

## 1.2 Donor Controls

The second concern relates to the constraints imposed by official aid agencies on the types of initiatives that funding is available for. NGO autonomy is expected to be compromised at the expense of donor agencies and international organizations, who are motivated to a greater extent by political factors as opposed to "the situation on the ground" (Gagnon 1998: 2). In recent years, this has meant an increase in official money available for special funding 'windows,' particularly with respect to AIDS, women in development, democracy, and emergency relief. Smillie and Helmich (1993: 24-5) note that

[i]n some cases, the funds have been created as a direct response to NGO pressure. Usually they offer highly concessional terms, often a 100 percent funding basis. This has understandably attracted NGOs, but often at the expense of their own initiatives, in countries of their own choosing.

A related aspect is the emphasis on *limited time horizons* allotted before visible findings must be achieved. In BiH, the shifting of donor priorities every six months to a year was especially apparent in the transition from humanitarian relief to reconstruction, to business development, to minority returns, to building civil society (Gagnon 1998: 12).

One of the normative concerns raised by the perceived reduction in autonomy is the assumed unwillingness of NGOs to *criticise* governments and to play the traditional watchdog role that has been attributed to them. Not only are NGOs reluctant to chastise their own financiers for self-interested reasons, but there is an increasing concern that "NNGO [Northern NGO] lobbying and advocacy may even have backfired, fuelling the right-wing agenda of reducing aid flows by generating evidence that some aid-financed projects are 'bad investments', and that some aid-financed policies are bad for poor people" (Hulme/Edwards 1997: 279).

## 1.3 Evaluation Methods

An extension of the aversion to 'blueprint planning' is the assertion that governments adopt evaluation techniques that are too linear, restrictive, and quantitative to accurately capture the contribution NGOs make. The emphasis on cost-effectiveness and efficiency – which are the indicators associated with the New Policy Agenda – are seen as being incompatible with equity and empowerment, even though the latter two are the objectives that many NGOs claim to pursue (Biggs/Neame 1994: 43).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, if *intangible* indicators of results are ignored because of the adoption of quantitative methods and the measurement of tangible factors, some worry that sustainable development and accountability may be discouraged with an overall negative effect

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<sup>10</sup> Fowler (1994) proposes an alternative 'stakeholder model' for evaluating NGOs. This model is based on subjective and contextual evaluation by participants at various levels in the organization (which may include other contracts with different NGOs and donors) which answer broad questions rather than seek a universal answer through standard responses. These perspectives would be used as a basis to reach compromises on differences of opinion, and to be ultimately reviewed by an independent observer according to preordained standards.