

"requires an ability to control all the factors outside of the project that may influence its outcome" (1994: 172). Instead, he suggests that three separate assessments should be made – project *output*, which is the actual activity undertaken by the NGO and can be measured quantitatively; project *outcome*, which is a longer term analysis of the difference that the project actually makes. It too may also be quantifiable, but only after several years' time. Finally, project *impact*, which is an abstract assessment of how the project contributed to the overall well-being of the population (or civil society building etc.) and will include considering other factors such as economic, political, or cultural improvements (Fowler 1994: 173).²⁶

The difficulty with this suggestion is that it obstructs *any* objective assessment from being made beyond the initial quantifiable determination of output, and to a lesser extent, outcome. The disconnect found between many NGO's ambitious project *goals* (such as to rebuild civil society), and the actual project *activities* (such as to provide funding to a local citizens' group), mean that the causal relationships and the influence of those actions cannot be traced beyond the initial project. This difficulty is further complicated because many NGOs have shown a reluctance to coordinate their activities with others. Given their noted tendency to work at cross purposes with each other (Gagnon 1998), any measurement of a single project's broader contribution is impossible to accurately assess.²⁷

The final limitation of the mainstream literature, which is ultimately the most damaging, is that it rests on *normative* foundations. Either implicitly or explicitly, NGOs are evaluated against a Weberian 'ideal type' that portrays them as "supplements, complements, alternatives, critics and watchdogs to government" (Smillie/Helmich 1993: 18). As a result, it is assumed that only small, innovative, independent and value-motivated NGOs, i.e. Korten's third sector, have the potential to be effective. This supposition is problematic not only on empirical grounds but also because, as mentioned above, it calls into question the value of its proposed solutions.

Thus, the solution proposed by Hulme and Edwards to the supposed trade-off between public funding and values, i.e. to become less dependent on government by raising more funds locally (1997: 282), is not currently feasible for three related reasons. First, the availability of private donations to NGOs seems to have already peaked in Canada (Smillie/Helmich 1993: 22); second and subsequently, NGOs' high degree of financial dependency on CIDA suggests that most Canadian NGOs could not continue to operate in any meaningful way without official assistance; and third, as competition for financial resources between NGOs increases, abstaining from public funding poses a collective action problem. More precisely, even though it may be

²⁶ An illustration of the increasing levels of abstraction in this model would be: Suppose that following a war, illness and death are increasing among a population in a refugee camp. One reason given for this is the lack of potable water. To remedy this situation, an NGO undertakes to provide water purification systems for the refugee camp. The project *output* would include the number and cost of the purifiers built in the area; the project *outcome* would be the amount of clean water used over time by the inhabitants of the camp; the project *impact*, however, would be the number of lives saved and illnesses prevented, which would not be simply a result of the fresh water, but would also include access to clean sanitation and medicine as well as the broader realms of sufficient nourishment, and the development of economic and political stability.

²⁷ Besides implying a static conception of the 'ideal' NGO, these arguments imply a static conception of the most conducive policies for development. In other words, it seems as if the puzzle has been solved already, and the government way of operating is never going to be appropriate.