Allies or Adversaries

Governments throughout the developing world have witnessed a proliferation of nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations (NGOs) providing services like education, healthcare and piped drinking water in their territory. In *Allies or Adversaries*, Jennifer N. Brass explains how these NGOs have changed the nature of service provision, governance, and state development in the early twenty-first century.

Analysing original surveys as well as interviews with public officials, NGOs and citizens, Brass traces street-level government–NGO and state–society relations in rural, town, and city settings of Kenya. She examines several case studies of NGOs within Africa in order to demonstrate how the boundary between purely "state" and "nonstate" actors blurs, resulting in a very slow turn toward more accountable and democratic public service administration. Ideal for scholars, international development practitioners, and students interested in global or international affairs, this detailed analysis provides rich data about NGO–government and citizen–state interactions in an accessible and original manner.

Jennifer N. Brass is a professor at the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University, Bloomington. Brass was a 2015 recipient of the Indiana University-wide Outstanding Junior Faculty Award, and has received awards from the African Politics Conference Group at the American Political Science Association and from the International Society for Third-Sector Research. Brass has completed field research in Senegal, Kenya, Djibouti and Uganda, and has conducted trainings for the US State Department, the US armed services, and the private sector.

Allies or Adversaries

NGOs and the State in Africa

JENNIFER N. BRASS
Indiana University

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

One Liberty Plaza, New York NY 10006, USA

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107162983

First published 2016

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data
Names: Brass, Jennifer N., author.
Title: Allies or adversaries : NGOs and the state in Africa / Jennifer N. Brass, Indiana University.
Description: New York NY : Cambridge University Press, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016019085 | ISBN 9781107162983 (alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Non-governmental organizations – Kenya. | Economic development projects – Kenya. | Non-governmental organizations – Political aspects – Kenya. | Kenya – Politics and government – 2002–
Classification: LCC HC865.Z9 E4426 2016 | DDC 338.91096762 – dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016019085

ISBN 978-1-107-16298-3 Hardback

For Betty

Contents

Figures and tables

Figures

Tables

Preface

In 2002, at the age of 24, I moved to Nairobi, Kenya to work for a small local NGO. Africa was not completely new to me: as an undergraduate, I spent a year studying abroad in Dakar, Senegal, where I lived with a local family, took classes at the university, interned with the US Peace Corps, and traveled in nearby countries. Afterwards, I graduated with a degree focused on African Studies, then worked for an international development-focused NGO in Washington, DC. I felt it was time to try working in Africa. An opportunity arose in Nairobi and off I went.

The NGO where I worked was located in one of the city's industrial-area slums – "informal settlements," as they are known in the development industry, or "villages," as local residents call them. In these areas, large factories stand interspersed with unauthorized neighborhoods where residents live in makeshift houses of corrugated iron sheets, wood, plastic, and sometimes cardboard; open sewage and muddy laneways create a hopscotch pattern of solid land to negotiate during the rains; and microentrepreneurs sell shoes, clothes, household goods, and foodstuffs along each path.

In the midst of these conditions, a young Kenyan woman started the organization in the early 1990s. She wanted to help address the lack of schools in the area, where only nine government schools served approximately 140,000 children. As the program grew, she also aimed to assist members of the community in dealing with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. To do so, the NGO operated a nonformal primary school, eventually serving more than 950 children, 40 staff members, and the nearby community. At the school, pupils were taught the government curriculum, participated in extra-curricular activities, and ate a nutritious meal each day. Alongside the school services, the NGO also provided financial support, counseling

by a trained social worker, nutrition training, and enterprise development for a women's group whose members were HIV-positive.

Armed with only a primary school teaching certificate and a healthy supply of gumption, the founder began by hiring four other teachers at a wage of about $10/month, and coordinating with a local church to use their hall for classrooms. Not long after, a European NGO looking for projects to fund in the slums noticed the informal school and offered aid. The European organization helped the school settle onto unclaimed land, build corrugated iron and wood structures to serve as classrooms, and register with the government – as a "testing center" for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education, the exam required for students to enter secondary school.[1] The school's international funder also paid teacher salaries and administrative costs, and managed the NGO's accounts and hiring.

After a few years, the European NGO was unable to continue its support. It helped the fledgling Kenyan organization find a second international NGO supporter, this time an American one, which funded nearly all of the school's annual budget of $80,000 for the next five years. At that point, however, the American NGOs' headquarters announced global priority changes, and it stopped supporting the Kenyan NGO after only three months. The founder then sent out an SOS to every foreigner who had been involved with the NGO, asking for assistance. Two colleagues of mine and I obtained financial support to cover our expenses, and headed to Kenya.

Over the next eight months, we successfully implemented a financial management plan, accounting system, and human resources manual, and we worked to find cost-cutting measures and new donors. Today, the NGO is funded in part by three different European NGOs, an American NGO, several individuals from around the world, and school fees from the students. Some summers, it hosts 10–12 European volunteers who act as teaching assistants and run training seminars for the staff and students. To our surprise, the Kenyan government has at times embraced the NGO as a "showcase" nonformal school, visited and displayed by Ministers of Education as a success story in the slum. Yet it still receives almost no money from the Kenyan government – though Ministry of Education

[1] The school registered as a testing center, and not a primary school, because of its informal nature and the lack of official training by much of the staff. At the same time, the Head Teacher was invited to Head Teachers' meetings at the local Division and District Education Office, and the pupils were invited to participate in extra-curricular events at the Division, District, Provincial and National level with government and formal private schools.

officials have been in very slow-moving talks with the NGO for several years regarding partial public funding for teacher salaries.

The story of this NGO is not unique. Wherever I traveled in Kenya during 2002, I noticed signs for this NGO and that one, met people working for big international NGOs and small local ones, and witnessed vehicles emblazoned with NGO logos driving up and down the country. Prosperous suburbs of Nairobi were full of foreign and local NGO workers and offices, and have become known as "NGO centers." Traveling back and forth to the slum by local minibus *matatu* transport, pop or hip-hop music blaring and diesel fumes filling my head, I reflected on the state of affairs. Where was the government in this situation? What had brought all of these organizations to Kenya? What were they achieving? Wasn't a lot of what they did supposed to be done by the government, particularly the core service of education – which even Adam Smith, granddaddy of the free market, believed the "watchman state" should provide? Were NGOs letting the government off the hook in their duty to provide? And were they making service provision decisions that might normally reside in the realm of the state? Did any of this matter to regular people – did it change how they viewed their government?

During 2002, and many times in the years since, Kenyans have told me that NGOs have been a blessing to the country, providing things that they could not rely upon the government to deliver, helping out when they did not trust the government to come through. In 2002, people seemed to view NGOs with hope; the government, with disillusionment. But what does it mean when people drop their expectations of their government? Does it lower government legitimacy in their eyes to see these other nonstate actors – often foreigners – provide basic services? And how has the situation changed since 2002, when the country experienced its first multi-party elections in decades?

These are the settings, experiences, and thought processes that formed the impetus for this book. The idea for this research came out of an enriching personal experience in Kenya, yet one that left me frustrated and disappointed with the Kenyan government. Over the course of conducting this research, however, I've discovered that – as is often the case – there are two sides to the story. In many ways, NGOs have actually had a positive impact on government, and their existence helped to make the Kenyan state stronger. Despite the conclusions of many recent books on African politics proclaiming the weakening of the state in Africa, I came to believe that NGOs helped support, encourage, and bolster a more able state in Kenya.

Acknowledgments

As anyone who has written one knows, a book cannot be finished without the advice, encouragement, and empathy of a team of colleagues and friends. I began the formal process of writing this book as a doctoral student of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley. I am grateful to my dissertation committee members, David Leonard, Leo Arriola, Chris Ansell, and Michael Watts. David was a dedicated chair and advisor, closely reviewing chapter drafts and pushing me to do a bit more "heavy mental lifting" to make my points clear. Where David gave me the blueprint for a long career in academia, Leo became my role model for the next generation of African politics scholars. Talking to him always reinvigorated my interest in research; his love of learning is infectious. Chris proved that scholarship on comparative politics and public administration could be successfully interwoven and respected. Michael provided the perspective from outside Political Science that ensured my topics were broadly relevant to social scientists, and helped me develop my voice as a scholar.

At key points in my graduate school experience, Berkeley faculty Ann Swidler, Ted Miguel, Todd LaPorte, Kiren Chaudhry, Steve Vogel, and Paul Pierson also provided advice and mentoring, for which I am grateful. My student cohort was likewise an excellent extended family; special thanks are due to my dissertation-writing partners, Jennifer Dixon, Sam Handlin, Jon Hassid, Rachel Stern, and Susanne Wengle, as well as Martha Johnson, Robin Turner, Kristin Reed, Chris Blattman, Jody LaPorte, and Dann Naseemullah.

I am also indebted to colleagues, mentors, and friends at Indiana University (IU), where I am faculty in the School of Public and Environmental

Affairs (SPEA). Crucial to improving this book was a day-long manuscript review hosted by the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis, during which I received invaluable feedback from special guest Aili Tripp, who generously donated her time and energies for the event, alongside Elinor Ostrom, Lauren MacLean, Matt Auer, Todd Beer, Ashley Bowers, Sergio Fernandez, Kirsten Gronbjerg, Tim Hellwig, Maria Grosz-Ngate, and Anh Tran, each of whom provided detailed comments on at least one chapter of the manuscript. Lisa Amsler, Beth Buggenhagen, Sumit Ganguly, Beth Gazley, John Graham, Jeffrey Hart, Michael McGuire, Mike McGinnis, Sam Obeng, Justin Ross, and Allison Schnable also provided feedback that improved the manuscript at key junctures. Additional mentoring from Michael and Lisa helped me keep my eye on the finish line. I received excellent research support from graduate students Liz Baldwin, Kirk Harris, Susan Wambugu, and Shannon Lea Watkins. At IU, I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Lauren MacLean, who has helped move this book along in too many ways to count. I am extraordinarily lucky to count her as a mentor, co-author, and friend.

For many of us, a book spawned from a doctoral dissertation is intensely tied to the author's self-identity – and those identities are tested during the rougher moments of the research and writing process. In addition to the aforementioned people and institutions, I recognize several support networks and well-timed external reminders that the work was good, the challenges were surmountable, and the course was worth staying. During my first year of graduate school, I received a National Science Foundation multi-year fellowship that funded most of my field research in Kenya. My application for that grant was the first time the ideas that became this book were put to paper in an organized form. Later, during my first years on the Indiana University faculty, I was equally fortuitous to receive accolades from the African Politics Conference Group (APCG) and the International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR), which again quieted my inner critic. The APCG has become an intergenerational community of individuals I value for collegiality and generosity of time – many individuals I met through APCG have given me thoughtful feedback on drafts of this book. Likewise, my colleagues at the Midwest Working Group on Political Economy (MGAPE) and an informal group of ladies who study Africa have provided professional-personal support. From these groups, I especially thank Claire Adida, Marc Bellemare, Ryan Briggs, Karisa Cloward, Jeff Conroy-Krutz, Kim Yi Dionne, John Harbeson, Frank Holmquist, Adrienne LeBas, Ashley Leinweber, Gina Lambright, Rachel Beatty Riedl, Laura Seay, Ryan Sheely, and Nic van

de Walle for their feedback. I also thank others in the broader academic community for formal and informal support along the way, including Tim Buthe, Melani Cammett, Mary Kay Gugerty, Martin Lodge, Johanna Mair, Woody Powell, Aseem Prakash, Kenneth Prewitt, Rachel Robinson, Monique Segarra, and David Suarez.

People have also supported me outside of the office during this long process. I owe my largest thanks to my family. My husband (and colleague), Matthew Baggetta, has been my biggest cheerleader. He provides unwavering support, whether by commenting on drafts, brainstorming solutions to writing problems, or volunteering to cook me dinner and take care of our home when I am single-mindedly focused on writing. Our son, meanwhile, provides the daily small joys that remind me why I work on "big questions" – I hope to help find answers for future generations. When I was myself a child, I learned from my mom to take risks and dream big, even when the likelihood of failure was high. My dad, on the other hand, taught me the importance of hard work and attention to detail – and the proper place of both in a life that is also full of play. During years of going back and forth to Kenya, it was big sister who always pulled me back home, and who demonstrated the most pride in my work as a scholar of Africa. Friends have acted similarly; happily, there are too many to name. Without the early influence of the Concordia Language Villages – Dahveed and Zuwenna in particular – I might never have gone to Africa.

Of course, this book could not have been completed without considerable and generous time, thought and energy put in by hundreds of Kenyans, most of whom remain nameless for confidentiality reasons. At the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi, scholars Karuti Kanyinga and Winnie Mitullah helped me navigate the Kenyan political landscape, as well as its bureaucracy. Tom Wolf, likewise, opened his network of Kenya scholars to me, and facilitated my survey research in many ways. From Mbeere District, a very special thank you is owed to Mwaniki, who volunteered many days of his time to bring me into the back roads and small villages of the district to speak with NGOs I may not have found myself. And in Nairobi, I cannot thank Betty Nyagoha and Joseph Ngigi enough. Betty, along with Joseph Oloo and the entire Gatoto family, including Lucy Karuri, Scholastica Muasya, Winnie Mutua, Rhoda Mutua, and many others, inspired this book. Joseph Ngigi made the research a logistic reality, not only finding me places to live when in Nairobi, but also providing Gold Mine transportation wherever I needed to go. (And I wouldn't have been in Kenya

at all if it weren't for Colman Farrell.) They have become true, lifelong friends.

I owe appreciation to several publishers for permission to reprint material that has already been published. Chapter 4 of this book is based on "Why Do NGOs Go Where They Go? Evidence from Kenya," originally published in *World Development*, Vol. 40, Issue 2 (2012), pp. 387–401. Some material from Chapters 5 and 6 draw from material published in "Blurring Boundaries: The Integration of NGOs into Kenyan Governance," from *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, Vol. 25, Issue 2 (2012), pp. 209–235, and "Blurring the Boundaries: NGOs and Government in Kenyan Service Provision," which is Chapter 5 of Melani Cammet and Lauren M. Maclean (eds.) *The Politics of Non-State Social Welfare in the Global South*, Cornell University Press (2014).

Lastly, I am grateful to my publisher, Cambridge University Press, particularly editor Robert Dreesen, along with the production team at Cambridge. With their help and that of Elizabeth Andrews, Peter Dimock, and two anonymous reviewers, this book has improved immensely. All remaining errors and omissions are my own.