



The involvement of non-state actors in international relations: pros and cons for development processes in countries of the global south

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Abstract

This paper examines the involvement of non-state actors from the global north in relations with countries in the global south from a development perspective. Utilizing a SWOT analysis framework, the study analyzes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with their engagement. The findings highlight the potential benefits of their access to resources, expertise, and advocacy, as well as the challenges related to power imbalances, accountability, and cultural dynamics. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the implications of non-state actor involvement in global south development, addressing gaps in knowledge, and offering insights for policy and practice in international development.

Keywords: Colonialism; Development; Foreign Aid; International Relations; non-state actors

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1. INTRODUCTION

The involvement of non-state actors from the global north in relations with countries in the global south has gained significant attention in the field of international development. Civil society organizations, individuals, philanthropic foundations, and multinational corporations, all non-state actors, play a crucial role in shaping development processes in global southern countries (Halwan et al., 2022). This essay aims to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of the involvement of non-state actors from the global north in global south development from a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis perspective.

The involvement of non-state actors from the global north in relations with countries in the global south has become a significant aspect of international development. Inequality, poverty, limited access to education inadequate healthcare, and lack of infrastructure, and many more socio-economic challenges faced by the global south, comprising the countries in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Non-state actors, such as people, civil society organizations, multinational firms, and philanthropic foundations, have become significant players in determining the course of development and its results in this setting.

Traditional theories of international relations have often overlooked the role of non-state actors in global south development, focusing primarily on state-centric approaches. Nevertheless, the dynamics of a globalized society are changing, making it necessary to reevaluate the actors and variables that affect development outcomes. Non-state players from the global north have been more active in development initiatives, spurred on by a variety of factors such as social activism, philanthropy, and corporate social responsibility (Gulema & Roba, 2021).

The activities of non-state actors in global south development have both potential and actual consequences for the socio-economic landscape of these countries. Understanding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with their involvement is crucial for comprehending the complexities of international development and formulating effective strategies for sustainable and inclusive progress (Apostu & Gigauri, 2023).

Furthermore, the relationship between developed industrial countries and countries in the global south is marked by historical, economic, and political ties. Industrialized countries often possess significant influence and resources that can shape the contexts, opportunities, and constraints related to development in the global south. Acknowledging this dynamic, it is essential to critically analyze the involvement of non-state actors from the global north and assess their impact on the development processes of global south countries.

In light of these factors, this essay seeks to assess the benefits and drawbacks of non-state actors from the global north engaging in interactions with nations in the global south from the standpoint of development. This study holds significant importance in the field of international development for several reasons. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on non-state actor involvement in global south development. This study consolidates previous evidence and offers a nuanced view of the dynamics and ramifications of their activities by undertaking a thorough examination of the benefits and drawbacks of their engagement. The results of this study can be a useful tool for academics, decision-makers, and professionals in the field of international development.

By concentrating especially on the engagement of non-state actors from the global north in relations with nations in the global south, this study fills a significant vacuum in the literature. While previous studies have explored non-state actor engagement in development, they often lack a comprehensive examination of the specific implications for global south countries. This study provides a dedicated analysis of the consequences of their involvement in the context of global south development, offering insights into the opportunities and challenges faced by these countries.

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The findings of this study have practical implications for policy formulation and program design. Understanding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with non-state actor involvement allows policymakers to develop more effective and informed strategies for harnessing their potential benefits while mitigating the risks (Aguayo, 2022). The insights gained from this study can guide the development of policies and practices that foster equitable partnerships, enhance local ownership, and promote sustainable and inclusive development outcomes in global south countries.

The involvement of non-state actors in global south development has garnered significant scholarly attention in recent years. The literature on this topic provides valuable insights into the various dimensions and implications of their engagement. Several key themes and perspectives have emerged from literature, shedding light on the pros and cons of non-state actor involvement.

The literature has emphasized the importance of non-state actors' expertise and knowledge transfer (Competence Centre on Foresight, European Commission, 2020). The technical and specialized skills possessed by many non-state actors (Nasiritousi et al., 2014) that know-how can contribute to sustainable development, innovation, and capacity building in the global south (Shulla, 2020). Researchers have examined the effectiveness of knowledge transfer mechanisms, such as technology partnerships (United Nations, 2015), skills development programs, and educational exchanges, in enhancing local capabilities (Shulla, 2020).

The role of non-state actors in development projects in providing financial resources has been examined by (United Nations Environment Program, 2018), (Garcia & Urrea, 2022). According to UNCTAD (2021), the contributions of private corporations, diaspora communities, and philanthropic foundations in funding initiatives aimed at healthcare, poverty reduction, education, and infrastructure development in the global south have been explored in the report of World Bank, Financing for Development Post-2015. This research highlights the potential benefits of their financial support, but also raises concerns about the influence and control they may exert over development agendas (OECD, 2018).

The literature also highlights potential challenges and criticisms of non-state actor involvement in global south development. Questions have been raised about accountability mechanisms, transparency, and the potential negative impacts of certain development interventions.

The significance of this study thus lies in its contribution to the body of knowledge on non-state actor involvement in global south development, its application to the design of policies and programs, its applicability to more general discussions on power dynamics and accountability, and its capacity to promote dialogue among stakeholders. By examining the pros and cons of non-state actor involvement, this study aims to inform more effective and equitable approaches to international development, ultimately contributing to sustainable and inclusive development outcomes in global south countries.

1.1. Purpose of Study

The objective of this study is to examine the pros and cons of the involvement of non-state actors from the global north in relations with countries in the global south from a development perspective. The specific objectives are as follows:

- a. To assess the opportunities and threats presented by non-state actor involvement in global south development. It involves examining the potential opportunities for innovation, capacity building, and collaboration, as well as the threats posed by neocolonial dynamics, lack of accountability, and power imbalances.
- b. To identify and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of non-state actor involvement in global south development. This includes exploring the potential benefits they bring in terms of

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resources, expertise, and advocacy, as well as the challenges and limitations associated with their engagement.

- c. To conduct a comprehensive SWOT analysis, integrating findings from the literature review and empirical examples, to provide a holistic understanding of the potential and actual consequences of non-state actor involvement in global south countries.
- d. To contribute to the existing body of knowledge on non-state actor involvement in global south development, filling gaps in the literature and providing insights that can inform policy and practice in international development.

By achieving these above objectives, this study lines up to enhance our understanding of the dynamics and complexities of the involvement of non-state actors in the development of the global south. This may enable policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to make informed decisions and foster more inclusive and effective approaches toward international development.

2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

By conducting a SWOT analysis, we will explore the potential and real consequences (Gurel & Tat, 2017) of the non-state actors' activities in global southern countries. An insight into the pros and cons related to the non-state actors' involvement (Kok & Ludwig, 2021) will be provided in this analysis contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the contemporary global landscape for international development (Stengel & Baumann, 2017; Arts, 2003; Seriki, 2020).

3. RESULTS

3.1. Strengths

3.1.1. Innovation and Technology Transfer

According to Abbot (2012), non-state actors often bring innovative ideas, technologies, and best practices from the global north (Ruppel, 2021). By facilitating the transfer of technology and knowledge, they can contribute to enhancing productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness in the global south (Ataman, 2003). This transfer can spur economic growth and promote sustainable development (Agency et al., 2022).

3.1.2. Access to Resources and Expertise

Wijninga et al. (2014) showed that non-state actors from the global north often possess substantial financial resources, technological advancements, and expertise in various sectors. This allows them to support development projects and initiatives in the global south (Runde, 2015) that may lack the necessary resources or knowledge. Their involvement can accelerate progress in critical areas such as education (UNESCO, 2021), healthcare (WHO, 2021), infrastructure, and entrepreneurship (Shulla, 2020).

3.1.3. Advocacy and Mobilization

Non-state actors can raise awareness about global south issues (Ataman, 2003), advocate for the rights and interests of marginalized communities, and mobilize resources (Nasiritousi et al., 2014) and support on an international scale (European Environment Agency, 2005). Their involvement can amplify the voices of those who are often overlooked, fostering social justice, human rights, and environmental sustainability (Derks, 2012), (European Court of Auditors, 2009).

3.2. Weaknesses

3.2.1. Lack of Accountability

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Non-state actors often operate outside traditional regulatory frameworks, resulting in limited accountability for their actions (Abbot, 2012; Fernandes Rodrigues Alves et al., 2023). This can lead to the exploitation of natural resources, labor, and local communities (Ojeda-García, 2021). The absence of clear mechanisms for oversight and redress can perpetuate social and environmental injustices, undermining sustainable development goals.

3.2.2. *Power Imbalances and Dependency*

As Moon (2019), explored, the involvement of non-state actors from the global north can perpetuate power imbalances in global south development. Global South countries may become dependent on external actors, compromising their sovereignty and decision-making capabilities (Epifanova & Dietrich, 2022). Mukhopadhyay et al. (2021) have shown that non-state actors may dictate the development agenda, potentially neglecting the specific needs, cultural context, and priorities of the local communities.

3.2.3. *Neocolonial Dynamics*

The involvement of non-state actors can inadvertently perpetuate neocolonial dynamics (Chowdhury, 2022), with the global north imposing its norms, values, and practices on the global south (Brouwers & Le Ber, 2020). This can lead to the erosion of local cultures, knowledge systems, and identities, undermining social cohesion and hindering self-determined development pathways.

3.3. **Opportunities**

3.3.1. *Sustainable Investments and Economic Opportunities*

Non-state actors can contribute to sustainable investments, job creation, and economic opportunities in the global south (sbusch, 2022). Through responsible business practices, fair trade, and responsible investment initiatives, they can support local entrepreneurship, livelihoods, and economic diversification (Bozhikin et al., 2019; Agyemang et al., 2019).

3.3.2. *Collaboration and Partnership*

Non-state actors can engage in partnerships and collaborations with global south countries, fostering mutual understanding and shared responsibility (Ordóñez-Llanos, 2020). Together, they can address difficult development concerns, ensure diversity, and encourage local ownership by combining their various capabilities, expertise, and resources.

3.3.3. *Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening*

Non-state actors can contribute to capacity building and institutional strengthening in the global south (Human Rights Council, 2023). They can empower civil society organizations, local communities, and government institutions by providing technical assistance, training, and knowledge exchange programs, to achieve sustainable development goals and address development challenges effectively (Wijninga et al., 2014; Yushi et al., 2020).

3.4. *Threats*

3.4.1. *Cultural Assimilation and Homogenization*

Non-state actors from the global north may unintentionally promote cultural assimilation and homogenization, undermining the diversity and uniqueness of global south cultures (Drinhausen & Legarda, 2022). Local traditions, values, and knowledge systems may be marginalized or disregarded, eroding cultural identities, and potentially leading to social tensions (Dijkstra et al., 2001).

3.4.2. *Fragmentation and Duplication of Efforts*

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The involvement of multiple non-state actors can result in fragmentation and duplication of efforts (Dijkstra et al., 2001). Lack of coordination and coherence among actors may lead to inefficiencies, wastage of resources, and overlapping initiatives (European Environment Agency, 2005). It is crucial to ensure effective coordination mechanisms and collaboration among non-state actors to maximize the impact of their interventions.

3.4.3. Economic Dependence

Reliance on non-state actors for funding and resources can create economic dependencies in the global south (Human Rights Council, 2023). This can hinder the development of local industries and limit the ability to pursue independent development strategies. Global South countries may become vulnerable to fluctuations in external funding and market dynamics, perpetuating cycles of economic dependence (Goldthau et al., 2020).

4. CONCLUSION

The involvement of non-state actors from the global north in global south development presents a complex set of advantages and disadvantages. Through a SWOT analysis, we have examined the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with their engagement. While their access to resources, expertise, and advocacy can contribute positively to development processes, concerns regarding power imbalances, accountability, and cultural dynamics must be addressed.

Collaboration, inclusivity, and respect for local agencies and diversity are vital in ensuring that the involvement of non-state actors leads to sustainable and equitable development outcomes. Global South countries should actively participate in decision-making processes, define their development priorities, and leverage partnerships to maximize the benefits of international involvement while mitigating the risks. By fostering genuine partnerships based on mutual respect and shared responsibilities, non-state actors can play a constructive role in supporting the aspirations of global southern countries for sustainable development, social justice, and self-determined futures.

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