Haiti

Haiti is the 'Pearl of the Caribbean'. It is a proud country with the first successful slave revolution in history and the first independent black republic. However, usually these are not the attributes that immediately come to mind in thinking about Haiti. Quite in contrast, Haiti is known as the 'Republic of NGOs', the country with the second highest number of foreign NGOs in the world (Schuller 2007) and a hotspot of poverty and chaos.

Even before the disastrous earthquake in January 2010 Haiti was despite of, or, maybe due to, decades of international intervention and development efforts, already known as the poorest country of the Western hemisphere. Continued international support for past dictatorships has led to famines, human rights violations and kleptocracy. Haiti is generally considered a failed state, with weak governmental structures, little state accountability and high vulnerability to environmental catastrophes (Zanotti 2010, 756).

NGOs, once hailed as magic bullets (Edwards/Hulme 1995), have been criticized from many different perspectives, but nevertheless continue to be important actors in the development landscape of Haiti. However, years after the disaster, the situation in Haiti has only changed superficially. The apparent failure of NGO work and their development approaches has, also generally, resulted in a fundamental critique of mainstream development, as proposed by Post-Development theory.

The discussion of this paper is located within the tensions of the mainstream development paradigm and Post-Development as its deconstruction. Post-Development demands the questioning of dominant discourses, representations and the power/knowledge nexus and argues that this can only be achieved by local, i.e. Southern, movements and organisations themselves. In this regard, strategies of Alternative Development and their participatory approaches are contrasted with the call for radical Alternatives to Development (Sachs 1993; Rahnema 1997; Escobar 1995). Some proponents nevertheless contend that cooperation of local and international organisations within frames of Post-Development is possible (Andreasson 2007; Gibson-Graham 2005; Matthews 2004, 2007, 2008; McGregor 2007, 2009; McKinnon 2007, 2008). Gibson-Graham argue that 'the postdevelopment agenda is not [...] anti-development. The challenge of postdevelopment is not to give up on development, nor to see all development practice – past, present and future [...] as failed. The challenge is to imagine and practice development differently' (Gibson-Graham 2005, 6).

NGOs, particularly those seeking to imagine and practice alternatives, are confronted with the pitfalls of this aspiration and the fact that they are part of the structured mainstream development apparatus. This article seeks to explore narratives and practices of partnership and cooperation within relations of international NGOs (INGOs) and Haitian organisations.

My theoretical point of departure is the assumption is that reality is constructed through discourse. Dispositifs, such as the development dispositif, are structuring discourses and provide predefined

infrastructures to solve a set problem, in this case that of 'underdevelopment'. Escobar defines development as a historically produced discourse within a Western dispositif, which serves to establish, stabilize and reproduce hegemony and control (1995, 6). Within this dispositif, actors and institutions constitute an apparatus 'for producing knowledge about, and the exercise of power over, the Third World' (ibid., 9). Likewise, dispositifs produce a reification of power techniques (Bühmann/Schneider 2008, 54). They result from an entanglement of power and knowledge relations (Agamben 2008, 9); and are 'strategies of power relations that are supporting types of knowledge and in turn are supported by it' (Foucault 1978, 123).

In order to analyse these power relations I will first identify existing discourses about partnership within cooperation of INGOs and Haitian organisations (HNGO). I will then analyse institutionalized rules that frame actions. The analysis aims to shed light on discourses and narratives of ideal types concerning work and self-perception that are perpetuated by the INGOs themselves, before identifying clashes of this construction with reality.

My findings illustrate that the development dispositif produces a 'trickle-down intermediarism' that fundamentally clashes with ideal types of partnership proposed by respondents. This is demonstrated by exploring structures (the 'Republic of NGOs'), rules (the ideology of projects) and positions (speaker and subjects).

This article draws on empirical field work in the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince and in the departments Artibonite, Centre, Nord-Ouest and Ouest between 2012 and 2014. Data was collected through participant observation, narrative interviews and group discussions with INGO and HNGO staff, activists, community leaders and grassroots groups.

2. Exploring discourses of partnership and cooperation

Many INGOs pride themselves on not implementing projects themselves, but supporting local visions and cooperating with local organisations. Publications stress that these are partnerships between equals. INGOs 'no longer seek to impose their vision of development [...] but instead wish to be partners in strategies determined and "owned" by recipients themselves' (Abrahamsen 2004, 1453). However, before realities can be evaluated and analysed how partnership is defined and experienced by different actors, it needs to be asked what the concept of partnership actually entails.

Pickard rightly notes that partnership is a word that is not clearly defined and must be given 'meaning within a specific context' (Pickard 2007, 576). The word is 'construed to mean equal standing among participants, with perhaps differentiated responsibilities' (ibid.). Often, it includes a notion of solidarity. Generally it is assumed that 'North-South partnerships [...] enable more efficient use of scarce resources, increased sustainability' (Lister 1999, 3) and produce benefits for both parties in reaching the assumed common targets. However, the variety of possible partnership positions is broad, not at all of which necessarily encompass equality. They range from cooperation partner, sub-contractor and implementation tool to advocate-client or donor-recipient relations. Particularly relevant is the definition also for evaluating demands towards participation and empowerment, which are two main elements in INGO partnership discourses. At the core lies the question of conditions and limitations for initiating and maintaining partnership, especially in considering the

large financial component of these relations.

In practice, the construction of partnership produces a variety of different and often tense role and relationship configurations. These are not necessarily limited to interactions between Northern and Southern actors. At the same time, international organisations often feel they have to deal with rules and structures of the dispositif that force them to maintain certain configurations. These will be further explored below.

The discourse of partnership in NGO work emerged in the 1980s. Following the era of structural adjustment policies, an increased emphasis on 'privatizing development has led to sharp increases in official aid to NGOs' and has provoked 'new debates about the desired relationship [...] between NGOs in the North and South' (Fowler 1991, 5). The concept was initially treated as 'a) an ideological statement that would demonstrate the strength of Northern NGOs commitment to solidarity [...], and b) as a set of new collaborative mechanisms and funding practices' (ibid., 14). Fowler argued in 1991 that the term partnership is so 'ill-defined and overused that it is in danger of losing a serviceable meaning' (ibid., 5). Since then, there has been continuous debate about conditions that make partnership a 'practical solution to inadequate aid performance' (Fowler 2000, 3; Maxwell/Ridell 1998; Lewis 1998; Lister 1999; Fowler 1991, 2000). Despite the many failings that were observed since the rise of the debate the prevailing assumption remains that partnership will help 'move the South in the desired direction' (Fowler 2000, 6) and eventually will 'make aid more effective' (ibid.). Although many INGOs, and in particular those that have been researched for this work, consciously strive to build meaningful relationships on equal terms, the question of power continuously arises. The discourse of partnership in development cannot be viewed separately from power especially when considering its location within the dispositif of development and postcolonial contexts. The following analysis attempts to trace how the concerned discourses regarding partnership are structured and 'how they are structuring knowledge domains' (Keller 2011, 55), 'constitute reality orders and [...] produce power effects' (ibid., 48).

3. The discourse of 'development through partnership'

To determine the specific components of the 'development through partnership' discourse I initially analyse INGO official publications before drawing on responses of INGO staff in interviews. If we follow Foucault's assumption that 'speaking is to do something' (Foucault 2008, 697), then speaking, or, as in this case the dispersion of arguments through publication, reaches beyond the mere formulation of ideas. Rather, through the definition of interaction as partnership in a particular context, it constitutes an action and the formation of certain objects within this particular discourse of partnership. What is especially relevant for the analysis is to identify the subject and object positions as these constitute the processes of formation.

The INGOS analysed in this research without exception formulate a desire to support local organisations in achieving better conditions (in a variety of aspects) for themselves and for their communities. The approach they are taking is through partnership, which is defined through components and criteria such as equality, a horizontal relationship, the ability to voice critique and discontent. Respondents are aware that their ideal type of partnership has severe pitfalls and shortcomings that are inherent in the role configurations, most importantly the imbalance produced

through the one-sided location of funds. Nevertheless, according to the dominant discourse, partnership is considered the only just approach of intervention for international NGOs (Fowler 2000, 1). This approach continues to be contended, although problems recognized have been discussed for almost two decades.

The importance of dialogue and negotiation is prominent in publications and responses of interviewed INGO staff. A dialogue between the two parties is seen as acknowledging and accounting for diverging roots, cultural backgrounds and languages of the people that cooperate. A respondent emphasizes that one 'cannot develop another person. This person can only develop him or herself. This means that you need to engage into a dialogue and in this dialogue you need to try, as far as possible, to also share this with the other' (INGO respondent 2012). One has to be able to understand the cultural background and actual realities of the counterpart. Partnership in the cooperation with the Haitian organisation then means concerted action. As a respondent formulates: 'Concerted discussions, concerted analysis of problems, but also the concerted search for solutions' (INGO respondent 2012). This allegedly plays an important role both for the planning of projects as well as for their later implementation in all interviewed INGOs. What is furthermore pointed out by respondents is the aspiration to an equal nature of partnership and the maintenance of horizontal relations. The ability to raise critique and disagreement and the space to build confidence are also seen as major indicators for ensuring an equal and balanced relationship.

Despite of these assumptions, the access to financial funds inevitably provides INGOs with a means of power. Although the INGO respondents are aware and reflective of shortcomings to their aspirations that are resulting from this, they consider the constellations as valid. Initially, all INGO interview partners formulate an ideal type of partnership even though in many cases they almost immediately limit it by pointing out existing constraints resulting from the larger infrastructure of the development dispositif and the imbalance produced through financial funds. In their narratives, the compromises are justified by the infrastructure, which in turn fundamentally determines the scope of power and the nature of relation- and partnerships.

4. 'Trickle-down intermediarism' and clashes of reality and construction: Considering structures, rules and positions of the dispositif

Aligning with Ferguson I 'take as [...] primary object not the people to be "developed", but the apparatus that is to do the "developing" (Ferguson 2003, 17). Sometimes referred to as the 'Republic of NGOs' (PeaceBrief 23 2010), Haiti has the second highest number of foreign NGOs in the world, with estimates ranging from 3,000 to as many as 10,000 (ibid.). What has been voiced multiple times is that their way of working and operating is rather more problematic than their sheer number, both in regard to international NGOs, but also Haitian. In the past, Haiti has been a 'canvas for approaches to aid' (MacFarquhar 2010) exercised by the development apparatus and is dominated by all kind of development organisations and agencies. They have influenced the fabric of society and politics not only by their mere presence, but also by the rules they impose and according to which almost all players in this game abide. By its very existence, this has implications that are causing the disempowerment of local actors and the weakening of existing national structures and organisations

and very often does not produce sustainable change. One respondent points out: 'The way the "Republic of NGOs" operates here is extraordinarily wasteful and very insulting.' This way of operating needs to be considered in three aspects in particular: the structures, the rules and the positions of the dispositif that make up this republic. The structure of the dispositif includes a range of rules and positions. These impose external constraints on the aspirations towards equal partnerships.¹ The 'Republic of NGOs' in this regard proves to be a very concrete structure of the development dispositif. The characteristics and practices described constitute and focus the relation of power and knowledge between the cooperating parties.

4.1 The rules of the dispositif and the ideology of projects

Many INGOs receive a large part of their financial funds from governmental or state donors. These large donor agencies pursue a particular strategy and inevitably have their own agenda, to which the recipient organisations have to align themselves to in order to be eligible for funding. Sometimes these structures have been described as aid industry (Fowler 2000, 1). Indeed, in many cases development cooperation resembles a professional employment business. The work of the actors on the ground is dominated by considerations regarding the binaries of time and money, as well as efficiency and results. The most visible outcome of this are the myriads of projects conducted and carried out: 'Haiti is a vast cemetery of projects' (Haitian NGO respondent 2012). This critique has been expressed repeatedly by representatives of Haitian NGOs. Connected to this so-called ideology of projects are certain rules and restrictions.

The first major problematic complex is the question of finances and resources and access to them. Development interventions are carried out through projects, for which financial funds are necessary. The duration of projects is one of the main pitfalls in this constellation. While there is a long term vision formulated, the nature of projects, being restricted to a typical cycle of two or three years, does not account for that. Communities and Haitian organisations have to plan from project to project, and from donor to donor, each imposing their own requirements. Very often this leads to a situation where the Haitian organisation, if they possess the means, works to cater for this variety of different requirements, thereby entering a vicious cycle of having to accept yet another disconnected project idea in order to make ends meet. They are forced to focus on issues the donor prefers. This eventually leads to a perpetuating cycle of self-sustenance and does not produce sustainable change and emancipation. These institutional settings restrict Haitian organisations in terms of how they pursue their own vision. Even a representative of an INGO bitterly admits: 'The idea of projects is not sustainable.'

What has been criticized by all respondents, regardless whether they are Haitian or international, is the impression of a funding treadmill into which they enter by attempting to or actually accessing official development funding. Very often fulltime staff is required to manage funds. This requires an organisational structure that, in due course, needs to be maintained, leading to a severe imbalance between the search for new funds and the actual work being carried out. The search for funding becomes self-perpetuating. Although one would expect this concern to be raised predominantly by Haitian actors, this is also a problem INGO respondents feel exposed to. 'The hand giving is the one holding the power' is an INGO representative's view expressed not with regard to his relation to the

¹ Whether these are real or perceived may be open to discussion.

Haitian recipients, but to his organisations' own position when receiving external funds.

INGO respondents locate themselves in an intermediary position. They feel dependent on influx of donor money and as being part of a complex system of requirements and accountability. This (perceived) position of financial precariousness leads to a situation where INGOs feel dependency on external funds interfering with their liberty of decision-making. This has severe impacts on the way partnerships are shaped as they are aligned with donors' requirements. An INGO interviewee formulates this accordingly:

Local organisations can't meet donors' requirements and as international organisation WE need to respond to get money. [...] And we need to present a high level quality of proposal and we need to respect deadlines. And such a deadline doesn't allow a REAL negotiation with local partners. Even when the good will exists, it's not an easy task to get a balanced relationship.

This also points to the problematic positioning of international NGOs in regard to partnership relations to Haitian organisations and the fluctuation between real and envisaged subject and object positions. Another INGO respondent confides that he often feels the same dilemma regarding participation. Even though the work ethic and approach of his organisation stresses the importance of participation as central and views it as a main requirement for equal partnership, he does not feel comfortable with his room for manoeuvre. His action is inevitably limited through the access to donor funds.

Where I see a problem that is participation. It is, was, a big word in our organisation. But when WE don't have the money... you let people participate [...] and then we go on the search for money and we don't find the money. Then there is big disappointment on the other side [...]. WHEN do I let participation happen in order to avoid big disappointment?

This does not only expose the difference between participation in development and participation in projects, but also stresses the determining factor of access to financial resources that official agencies provide. The quote above shows very clearly how the vertical relations and impositions of certain views, that dependency on external funds evokes, is trickling down the development chain. In this chain, INGOs serve as intermediaries by providing access to funds; however, they also trickle down the pressures they experience. A respondent admits that 'because resources are not autonomous [...] there are different bias and different constraints at different level, even for the international organisation.'

An INGO respondent even relates the financial dependency he experiences to the constellation of his Haitian partner and himself as he realizes that 'we are also dependent on [...] funds.' This results in situations where demands or needs are voiced by the partners and the INGO feels unable to respond to them as their priority setting is tied to other considerations (ibid.). This is especially relevant in connection to decision-making which particular issues are to be funded.²

In addition, the access to funding is regulated by the requirement of demonstrating results. One respondent confides that his organisation is bound by having to guarantee to their donors that development is happening with the money they receive. He also admits that from his point of view this is also the biggest challenge for what 'we term partnership'. This exposes the core assumption of many development endeavours: being able to document a certain pre-planned outcome signifies a

² See p.11 with regard to environmental or advocacy funding.

positive impact. It remains questionable what definition of development lies at the root of this framing as it seems like engagement into development interaction is not about fostering or promoting a specific type of change, but merely about the documentation of superficial outcomes. This is to be explored in relation to the dominance of results, time and efficiency and the requirements of accountability attached to that.

The importance of these factors is clearly acknowledged because 'at the end, at the end of the chain [...] we are all committed to results' (INGO respondent 2012). There is a pressure to show results and to document impact. Particularly problematic is that donor agencies often ask for a quick impact. Not only does this lead to a focus on short-term and non-strategic project planning as an INGO respondent admits, the INGOs also find themselves in a position, where, in order to demonstrate this impact quickly and supposedly efficiently, they feel the need to act operationally and dominate the processes of decision-making and implementation in the cooperation with their partners. This adds a further element of control to the relationship, even though the respondent previously stressed that from her point of view INGOs 'cannot lead development in any country. People should be first' (INGO respondent 2012).

Donors [...] are asking for quick impact. We cannot get an impact in one year. In every single project you are told to get results, to get impact after ONE year. It's managed like a project. [...] and there is the temptation to be operational. To show the donor what is expected. Even though, everyone knows that's not the case [...] [and] things didn't change for the majority of people.

This problem is also exacerbated by the accountability structure. As INGOs are private 'they are not accountable to the beneficiaries. They just have accountability above' (Independent international consultant respondent 2012). This means that they can align themselves to donor demands rather than to beneficiary requirements.

Again, there is a clear trickle-down effect detectable. Haitian organisations, who are exposed to a number of international actors, gain competency in formulating their proposal in that fashion that it fulfils the requirements. Formality, however, does not necessarily correlate with the activities being adequate to realities. Although there is awareness of misdirection of efforts, INGO staff do not feel in possession of power to change this constellation and continue to abide to the rules that do not necessarily produce sustainable change. An INGO respondent admits: 'A lot of money [is] wasted in this country.'

INGO respondents show awareness that their project work often is not sustainable. For this reason they claim to pursue a shifting approach from project work to program work, where a more holistic view is attempted. Nevertheless, the threshold remains the restriction of funds. In particular, as some decision-makers are almost exclusively interested in the mere measurement of output, 'soft' topics like advocacy, where these outputs are more difficult to illustrate and measure, are often severely underfunded. The apparent attractiveness of issues is always connected to an externally determined agenda. An INGO respondent gives the example of environmental issues, which are indeed a pressing problem in Haiti, but in 'one period, EVERY funding for environment [was] completely abandoned, [...] all the [local] organisations [had to] close their offices, it was not sexy at all' (INGO respondent 2012). The INGO respondents experience this constellation as a severe restriction to their work. They have commenced working with a local organisation in a certain thematic area, but when the focus of their own donors shifts there are no longer resources available. A respondent admits that one of their

major weaknesses is a strong alignment of project planning to criteria of their own donors. In order to access further funding from co-financing sources the focus of the work of his INGO was laid on the implementation of infrastructure projects in the past, which has led to a neglect of involvement with local structures, actors of civil society and especially the consideration of local competencies and capacities.

However, INGO respondents also refer to the existence of so-called unrestricted funds originating from private donations, with which they experience far greater freedoms. An interviewee expresses that, with these funds, they can 'prolong a project and secure the things we have started. Secure sustainability' and also act much quicker compared to projects financed with official funding. However, he also admits that before the large influx of private donations received after the earthquake in 2010, their work in Haiti was largely financed from co-financing donors. Even though it has been formulated as strategy to use the untied funds for work that is considered to be 'softer' in focus, it remains open to discussion how this focus will shift again after these funds have diminished. Another respondent expresses a similar perspective:

We continue to say we don't want to be donor driven. [We] try to get some fundraising [...] to get [...] unrestricted money. The restricted money comes from the donor, with ALL the requirements we cannot go over. And our unrestricted money is used to support some not so sexy [issues], for example advocacy.

Indeed, in interviews with organisations, who are not accepting official development assistance (ODA) funds, but concentrate on own fundraising with private donors or trusts, it seems that the respondents perceive their spaces of manoeuvre, negotiation and decision-making much more open and flexible. Nevertheless, INGOs continue to rely heavily on ODA funds despite that they seem to be aware that the acceptance of these is inevitably connected with compromises regarding their work ethic.

It has become clear that the ideology of projects provides severe hindering for sustainable processes. These barriers exist at different levels. First, the underlying ideology of project funding does not 'admit thinking about the underlying premises of the so-called project, [...] [as] managerial techniques of monitoring and evaluating projects through log-frames' (Shivji 2007, 37) remove the sight of the whole. Secondly, in order to make projects easy to manage and to evaluate, they are conceptualized as single issues. These are identified as a 'problem at the level of phenomenon; its underlying basis is not addressed but assumed [...] [thereby being] isolated and abstracted from its social, economic and historical reality' (ibid., 36). The ideology of projects, even if actors enacting it envision sustainable processes of change, by its very nature and structure prevents the promotion of such processes.

4.2 Positions of power within the dispositif

In the outline of ideal partnership constellations the main components are clearly formulated. They are personal, individual, horizontal and balanced long-term relationships, the mutual sharing of experiences and understanding of realities, spaces for disagreement and negotiation and a shared vision and common basis. INGO respondents maintain that they seek equal relationships that are balanced according to the definitions they have put forward. Nevertheless, there are elements of power and privilege to be found in those relations that implement positions of speaker, subject and

object. Although it is important to note that all INGO respondents display a high degree of reflexivity and awareness concerning their role within the development dispositif, there are a variety of problematic positions that contradict the descriptions and definitions of partnership on equal footing provided by them and show that these are closer to ideal types than to reality. For this reason, it is necessary to explore actual conditions and fields where reality and construction clash.

A determining factor in relationships is the question of who possesses the legitimate and adequate knowledge to propose solutions. An INGO respondent expresses, that eventually they themselves are the 'ones who give orientation', implying that they have knowledge or solutions the local partner does not possess. The discursive practices maintained establish that the proper knowledge about the solution of problems is necessarily located with the INGO. Staff feels that they 'need to be proactive and [...] take the adequate decision that can really help people to be empowered.' This statement includes a range of implicit assumptions the INGO respondent makes exposing the position she has assumed individually and for her organisation, while also demonstrating the rules of formation that maintain the discourse and confirm the assigned speaker and subject positions. These assumptions foremost include the components of knowledge, capability and empowerment.

Firstly, the respondent assumes that she has the necessary competence, knowledge and means to propose solutions from a valid position. Constraints seem to be attached that prevent an open negotiation of the question of validity of this position. Secondly, by expressing that it is her role to be proactive, the above respondent frames the Haitian counterpart as passive and helpless. The Haitian respondents on the other hand, are very much aware of the fact that they are put into a position where they are the ones that need to be helped, because they do not have solutions themselves. They criticize that they are almost exclusively characterized within categories of poverty and misery and that these categories are employed to obtain financial funds. Haitian respondents make very clear that they refuse to act and be acted upon exclusively within mechanisms concerning the passive negotiation of poverty. In contrast, however, the overwhelming involvement of external actors further perpetuates the imagery that Haitians are incapable and implements existing vertical relations. An international consultant, who has been working in the Haitian development landscape for a number of years interprets this as 'great white hero mentality', where the so-called privileged are convinced that they have to be able to help, that they are the ones obliged 'to have the solution', and that in 'places like Haiti, they don't have the solutions, WE have the solutions and WE can help.'

Empowerment is an INGO buzzword. By helping someone to become empowered, a process that seems to be framed as a passive action by the INGO representative, it is assumed that the actor who initiates the empowerment is already empowered. The underlying idea of this is doing something for the people, rather than together with them. This rather obviously admits unequal power relations, something that is recognized by Haitian actors when they voice their impression of cooperation: 'the master say and the labourers do it.'³

A further point in relation to legitimate positions of knowledge is the question of capacity building. Capacity building measures are repeatedly mentioned as one component of partnership to strengthen local competencies. However, often the actual aim of these measures remains blurred. In many cases, it is not clear whether trainings or workshops contribute to strengthening the organisation in pursuing their work or rather equipping them with competencies that enable them to

³ Haitian villagers as quoted by an international consultant, 2012.

better respond to bureaucratic requirements of donors. It can be questioned whether the effects of these trainings result in capacity for development or capacity for compliance to rules of the dispositive. Haitian organisations have criticized that measures often focus on technical capacities that are not oriented towards the promotion of endogenous processes of change but rather at managing the interaction between donor and beneficiary.

In close connection with the question of knowledge the issue of valid understanding arises. One major critique of the way INGOs operate is their lack of understanding of local contexts and realities and their consequent misdirected efforts. A prominent example of ill-directed interventions are cash for work programs being conducted in the middle of the planting season. The program 'drained all the farmers to the roads, leaving their farms and no time to plant, to make use of the rainy season' (Haitian NGO respondent 2012). The farmers were left with no harvest and the program had a very limited duration. A respondent of a Haitian NGO confided that these 'practices really hurt.' Haitian respondents criticized that in many cases neither their competencies nor their knowledge and understanding of local realities and experiences were consulted or considered. If results remain, if it all, on the micro level and do not produce any sustainable change, it questions the overall value of the project. Again, this point shows the orientation towards the requirement of quick and supposedly efficient implementation of projects that does not allow for the consideration of local voices.

An aspect that has even more severe consequences is that direct involvement of INGOs in communities has often caused the severe weakening of existing structures. Although respondents of INGOs have claimed that the level of organisation, in particular in the rural areas, is very low, there are a variety of structures existent based on mutual support and solidarity. By failing to recognize the existence of these groups the INGOs have set up parallel structures, which on first sight appear more attractive to the population as goods may be given out for free or financial incentives are envisaged. However, project cycles only span a limited period, after which the parallel structure disappears, while the initial structure has been severely undermined or even ceased to exist due to lack of support. The community is left without any sustainable structure at all. Additionally, this serves as a viable example for the lack of understanding of the local reality that many INGOs have by failing to recognize existing structures.

The level of resources within organisations and their partners and the access to those are factors that mostly perpetuate positions of power and hinder a balanced relationship. Important elements are the difference in size of the two cooperating parties and the fact that the international party has access to a variety of funds the Haitian organisation does not have independently. INGO staff is aware of this, and as a respondent formulates: 'if you need to be honest the power relation is not in favour of local organisations.' The Haitian partners of a large INGO confirm this insight. They feel that very often the relationship is limited to donor-beneficiary positions, where the party in possession of the funds inevitably dominates. Particularly in interactions concerning financial administration, the interactions are perceived as being minimally cooperative. There is also an awareness of the sub-contracting of partners, that sometimes INGOs merely support their own objectives, which relate to the expectations of their own donors, rather than those of the partner organisation. This eventually is more about 'disempowerment than development', as the HNGO becomes a tool in the implementation of externally induced objectives. It has often been stressed by INGO respondents that an important condition of an equal partnership is the self-confidence of the Haitian counterpart and their ability to refuse projects or funding that do not comply with the realities or their

organisations' work ethic and vision. In practice this is difficult. The INGO is, due to the inherent imbalance in size and access to resources, in the position to set the criteria for what is implemented and how the money is spent. A respondent does not recognize this as coercion but rather as the way work is necessarily done. Even when there is a rare act of refusal of funds of the HNGO, although seemingly implying balance and emancipation of INGO dependence, this is not necessarily true because, as an interviewee is aware, 'it's not so sure they will find the money to get their own [...] and [at] the end of the day they feel uncomfortable to say [no], to make their decision.' The Haitian organisation is almost always subject to a trade-off consideration between access to resources that ensure the maintenance of the organisation and the space for implementing their own vision.

Even though efforts may be made to lead an equal partnership there are a variety of power positions being assumed and perpetuated through levels of resources and decision-making powers that hinder this process fundamentally. Components of power are inevitably inherent in all partnership configurations analysed. They do not necessarily have to be intentional or coercive in nature but can work accordingly, simply due to the set-up of relationship configurations.

Some of the shortfalls of actual partnership and the discrepancy realities show toward the ideal type can be located in the way individuals define their own legitimate position. INGO respondents have justified certain responsibilities or lack thereof with the structure of the partnership discourse, but at the same time they have been violating it. While the assumption of positions is justified with rules of formation from within the discourse, existing shortfalls are explained with external constraints that are in turn imposed from the outside.

Structures of the development dispositif determine the nature of relationships and cooperation INGOs maintain with their Haitian partners. Although it is clearly voiced that these structures compromise the intended outcomes, INGOs feel they have to obey to set rules and requirements; they talk of empowerment and partnership but are predominantly concerned with ticking the required boxes. Often INGOs do not view themselves as donors but rather locate themselves in the same position as the Haitian organisation, and thereby continue to face and trickle down certain pressures and requirements. They accept structures as they believe they are 'in this environment, we can't get out. We can't just build a paradise for ourselves' (INGO respondent 2012). INGOs readily switch their own position from that of a speaker that defines the rules of cooperation, to that of a subject that simply obeys externally set rules. Essentially, however, this is not a question of internal or external pressure, but boils down to positions of power or disempowerment that are freely assumed by actors. Certainly, the structures that impose severe restrictions to alternative visions are in place; nevertheless, there are spaces where there is a choice of positions as has been demonstrated with the example of unrestricted funds. It can be concluded that although the present infrastructure of the development dispositif works to hinder the enactment of sustainable development relationships, narratives of legitimization and justification are readily employed.

5. Conclusions

The analysis above has pointed to vast clashes of reality and construction in INGO discourse on partnership and development interaction. There are various contradictions in the narrative of

respondents. On the one hand, INGO staff show reflexivity; on the other, INGO respondents are eager to find justifications for why they cannot abide by their self-proclaimed principles. There seems to be a high level of awareness about the short-comings of their own work; however, these are legitimized with outward and situational requirements and pressures.

The sources of problems are seemingly obvious. They are located in the set-up of the dispositif, its limiting rules and restrictions. Actors are consciously or unconsciously working to perpetuate this structure. The discussion has demonstrated that INGO actors feel they do not have any choice other than to abide to the rules and assume the role of intermediaries. They are torn between their ideal vision of work and the requirements they feel exposed, which are the restrictions of the dispositif on the one hand but also to the upward accountability structure and the inevitable interconnection of time, money and efficiency on the other. This intertwined set of clashing role sets can be termed as trickle-down intermediary position.

The above discussion has pointed to and identified rules and restrictions that seem to be based on the trickle-down exercise of power of some actors on others. According to Foucault, 'the exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which some act on others' (Foucault 2001, 340). Power in that sense exists 'only when it is put into action, even though, of course, it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures' (ibid.).

As Foucault argues, power relations can never exist without a certain degree of freedom. Individuals or collective subjects are necessarily faced with a 'field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct [...], of reacting and modes of behaviour are available' (ibid., 342). In continuation of these thoughts proposed by Foucault, the rules and structures of the dispositif, by which the actors feel restricted, can be characterized as a hierarchical bureaucracy. This bureaucracy works based on the rules of self-governance mediating the contact between official donor, INGO and local NGO similar to that between supervisor and subordinates. The functioning of this system fundamentally rests on the self-discipline of the intermediaries, who are, in pursuing a certain conduct in a specific field of action, imposing their interpretations, thereby trickling the imposition down the chain and (re-) producing dependencies. Consequently, this leads to a self-perpetuating cycle of certain conducts. Foucault argues that the 'actors' self-disciplinarian and self-regulating normalization of statements and practices leads to a strengthening and reproduction of the established discursive order' (Lie 2007, 53).

A respondent, who has observed this self-perpetuation in Haiti for some years, characterizes the main problem as that, that 'individuals don't get a sense of their own power. [...] Individuals become cogs in the wheel, because the system is allowed to a certain autopilot' (International consultant respondent 2012). This applies both to international as well as to Haitian NGO actors. Essentially the idea of change, framed within categories of developmental activism or protest, is contradictory to the existing bureaucratic structure with its focus on time, efficiency and quick results. The dominant conduct of development interaction does not allow for the idea of change, even though that may be the official discourse and aim. Development actors approaching interaction departing from this understanding omit (their own) individual agency. Development discourse and the corresponding dispositif remain systems by which actors are formed who then reproduce the 'very discourse they are shaped by' (Lie 2007, 54). In this sense, the dominant conduct is continuously 'reproduced by [...] agents and agencies – having the effect of strengthening the already established discourse and thus

reducing the relevance of other knowledge formations' (ibid.).

Partnership, which despite decades of critical discussion, remains as the only concept of intervention considered to be just, has been exposed as incorporating a range of pitfalls imposed by the dispositif that hinder meaningful interaction. One cannot claim that the idea of partnership is enacted uncritically by the INGOs. Respondents are aware and reflective of the problems. In particular the question of power seems impossible to resolve. Consequently, this leads to the question whether partnership is a viable approach at all and if a possible alternative can be thought of. INGOs claim that they work in partnership for development. However, in attempting to think of alternatives one should also attempt to think of alternatives to partnership. Partnership is only one type of possible relationships in the aid context. Possible alternatives could be cooperation and solidarity, both 'being based on the premise of interdependence' (Fowler 2000, 8). Cooperation is determined by the 'issue and interest at hand, the capacity and power of actors involved and the context' (ibid.). These factors need to be considered case by case and should eventually work in the interest of the South. Solidarity can be understood as 'recognition of the inevitability of the need for mutual understanding, empathy and shared action in an increasingly interdependent and complicated world' (ibid.). Both concepts rely heavily on the idea of interdependence. The core problem is that in actors' perception the development dispositif does not 'behave as an interdependent system but as a chain of dependency-inducing relationships' (ibid.) As has been traced above, 'each link in the chain may be connected to, but is protected from, the next by a sort of firewall, which stops the heat of inadequate performance from rising upwards and burning the real power holders' (ibid.). However, in thinking about cooperation and solidarity, structures and practices can be contested, renegotiated and changed. Rather than remaining on the macro-level of viewing interaction between North-South actors, micro-level observations allow the framing of these encounters as social constructions. With these, 'one can assume the possibility of discourses to be re- or even deconstructed' (Lie 2007, 56).

The burning question remains which role actors from the global North can and should play in order to support Haitian actors in pursuing their own agenda. This complex issue can be focussed to envisioning development as change or development as politics (McKinnon 2008) in particular stressing the factor of interdependence in a global system. It is essential to explore spaces for alternative starting points, i.e. conducts or fields of action, from within the dispositif and within framings of this model. In imagining alternatives, consideration needs to be given to peasant organisations and to other, presently existing but generally marginalized, forms of social mobilisation and action.

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